The sources of mass partisanship in newer democracies: Social identities or performance evaluations? Southern Europe in comparative perspective

Marco Lisi
Nova University of Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract
This study seeks to improve the current conceptualisation of partisanship and to provide empirical evidence about the nature of partisan identities in new democracies. Conventional theories suggest that partisan loyalties are grounded in social and group contexts, while ‘revisionist’ theories have emphasised the importance of the performance evaluations of political actors. This study argues that the nature of partisanship in newer democracies is more strongly influenced by the latter. By focusing on new Southern European democracies, this research confirms the importance of performance and retrospective evaluations as the basis of partisan loyalties. The impact of age and education is very weak, while ideological extremism displays a constant and significant effect. However, the nature of partisanship varies according to different party types, as voters of more ideological parties are less sensitive to short-term judgements.

Keywords
Group theory, partisanship, political parties, retrospective evaluations, Southern Europe

Introduction
Attitudes towards parties are crucial to the functioning of democratic regimes not only as an important instrument of mobilisation and participation, but also for the quality of representation and the mechanisms of democratic accountability. Partisan identities – defined here as electors’ long-standing attachments and loyalties towards parties – represent a key component of political parties and contribute to defining relevant characteristics of political systems (Budge et al., 1987; Sani and Sartori, 1983). Partisanship is also an essential cue that helps voters handle the complexity of many political situations (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009).
Extensive literature has examined the nature of partisanship in democratic countries, especially following evidence of the increasing erosion of partisan identities. According to conventional theories on electoral behaviour (Campbell et al., 1960), this psychological attachment to political parties is an important anchor for voters’ choice and a crucial heuristic device that helps voters locate themselves in the political space. Therefore, many theories have focused on the effects of partisanship on political behaviour – namely, in terms of electoral volatility – and how distinct political and individual characteristics influence this relationship.

However, the exact meaning of partisanship has long been a controversial topic in electoral behaviour research, both theoretically and empirically (Clarke and Stewart, 1998; Niemi and Weisberg, 2001). Indeed, two opposite paradigms have emerged. The first approach, associated with the early generation of studies on electoral behaviour, considered partisanship as an ‘unmoved mover’, which stemmed from a socially driven process through intermediation and political socialisation. By contrast, ‘revisionist’ theories contended that partisanship was endogenous to the political system and governance, and that partisan identities could be shaped by performance evaluations (Fiorina, 2002: 98–99).

This article aims to address this puzzle by examining the source and meaning of partisanship in newer democracies. While there is much literature on partisan identities in advanced industrialised countries, this is a relatively overlooked topic in more recent democracies. In spite of the evidence that young democracies have higher levels of electoral volatility and weaker social anchorage of political parties than mature democracies (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006; Van Biezen, 2003), the published research fails to examine the extent to which partisan identities are linked to immediate political events or personalities. The second main reason that makes these cases worthy of study is the substantial impact of this group of voters on electoral and government outcomes. As non-partisan voters make up a significant portion of the electorate (Rico, 2010), their vote plays a decisive role in determining election results. Therefore, the exploration of factors associated with the sources of partisanship in Southern European countries may reveal the dynamics of party systems more comprehensively than the existing research. Finally, by comparing mass partisanship cross-nationally through survey evidence, this study aims to shed more light on the different bases of support for distinct parties.

The main argument of this article is that partisanship in newer democracies depends primarily on specific events and short-term factors, rather than on group or social identities. The empirical evidence provided by previous studies offers several arguments in support of this hypothesis. First, recent contributions (De la Calle and Roussias, 2012) have already shown that non-partisan voters are weakly ideologically anchored and are usually placed in the middle of the ideological spectrum. Second, it is widely acknowledged that the traditional social cleavages in newer democracies are rather weak, especially for the main governing parties (Dalton, 2002). Finally, research in new democracies has suggested that partisan identities reflect party positions on different policy domains (Brader and Tucker, 2012). These considerations lead to the expectation that the roots of party support in newer democracies are largely based on the performance evaluation of the main political actors, leading to more fragile and unstable partisan attachments.

The cases of new Southern European countries will be used in this article to investigate the nature of partisan identities. The text is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the literature on partisanship in both old and new democracies, before presenting the data used in this study in the third section. The fourth section examines the source of partisan identities in new Southern European democracies and the differences between parties. The conclusions present a summary of the main findings and discuss the implications for future research.
The meaning of partisanship: Between social characteristics and attitudinal construct

Partisan identities are considered to be an essential instrument that links voters to political parties. Since the *American Voter* study (Campbell et al., 1960), partisan attachments have appeared to be a strong predictor of electoral choices, influencing the way citizens form their political attitudes. According to this paradigm, partisanship is a consequence of group identities, based on social location or psychological processes (Clarke and Stewart, 1998). The strong ties that individuals establish with political objects (parties and candidates) stem from the primary socialisation process, notably, with the transmission of political attitudes and preferences through the family, school, neighbourhood and Church (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). Therefore, the formation of partisan identities reflects the process of identity-building and it is linked to the social characteristics of the context.

