

Fiscal consolidation and voting: on the electoral costs of budgetary stability

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyse the potential impact of policies aimed at fostering fiscal sustainability on citizens' preferences. A survey specifically designed for this purpose quantifies citizens' knowledge and concern about fiscal imbalances and the institutional framework that addresses them in Spain, and their possible electoral reactions to public spending cuts and tax increases. Using both ordered and unordered multinomial probit models, we corroborate that citizens tend to disapprove of retrenchment policies. However, the effect on citizens' voting intentions varies depending on their political ideology. We confirm that left-wing voters supporting the incumbent coalition parties prefer austerity policies based on the revenue side of the budget, while right-wing voters tend to approve retrenchments based on the expenditure side to a larger extent.

KEYWORDS

Deficit, fiscal adjustment, fiscal austerity, electoral impact, public spending, taxes

JEL CLASSIFICATION

A14, H31, H62

1 | INTRODUCTION

Increasing concern for fiscal sustainability in recent decades has boosted the implementation of fiscal rules and budgetary consolidation retrenchment plans all around the world, particularly in developed economies. Within the European Union (EU), consolidation strategies have been applied intensively since the Great Recession to secure budgetary stability and to shield the credibility of the euro. Some

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countries have put the emphasis on cutting expenditure, while in others the effort has focused more on the revenue side, but most countries have used a combination of the two approaches.

It has been argued that austerity policies, as well as having potentially adverse economic effects, can exert negative political effects in terms of polarisation and turnout (Gabriel, Klein and Pessoa, 2022; Wiedeman, 2022; Hübscher, Sattler and Wagner, 2023b), possibly leading to political instability. Even when this instability does not take place, a large body of literature has proved that fiscal retrenchment has an impact on electoral outcomes, often resulting in incumbents being voted out of office (Hübscher & Sattler, 2018; Alesina et al., 2021; Bojar et al., 2022; Giuliani, 2022). Potential negative electoral consequences might mean that incumbents fear implementing consolidation policies.

In this paper, we analyse the impact of fiscal consolidation measures on voting intentions in Spain. For over a decade, Spain has been ranked among the EU-27 countries with the greatest structural imbalance between non-financial revenues and expenditures, and this has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the public debt to GDP ratio. After the outbreak of the Great Recession, the public finances suffered from a sharp deterioration due to a large decrease in tax collections and a persistent incremental trend in public expenditure. To address those large imbalances, the national government committed itself to intense austerity policies to put public budgets back on track. Hence, Spain is a particularly appropriate case study for evaluating citizens' opinions on fiscal stability and consolidation processes.

To accomplish this, we employ a specifically designed survey. Initially, we investigate the extent of citizens' awareness about the level of fiscal imbalances and the institutional framework employed to address them. We then shed light on the factors that explain citizens' concern for fiscal sustainability. Lastly, we analyse the potential impact on citizens' voting intentions of implementing tax increases or spending cutbacks.

We contribute to the literature on the impact of austerity policies on voters' behaviour in three ways. First, in line with the works by Hübscher and Sattler (2018), Hübscher, Sattler and Truchlewski (2023a), Langsaether, Goubin and Haugsgjerd (2022), Moury and Freire (2013) and Talving (2017), our analysis is based on micro-data from an ad hoc survey conducted in Spain in 2022. This approach avoids the potential selection bias of those analyses based on macro-data that study governments' re-election chances. It has been argued (Nyman, 2016) that the latter type of analysis may only capture the effect of austerity policies that were implemented because the government was confident of its re-election chances. Second, we use a quasi-experimental approach in which the total sample of individuals is segmented into two random groups. This allows us to assess the credibility hypothesis, which suggests that identical measures are evaluated differently depending on the credibility of the institution imposing them. In our specific case, we look for heterogeneous behaviour according to the level of government – supranational or national – that decides on the budgetary consolidation measures. Finally, we shed light on whether different consolidation measures (tax increases versus spending cutbacks) have different impacts on voters' electoral intentions.

Our results confirm the potential electoral costs of fiscal retrenchments, giving support to incumbents' fear of being put out of office as a result of the implementation of austerity policies. However, we do not find evidence to support the credibility hypothesis, as voters tend to dislike fiscal consolidation regardless of the level of government that imposes it. On the contrary, we do find empirical evidence of heterogeneous behaviour by voters depending on the composition of the austerity policies: citizens tend to dislike expenditure cutbacks to a larger extent when they position themselves to the left of the centre of the ideological spectrum, while they greatly disapprove of tax hikes when they position themselves to the right of that centre.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 provides a review of the literature on the factors that shape citizens' beliefs and preferences about public debt and austerity measures. Following the literature review, our empirical analysis is based on the results of an ad hoc questionnaire. In Section 3, using the data we collected, we perform an econometric analysis of the determinants of citizens' greater or lesser knowledge and concern about fiscal stability. In Section 4, we present econometric evidence concerning the factors that explain the differences in the citizens' attitudes towards austerity

policies. Section 5 presents a simulation of the potential electoral impact of different spending or tax-based retrenchment strategies. Finally, in Section 6, we offer our conclusions.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Retrospective economic voting has been extensively analysed since the ground-breaking work of Powell and Whitten (1993). It has been shown that citizens decide how to vote by comparing the economic situation at the beginning and the end of the legislature. If the economy has become worse, they tend to vote against an incumbent; if it has improved, they tend to vote for the incumbent. As an extension of this literature, the impact of governments' public spending and tax decisions, including the impact of fiscal consolidation policies, on the behaviour of voters has also been intensively analysed. The intuition here is twofold. On the one hand, voters would be expected to perceive the negative impact of fiscal austerity on GDP, employment and public services, and to punish the government for the cutbacks.¹ On the other hand, citizens could also value balanced public budgets and a sustainable fiscal policy, and thus reward the government for the implementation of consolidation policies when they vote.