This line of research has also been explored in the European context in the seminal contribution by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). These scholars have argued that partisanship is rooted in deep social cleavages, such as class, religion, territory (urban versus rural) or ethnicity. Therefore, partisan identities are regarded as a sociological reflection of citizens’ membership in more or less objectively defined groups. The ‘sociological’ model has also emphasised the importance of social and political networks for mobilising voters and reinforcing partisan identities. This mechanism also contributes to eliminating cross-pressures, with major consequences in terms of stabilising electoral alignments and ‘normalising’ voting choice (Converse, 1966).

Critics of this ‘group’ or ‘sociological’ approach have argued that partisan identities are not static but can easily oscillate from one election to another (Bartle and Bellucci, 2008). Contrary to what the Michigan School defended, partisan identities are not firmly rooted in the political socialisation process. Instead, they may derive from short-term situations and the evaluation of political actors. In other words, the ‘revisionist’ approach emphasises the instability of partisanship in the short term and the rationality beyond partisan attachments, considered as a ‘functional’ device at voters’ disposal in order to provide individuals with the possibility of acquiring information and simplifying the political process (Shively, 1979).

Key (1966) was one of the first authors to admit the possibility of short-term fluctuations in partisan identities. According to this contribution, political issues played a crucial role in voting choice. In particular, although young voters are influenced by the transmission of parental partisanship, they may display preferences that do not correspond to their partisan identities due to the influence of political personalities or party policies (Key, 1966). This approach was developed more systematically by Fiorina (1981), who redefined the concept of partisanship as a ‘running tally’ of incumbents’ performance. This means that the cognitive or affective dimensions based on political experiences are crucial to the formation of partisan identities. These attitudes are generally understood as the product of issue preferences and the evaluation of government performance (Bartle and Bellucci, 2008: 13–14). In other words, this approach questions the fact that partisanship precedes the evaluations of policy issues and attachments to politicians. As a consequence, the performance and competence of political actors may catalyse emerging partisan identities, transforming short-term considerations into more complex, deep convictions.

Several studies have found that partisan identities also emerge in newer democracies, regardless of their respective political trajectories (Brader and Tucker, 2001; Hagopian, 1998; Rose and Mishler, 1998). Moreover, it has been found that the level of partisan attachments is relatively low in recent democracies, especially when compared with more advanced political regimes (Dalton
This is explained mainly by the different socialisation process. First, many voters have never participated in democratic politics during their entire lifetime. Therefore, there are few partisan cues that can be transmitted from one generation to another. Second, political parties are new and have been created at the institutional level rather than through the mobilisation of specific cleavages (Van Biezen, 2003).

Empirical research on newer democracies seems to challenge the conceptualisation of partisanship elaborated by conventional theories. Studies on East European countries, for example, have shown that the nature of partisanship is not simply a positive attachment to parties, but can also develop from neutral or negative attitudes (Rose and Mishler, 1998). At the same time, the context of political campaigns in recent democracies is particularly important for shaping psychological linkages to parties. While long-term factors are considered weak predictors of the vote in new democracies, voters are particularly sensitive to ‘short-term’ factors and campaign effects. In particular, both the economy and leaders have a significant impact on vote choice in Southern European countries (Freire and Lobo, 2005; Lobo, 2008). This is especially true with regard to voters for the main governing parties, traditionally characterised as catch-all parties with a heterogeneous support base. Comparative studies beyond Europe also confirm that young democracies are more sensitive to performance evaluations (Nishizawa, 2009; Thomassen and Van der Kolk, 2009).

It follows from these considerations that voters in newer democracies are more likely to display ‘light’ partisan attachments, based more on short-term considerations than on long-standing values or identities. This is particularly true when there are few options in terms of viable government alternatives – a ‘closed structure of competition’, to use Mair’s (1997) terminology – as well as strong constraints on future political choices. One of the main arguments behind this study is that performance evaluations of the main political actors, and also retrospective considerations related to voters’ political experience, constitute the main sources of mass partisanship in newer democracies. In particular, given the impact of short-term factors on political attitudes and behaviour, we expect that the ‘performance’ model will be particularly important to explaining partisan attachments in Southern European democracies (Hypothesis 1).

However, there is another argument that raises important expectations regarding the characteristics of partisanship in newer democracies. Several scholars have argued that individual beliefs about democracy are vital components of partisanship (Almond and Verba, 1963). More specifically, citizens with positive opinions about the functioning of democracy are more prone to developing partisan identities. This association is likely to be particularly true in Southern Europe given the widespread feelings of distrust towards parties – and political elites generally – among the public opinion and electorate (Torcal and Magalhães, 2010: 55–63). From this viewpoint, it has been found that sentiments of anti-partyism are associated not only with short-term factors, but also with more cultural and long-term attitudes (Torcal et al., 2002). Following this rationale, we expect to find an association between the lack of partisan attachments and negative attitudes towards the political system (Hypothesis 2).

**Data and methods**

This article aims to examine the nature of mass partisanship in newer democracies by focusing on Greece, Portugal and Spain. Several studies have shown that party organisations in these new democracies have weak roots in civil society and have privileged institutional and governmental functions (Morlino, 1998; Van Biezen, 2003). This feature distinguishes the development of political parties in young democracies from that of mature democratic regimes. However, contrary to other new democracies, all three Southern European countries display one important characteristic
that is relatively uncommon in young democracies, namely, the stability of their party system. From this viewpoint, all three countries have established stable party systems since the mid-1980s, with power alternating between the two main moderate parties from opposite ideological blocks (Diamandouros and Gunther, 2001). This characteristic is expected not only to foster and strengthen the development of partisan identities, but also to affect the influence of partisanship on electoral behaviour. Yet, there are no cross-national studies on the nature of partisan attachments, in particular, with regard to the impact of performance factors.

It is also worth noting that since the democratic regimes were established, electoral competition in Southern Europe has taken place in the context of the widespread use of television, which led to the main parties adopting catch-all strategies (Pasquino, 2001). Thus, the expansion of communication channels and the usage of sophisticated campaign techniques have limited the capacity of parties to mobilise voters and to foster active participation in political life, which is a necessary requirement for the emergence of strong partisan identities. Although long-term predispositions and social background may help consolidate partisanship, the importance of political campaigns and the emphasis on issues and candidates have diminished voters’ interest in parties as collective entities per se.

The empirical analysis begins by observing the explanatory power of the two different models highlighted earlier. Rather than making a strict comparison of the two models, we use a logistic regression by entering distinct blocks of variables in order to gauge the explanatory power of each competing theory. To be sure, as Bartle and Bellucci (2008) have noticed, the distinction between partisanship as a ‘social identity’ and as an attitude is not always clear. Attitudes may be constructed from membership in social groups and vice versa. By including each group of variables step by step, we are able to assess which kind of factors are responsible for the emergence of partisan attachments. It should be noted that this methodological approach has the merit of presenting a conservative estimate of the impact of the second block of variables. The methodology adopted in this study is similar to that used by Gunther and Montero (2001) in their study of voting preferences in Southern Europe. We regress the dependent variable – partisan attachments – on two distinct blocks of independent variables, comparing the $r^2$ brought to the equation by these blocks of variables.

Relative to previous studies on the nature of partisanship in Southern European countries (Gunther and Montero, 2001), the contribution of this research is twofold. First, it includes a broad range of variables in terms of not only intermediation and social groups, but also short-term factors. Second, it uses multinomial logit regression, which enables us to better estimate the parameter for each party. Last but not least, it expands the main results both across countries and across party types.

There has been a huge debate on the validity of the measurement of partisanship used in the American election studies – based on the seven-point scale – for the European context (Bartle and Bellucci, 2008; Budge et al., 1976). Thus, before beginning the empirical analysis, it is necessary to specify the operationalisation of this variable. All the selected surveys use the standard question ‘Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?’, followed by the question on the direction (which party) and strength (very strong, strong, sympathiser) of partisanship. In this study, we use the response to the first question as the main dependent variable. The direction of partisanship is used in the multinomial analysis to examine the anchors of partisan identities for different political parties.

In order to minimise problems of different question wording and survey design, all post-electoral surveys are drawn from the Comparative National Election Project (CNEP). This is one of the largest cross-national election projects in the world, with a record of data collection in more
than 20 countries (Gunther et al., 2007). It includes several comparable items dealing not only with ‘intermediation’ variables and the socialisation process, but also with political values and attitudes. To our knowledge, there are no other data available containing such a broad range of information. Although the data set includes other young democracies, our choice is limited to those of Southern Europe because the party system in several other cases is not fully institutionalised or crucial variables are missing and cannot be included in the analysis. There is also at least one other important distinction between Southern Europe and other new democracies. This is related to the historical difference in terms of national sovereignty, as Southern European countries did not experience colonial occupation during the last century. On the other hand, all three countries included in the analysis share relevant characteristics with regard to socio-political and economic modernisation (Gunther et al., 1995).

Findings
Partisan identities have developed throughout Southern Europe since the establishment of democratic regimes. Although the level of partisanship is quite low compared with West European countries, in all three cases, there was an increase during the first decades, especially in Spain and Greece (Freire, 2006). As for their level, the three Southern European countries show a similar proportion of partisan identities. According to the European Social Survey (2002–2010), Portugal and Greece display similar scores, with an average of 54.3% and 53.6% of party identifiers, respectively, while in Spain, the proportion is lower (48.9%).

Are these partisan identities deeply anchored to social groups or are they associated with immediate political events or superficial attachments to political personalities? The first block of variables aims to capture the anchors of partisanship by including dimensions traditionally associated with the ‘sociological’ paradigm. Therefore, we include one variable related to the frequency of religious practice in this model, two variables based on marital and professional status, and, finally, whether or not the individual is a member of an association. In doing this, we take into account the main dimensions associated with the ‘group’ approach. This paradigm has traditionally emphasised both the role of primary socialisation – mainly through the family – and membership of social groups, such as religious groups or associations. Unfortunately, we do not have homogeneous variables on the position of individuals in the class structure. We therefore use the occupational status variable as a proxy for voters’ social position.

The second block of variables focuses on the attitudinal components of partisanship. As mentioned earlier, this model includes several dimensions that gauge the performance evaluation of the main actors and the political system itself. Three variables are related to the traditional ‘retrospective performance’ paradigm. The first is based on the perception of the economic situation, measured through voters’ evaluation of national (sociotropic) conditions. The second short-term factor focuses on the evaluation of government performance. This is considered an important short-cut device for the formation of voting preferences (Popkin, 1991). The third short-term element is based on the evaluations of party leaders. We use an index built by considering the like–dislike (10-point) scale of the two main leaders from the government and opposition, respectively. By distinguishing between positive and negative attitudes towards leaders, it is possible to calculate a ‘leader ambivalence’ score by subtracting the evaluation of the incumbent from the score of the opposition leader and then taking the absolute value, regardless of the direction. The idea is that more ambivalent voters (whose score is close to zero) are also more likely to display lower levels of partisan identities, while those with clear (positive or negative) feelings towards one of the two candidates are expected to be more prone to hold partisan attachments. Finally, the fourth variable
focuses on voters’ discontent with the political system by considering the degree of satisfaction with the democratic regime.6

Besides the two sets of variables, the multivariate analysis also controls for the main socio-demographic characteristics, namely, gender, age, age squared (to control for curvilinear effects) and education. We also include the ideological distance from the centre in our model (‘ideological extremism’ or ‘centrism’). As previous research has shown, partisans are more likely to locate themselves at the extremes of the ideological spectrum (De la Calle and Roussias, 2012). On the other hand, independents are often under cross-pressure from multiple parties and are more prone to position themselves in the centre of the ideological continuum. This may be interpreted as a lack of knowledge or as a neutral position vis-à-vis the main political parties. Table 1 shows the main findings about the determinants of partisanship in Southern Europe by comparing Model A (the ‘sociological’ paradigm) and Model B, which also includes attitudinal factors.

The baseline model shows a relatively good fit in the Greek case (compared with other Southern European countries), with an $r^2$ of 0.14 (Nagelkerke statistics) for the first model and 0.24 for the second. A first examination of the results provides important insights into the nature of partisanship, namely, in terms of the weak explanatory power of the social anchors of partisanship. In fact, only age and age squared display a significant impact, even after the inclusion of attitudinal variables. As expected, we found that partisanship increases as people get older, but the negative sign

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Table 1. Determinants of partisanship in Southern Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greece Model A</th>
<th>Greece Model B</th>
<th>Portugal Model A</th>
<th>Portugal Model B</th>
<th>Spain Model A</th>
<th>Spain Model B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−.16 (.16)***</td>
<td>−.12 (.17)***</td>
<td>−.07 (.10)</td>
<td>−.03 (.11)</td>
<td>.02 (.09)</td>
<td>.04 (.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.08 (.03)***</td>
<td>.09 (.03)***</td>
<td>.02 (.02)</td>
<td>.02 (.02)</td>
<td>.04 (.01)***</td>
<td>.02 (.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age squared</td>
<td>−.001 (.00)**</td>
<td>−.001 (.00)**</td>
<td>.000 (.00)</td>
<td>.000 (.00)</td>
<td>.000 (.00)</td>
<td>.000 (.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>−.09 (.20)</td>
<td>.53 (.13)***</td>
<td>.58 (.15)***</td>
<td>.43 (.10)***</td>
<td>.38 (.11)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrism</td>
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<td>.30 (.05)***</td>
<td>.18 (.03)***</td>
<td>.18 (.04)***</td>
<td>.52 (.03)***</td>
<td>.42 (.04)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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<td>.15 (.10)</td>
<td>−.03 (.03)</td>
<td>−.01 (.03)</td>
<td>.04 (.03)</td>
<td>.02 (.03)</td>
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<td>−.14 (.19)</td>
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<td>.03 (.10)</td>
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<td>.13 (.10)</td>
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<td>.36 (.10)***</td>
<td>.30 (.11)***</td>
<td>.39 (.11)***</td>
<td>.33 (.11)***</td>
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<tr>
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<td>−</td>
<td>.16 (.08)**</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.09 (.05)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
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<td>−.04 (.09)</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.09 (.07)</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.17 (.06)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader ambivalence</td>
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<td>.15 (.02)***</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.09 (.02)***</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.18 (.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with democracy</td>
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<td>−</td>
<td>.40 (.07)***</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>.30 (.07)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>−1.26 (.36)***</td>
<td>−2.64 (.51)***</td>
<td>−2.19 (.34)***</td>
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<td>2689.6</td>
<td>2068.49</td>
<td>3250.5</td>
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<td>.24</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.22</td>
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<td>(966)</td>
<td>(918)</td>
<td>(2031)</td>
<td>(1608)</td>
<td>(2652)</td>
<td>(2478)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. Dependent variables: 0 = non-partisans; 1 = partisans. Standard errors in parentheses.
of age squared means that older people display lower levels of party loyalties than middle-aged groups.

On the other hand, we find that ‘performance’ variables contribute significantly to explaining partisan identities. Of the four dimensions included, only economic performance fails to achieve standard levels of statistical significance. Unsurprisingly, partisan attachments are strongly associated with the evaluations of leaders. In particular, a strong preference towards one of the main leaders increases the likelihood of displaying partisan identities, whereas voters with no clear preferences vis-à-vis the two main leaders are more likely to lack any partisan attachment. It is worth noting that government evaluation, as well as satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, is positively related to partisanship. In general, the direction shows that non-partisans are more dissatisfied with government performance and the political system. All coefficients suggest that feelings of discontent about political actors and outcomes are associated with neutral or negative attitudes towards political parties. As for the socio-demographic controls and political predispositions, ideological extremism (or ‘centrism’) and age are the two most important variables in predicting partisanship. Both variables are significant at the 0.01 level, with signs in the expected directions. This means that more extreme voters have a greater tendency to hold partisan attachments, while young and older citizens are more prone to lack any partisan identities.

Looking at the Portuguese case, we find that the overall fit of the models has less explanatory power when compared with Greece. However, if we consider the four dimensions related to the performance model, we observe a marked increase in the overall fit. First, if we look at voters’ social position, the results suggest a strong association between associational membership and partisanship. Moreover, contrary to our expectations, those who are married are more likely to lack partisan attachments. Both relationships remain statistically significant even when we include attitudinal variables. Moving to performance variables, our data suggest that ambivalence about the leaders and satisfaction with democracy have a strong impact on partisanship. In addition, government performance is also related to partisan identities, with more dissatisfied voters less likely to have partisan loyalties.

Finally, the third case covered in this study confirms the findings for the Portuguese case. Education and ideological extremism are both statistically significant and contribute substantially to explaining partisan identities in Spain. As for the two competitive models, the impact of the attitudinal variables appears to be stronger given that all factors achieve statistical significance. In particular, ambivalence about leaders and satisfaction with democracy are the most important predictors (Wald coefficients), while government performance and economy are significant only at the 0.1 level. On the other hand, social capital is also important, as belonging to an association is linked to more partisan attachments.

To what extent can these results be generalised to other young democracies? In other words, are these findings related to the specific trajectory of Southern Europe or do they reveal an important aspect of the nature of partisanship in newer democracies? In order to obtain more robust results, we apply the same model to two other countries, namely, Uruguay and South Africa. The criteria for the selection of these two cases are twofold. First, they present relatively stable and institutionalised party systems, which is a key requirement for the development of partisan identities. Second, they belong to the countries surveyed in the CNEP project. Therefore, they share several common variables that allow us to compare the two models previously tested. Moreover, the fact that these countries present significant differences in terms of political development provides more robust results with regard to the nature of partisan identities.

As can be seen from Table 2, performance variables are also important in other young democracies. The most striking finding of the analysis is that despite the different context, partisan
Table 2. Determinants of partisanship outside Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model A</td>
<td>Model B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−.14 (.13)</td>
<td>−.11 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.02 (.02)</td>
<td>.01 (.02)</td>
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<td>Age squared</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Centrism</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<td>.11 (.05)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family status</td>
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<td>.24 (.17)</td>
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<td>Occupational status</td>
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<td>.14 (16)</td>
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<td>Economy</td>
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<td>.02 (.07)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader ambivalence</td>
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<td>.15 (.02)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with democracy</td>
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<td>.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(1187)</td>
<td>(1026)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. Dependent variables: 0 = non-partisans; 1 = partisans. Standard errors in parentheses.

identities are linked to feelings towards party leaders and the evaluation of how the political system functions. In both cases, these variables are statistically significant at the .001 level and in the expected direction. This means that those with more ambivalent attitudes towards leaders are more likely to lack partisan attachments. On the other hand, a negative evaluation of the democratic regime seems to hamper the development of partisanship. Despite these similarities, the two countries differ in the factors that shape the social component of partisanship. Uruguay displays a similar pattern to those of newer European democracies to the extent that ideological extremism has a strong relationship with partisan attachment. Yet, it is evident that the Left–Right continuum clearly has a different meaning in South Africa, where it is not related to partisan identities. In this case, our results indicate that two independent variables of the sociological model have statistical significance, namely, associational membership and religiosity. This result confirms the importance of identity politics in the African continent highlighted by previous research (Basedau et al., 2010). However, it is worth noting that their impact is limited when compared with performance variables, especially if we consider the evaluation of leaders.

In order to interpret the logit coefficients and to compare the effects of the main independent variables in new democracies, we compute predicted probabilities for the most significant predictors of partisan attachments. Starting with ideology, we can observe that the strongest effect takes place in Spain, where the difference between centrist and more extreme voters corresponds to a change in the probability of having partisan attachments from 12.3% to 65%, holding other variables constant at their means (see Table 3). Leader ambivalence also has a strong impact on partisanship. In this case, Spain and Greece display the strongest effect: as levels of ambivalence move from low to high, the probability of holding partisan attachments decreases by more than 45 percentage points, with all remaining variables constant at their means. This effect is somewhat
weaker in Portugal (27.5 percentage points), although it remains statistically significant. As we have seen, satisfaction with democracy is also very helpful in explaining partisan loyalties. The probability of holding partisan attachments rises from 39.3% to 66.4% in Portugal when we shift from a negative evaluation of the political system to more positive attitudes. This variable is also significant in both Spain and Greece, with a marginal effect of more than 20 percentage points. Overall, these findings suggest that ideology and satisfaction with democracy are crucial for the emergence of partisan loyalties, while the evaluations of the government and leaders depend more heavily on the specific characteristics of party competition.  

As we have seen, only associational membership presents significant effects across several countries. Yet, its impact is substantially weaker than for leader evaluation or performance variables. Only South Africa shows a relevant increase of 26.5 percentage points between people with no affiliation and those who are members of an association. This variable is also significant in Spain and Portugal, with a marginal effect of 13.7% and 10.6%, respectively. If we look at the impact of education, our results indicate that the effect is relatively small compared with attitudinal variables, with the partial exception of Portugal. In this case, the probability of displaying partisan attachments increases by 13.7 percentage points when we move from people with less than an undergraduate degree to higher levels of education.

Table 3 also shows predicted probabilities for the two young democracies outside Europe. The first important thing to note is the limited impact of ideology on partisanship, especially in the case of South Africa. This finding suggests that the Left–Right schema is primarily a European heuristic,
with a reduced applicability to other geographical and political contexts. The second point is related to the importance of the evaluation of the political system. In both cases, the probability of holding partisan attachments increases by more than 30 percentage points when we move from negative to positive attitudes vis-à-vis satisfaction with democracy. This impact is substantially higher than the effect displayed by Southern European democracies. Finally, the impact of leader evaluation is particularly important in South Africa, while in Uruguay this cue seems relatively inconsequential to shaping partisan identities. In general, these results support our expectations about the importance of the attitudinal component for partisan identities. The fact that similar findings have been obtained in other new democracies (Samuels, 2006) boosts our confidence in these results.

The findings thus far indicate that partisanship is more associated with attitudinal attributes than with social identities. To what extent do distinct parties differ in the way superficial attachments to political personalities or immediate events shape their bases of support? We address this issue by examining different political parties in Southern Europe in an effort to provide a comprehensive picture of the nature of partisanship. Our goal here is to assess the extent to which partisan identities for Southern European parties are distinct, especially with respect to the two competing paradigms presented earlier. The dependent variable used here is self-reported partisanship, derived from national election studies in Greece, Portugal and Spain, for the three main forces with the largest partisan bases: the communists (KKE, PCP and IU), socialists (PASOK, PS and PSOE) and conservatives (ND, PSD and PP). The statistical method of multinomial logit is used to reveal the relationships underlying the sources of partisanship; this procedure allows us to estimate the impact of explanatory variables on a dependent variable that can take more than one categorical value. In this case, we have five categories: partisanship for the communists, socialists, conservatives and other parties, and no partisan identification, which we use as the reference category.

Overall, the model does a good job of explaining the direction of partisanship in Southern Europe. The resulting $r^2$ suggests that the variables included in the equation explain between 49% and 68% of the variance, which is a good improvement over previous results. This depends to a great extent on the different dependent variable used in the multinomial regression, which captures partisan loyalties in a more sophisticated way.

Table 4 presents the regression coefficients for each category of the dependent variable in the Greek case. For each party, partisanship is associated with a strong positive sentiment for the party leader. In every case – with the exception of the KKE – partisanship is also linked to a clear dislike for at least one rival party leader. These results support the hypothesis that partisanship in Greece is substantially driven by personalism, although further research is needed to investigate both the origin of this association and the causality behind it. It is also interesting to observe that performance variables are crucial factors accounting for the nature of partisanship for the two main governing parties. Those who are more satisfied with government performance and with democracy are more likely to display partisan attachments to the incumbent socialists. On the other hand, a negative evaluation of the government is associated with a positive feeling towards the main opposition party (ND). There is also evidence from the results that the source of partisanship for the communists is not only less personalistic, but also more rooted in social or ideological anchors. As expected, voters with lower levels of religious feelings and more extremist positions are more likely to develop partisan attachments towards the communists. Ideology is also important for the rightist ND, whose partisan loyalties seem more polarised than those of the socialists. In this case, two of the variables associated with the sociological/group paradigm also achieve statistical significance, namely, occupation and associational membership. However, their impact is substantially weaker than performance and evaluation variables.
The results for Portugal and Spain confirm the importance of feelings towards the party leader, especially for the two main governing parties (see Tables 5 and 6). Government performance and the evaluation of the economic situation are also particularly significant. On the other hand, social variables are only weakly associated with partisan identities, with the partial exception of the IU.

Compared with other Southern European democracies, the results for the Portuguese case are distinct in that ideological centrism is important only for the PCP, while it is irrelevant for the two main governing parties.

By looking at Wald coefficients, we can better compare the results across countries and party types. Not surprisingly, centrism displays the highest impact for radical left parties (IU and KKE), but leader evaluations also show significant results, with the second highest score (the first in the case of PCP, with a Wald coefficient of 43.7, compared with 18.6 for ideology). On the other hand, sentiments about party leaders are by far the most important variable for all socialist parties (PSOE, PS and PASOK) (Wald coefficients: 216.1, 82.4 and 61.5, respectively). Government performance is also extremely important, especially in explaining the vote towards incumbents. This variable shows the highest impact in the case of the Spanish PP, and the second most important effect for the Greek PASOK and the Portuguese PSD. It is also worth noting the relevance of satisfaction with democracy, notably in Portugal and, to a lesser extent, Spain.

Given the general absence of strong effects across parties, more or less objectively defined group identities therefore seem relatively unimportant to shaping partisanship in Southern European countries. Overall, we see very few strong relationships between the group identity variables and...
partisanship for all parties. The results for age deserve comment because the literature on partisanship in mature democracies associates age with partisanship from a life-cycle perspective, meaning that scholars expect older voters to be more partisan (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1969). In the case of young democracies (with the partial exception of Greece, see below), age does not seem to be related with partisanship for any party. Therefore, newer democracies do not support the association found in old ones. The explanation for these results may lie in two distinct factors. On the one hand, all the countries have experienced very long periods of authoritarian regimes. This has not only hindered the formation of partisanship for adults, but also the transmission of partisan loyalties to younger generations. On the other, the reinforcement of partisan feelings has been limited due to the catch-all politics adopted by the main political parties, the high level of personalisation of politics and the weak societal roots of party organisations. From this viewpoint, Greece can be considered an exception because the authoritarian regime was short-lived compared with the long dictatorships experienced by the two Iberian countries. This means that the legacy of dictatorship on the formation of partisanship is weaker, showing a positive and significant relationship between age and partisan attachments.

**Conclusions**

The study of partisanship in newer democracies has allowed us to re-examine the debate on the meaning and sources of partisan identities, especially with regard to two competitive paradigms:

<table>
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<th>IU</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
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<th>PSOE</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>s.e.</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
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<td>Age squared</td>
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<td>(.14)</td>
<td>.92***</td>
<td>(.21)</td>
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<td>(.05)</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
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<td>-.09**</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(.06)</td>
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<td>-.74***</td>
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<td>(.21)</td>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>(.07)</td>
<td>.33***</td>
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<td>.34***</td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>(.14)</td>
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<td>(.06)</td>
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<td>(.04)</td>
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<td>(.04)</td>
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<td>(.05)</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>(.05)</td>
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<td>-.004***</td>
<td>(.002)</td>
<td>-.01***</td>
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<td>(.59)</td>
<td>-12.07***</td>
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<td>(2438)</td>
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| Notes: The reference category is non-partisan voters. * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

‘group’ versus ‘performance’ theories. The first important finding of this study is that, in general, the origin of partisanship in young democracies is mainly associated with short-term factors based on retrospective evaluations of political actors, rather than on social factors. Therefore, our data fully support the two main hypotheses set forth at the beginning of this study. Yet, this conclusion must be interpreted with a note of caution for two main reasons. On the one hand, our empirical analysis considers only a few cases, and thus we are unable to make broad generalisations. In particular, Southern Europe may present distinct features from other recent democracies in terms of party system institutionalisation or colonial legacy. However, we believe that these results are a conservative test because new democracies display characteristics that reinforce the relationship between attitudinal variables and partisan loyalties. Moreover, recent events in Greece seem to confirm the link between performance variables and partisanship. According to the European Social Survey data (2002–2010), the level of partisanship remained stable until 2008, with an average of 59% of party identifiers, while in 2010, the proportion of voters close to political parties declined to 32%.

On the other hand, we must approach our findings very carefully due to the dispute about the effective status – endogenous or exogenous – of partisanship. As we mentioned, the treatment of partisanship as a cause or consequence of an individual’s attitudes and behaviour has been a matter of debate. This article did not aim to solve this problem. More modestly, its main objective was to apply and make a comparative test of two distinct models related to the nature of partisanship. More appropriate data and sophisticated methods are required to examine the causality of this
relationship. However, recent studies suggest that partisanship and leader evaluation are linked through close ties of mutual interaction (Garzia, 2012; Gerber et al., 2012; Marks, 1993), reinforcing our conclusions about the importance of performance evaluations in shaping partisan identities.

The second interesting finding is the consistent association between ideological extremism and partisan identities. Partisans are located mainly at the extremes of the Left–Right continuum, whereas moderate voters are more likely to display independent attitudes vis-à-vis parties. While this phenomenon may be interpreted as the consequence of dissatisfaction towards the main governing parties, the potential impact of party system dynamics on the nature of partisan attachments should also be noted. The lack of ideological differentiation may be responsible for the fact that partisanship is weak for most voters and considerably driven by evaluations of political actors’ performance and competence. Further research would be required to examine the link between party polarisation and the nature of partisanship from a comparative perspective.

This consideration leads to another important point that was at the centre of this study, namely, the different bases of partisan support for distinct political parties. This research has gathered evidence that the sources of partisanship vary according to the type of party. As we have seen, variables based on retrospective performance are particularly important for the main catch-all parties. By contrast, partisan identities for more ideological parties – that is, the communist party family – are based on the self-identification with the Left and are less dependent on personalistic ties. The results of the multivariate analysis indicate that partisanship for these parties is also a more deeply held substantive attachment. Although partisanship for other parties is more widespread, it rests more heavily on personalism.

Overall, our study suggests that party preferences in young democracies are relatively weakly held and considerably driven by performance evaluations. This means that partisan identities only partly reflect the concept of partisanship as employed by the conventional Anglo-Saxon literature. It is therefore likely that with the deep economic crisis that has hit Southern European countries, not only is the negative evaluation of political actors likely to increase, but it will also foster a significant erosion of partisan loyalties. As a consequence, electoral instability and party de-alignment in Southern Europe may increase substantially in the future, following the path opened by the 2012 legislative elections in Greece and the subsequent radical change in its party system.

**Appendix: List of parties**

**Greece:**
- KKE: Greek Communist Party
- PASOK: Greek Socialist Party
- ND: New Democracy

**Portugal:**
- PCP: Portuguese Communist Party
- PS: Socialist Party
- PSD: Social-Democratic Party

**Spain:**
- IU: Unitary Left
- PSOE: Spanish Socialist Party
- PP: Popular Party
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Notes
1. I refer to partisanship or partisan identities as the socio-psychological orientations developed towards political parties, which is the equivalent in the American literature to the concept of party identification. As several authors have noticed (Bartle and Bellucci, 2008; Budge et al., 1976; Holmberg, 2007), this concept is more appropriate for the study of European parties and voters because it can distinguish between partisanship and vote choice. The terms ‘partisan identities’, ‘partisanship’ and ‘partisan attachments’ are used interchangeably in this text.
2. We use the following post-election surveys: Greece 1996, Portugal 2005 and Spain 2004. As explained in the next section, some analysis has also been conducted for more recent elections.
3. These variables are coded as follows: frequency of religious practices (1 = not very often; 4 = very often); married (0 = not married; 1 = married); employment (0 = not employee; 1 = employee); associations (0 = not member; 1 = member).
4. This variable ranges from 1 (negative assessment of economic situation) to 4 (positive evaluation).
5. This variable ranges from 1 (negative assessment of government performance) to 4 (positive evaluation).
6. This variable ranges from 1 (not satisfied with the democratic regime) to 4 (very satisfied).
7. As for government performance, our data suggest that this variable has a weak effect in Spain and Portugal, while in Greece, the probability of holding partisan attachments increases from 32.9% to 54.4% when we move from a very negative to a very positive evaluation (data not shown).
8. Although the impact of leader ambivalence achieves higher levels of statistical significance than ideology, the difference between low and high values of predicted probabilities is greater for the latter. This anomaly can be explained by the fact that leader ambivalence has a greater standard deviation and the frequency distribution is relatively flat compared with the ‘centrism’ variable.
9. For the full names of the parties included in the analysis, see the Appendix.
10. Results for the ‘other parties’ category are not presented, but they are available from the author upon request.
11. Although we present results just for one point in time, the main findings are also supported by more recent data (Greece 2004, Portugal 2009 and Spain 2008). The data are available from the author upon request.

References


Author biography
Marco Lisi is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Studies, Nova University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests are political parties, party systems, electoral behaviour, political campaigns and democratic theory. He has published on political parties and electoral behaviour in several international journals such as West European Politics, South European Society and Politics and the European Journal of Communication.