A first wave of papers finds evidence supporting the latter effect (see Table 1 for a summary of the literature review): governments implementing cutbacks for the sake of fiscal sustainability do not face significant turnover decreases because citizens perceive a potentially positive long-term economic impact (Alesina, Perotti and Tavares, 1998; Alesina, Carloni and Lecce, 2012). Arias and Stasavage (2019) also find no negative impact of fiscal retrenchment on leader turnover in their study of 32 countries across the period 1870–2011. They offer three possible explanations of these results: voters do not mind about austerity; they do not know that cutbacks are being implemented; they know and care about the cutbacks, but are not sensitive to changes in fiscal policy.

However, more recent literature has claimed that the evidence based on effective voting could be biased. Nyman (2016) argues that focusing only on re-election cases limits the analysis to incumbents who implement austerity policies with confidence in their re-election. Therefore, alternative approaches have appeared, examining the impact of austerity measures on citizens' perceptions. In this line of research, Hübscher and Sattler (2018) find that austerity negatively affects voting intention, while Alesina et al. (2021) suggest that even the announcement of austerity measures is punished by voters. Bojar et al. (2022) find a negative relationship between fiscal consolidation and voting intention, particularly during low employment periods. Giuliani (2022) studies the impact of fiscal consolidation on the vote share of political parties in 36 EU and OECD country members during the period 2000–15, finding that in normal times, but not during the Great Recession, citizens did not punish austerity.

Talving (2017) investigates public deficit reduction in European countries, revealing a lower intention to vote for the prime minister's party. Hübscher, Sattler and Wagner (2021) show that the probability of re-election decreases sharply when austerity measures are applied. With surveys run in Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK, they also find a stronger effect for spending cuts than for tax increases. Ciobanu (2024) also found a strong negative effect of austerity measures on vote intention for the prime minister's party in Romania during the Great Recession. The results are similar for developing countries, as shown in the analysis by Ardanaz, Hallerberg and Scartascini (2020) of Latin American and Caribbean countries. Nyman (2016) shows that the decrease in an incumbent's support is larger when the fiscal retrenchment is transparent.

¹ Incumbents' fear of losing voters' support is reflected in the work of Moury and Freire (2013), which analyses the process of the approval and implementation of fiscal consolidation plans that took place in Portugal after the outbreak of the Great Recession. The authors find that conservative incumbents used the troika requirements as a window of opportunity to implement a fiscal retrenchment that would otherwise have met strong opposition among the electorate. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this happened in Spain as well, particularly after the transition of power by the end of 2011, when the main right-wing party won the national elections.

TABLE 1 Literature review.

	Data	Spatial period	Object of analysis	Methodology	Results
Alesina et al. (1998)	Macro	19 OECD countries, 1960–95	Do budget consolidation strategies have an impact on incumbents' electoral support?	Probit model	Austerity policies do not necessarily lead to diminishing electoral support
Alesina et al. (2012)	Macro	19 OECD countries, 1975–2008	Do austerity policies affect electoral results?	Probit model	Implementing tax hikes or expenditure cuts does not affect incumbents' electoral support
Moury and Freire (2013)	Micro: ad hoc survey	Portugal, 2012–13	How does framing affect voters' evaluation of austerity measures?	Descriptive statistics	Right-wing government uses conditionality of international aid as an opportunity to implement unpopular reforms
Nyman (2016)	Macro	27 countries, 1974–2013	How do fiscal adjustments affect governments' support in elections?	OLS	Parties implementing budget consolidation measures are punished by voters
Talving (2017)	Micro: European Election Study Voter study	24 European countries, 2004, 2009 and 2014	Do austerity measures affect incumbents' vote intention? Does the level of government imposing austerity measures matter?	Multilevel logistic regression	Austerity reduces incumbents' support The level of government deciding austerity measures is irrelevant
Barnes and Hicks (2018)	Micro: ad hoc survey experiment	Great Britain, 2010–15	Impact of media framing on voters' attitude towards fiscal consolidation	Ordinal logistic model	Media affect citizens' preferences for fiscal retrenchment
Hübscher and Sattler (2018)	Micro: ad hoc survey experiment Macro	Australia, Germany and USA 15 OECD countries (1978–2009)	Impact of austerity measures on vote intention	Dynamic panel data model	Austerity policies are punished by voters even when budget imbalances are large
Arias and Stasavage (2019)	Macro	32 countries, 1870–2011	Impact of expenditure cuts on leader turnover	OLS + instrumental variables	No effect
Ardamaz et al. (2020)	Micro: IDB-LAFOP's 2017 survey Macro	Seven Latin-American countries, 2017	Do voters react equally to different consolidation packages? Does austerity impact voters' behaviour?	OLS Pooled logistic regression	Voters prefer consolidation through tax hikes than spending reductions Voters punish fiscal consolidation at the polls
Alesina et al. (2021)	Macro	16 countries, 1978–2014	Impact of austerity measures on vote intention	OLS	Tax increases are strongly punished Spending cuts are punished by left-wing voters, but not by right-wing voters

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Data	Spatial period	Object of analysis	Methodology	Results
Bojar et al. (2022)	Macro	15 European countries, 2005–15	Does austerity affect incumbents' support?	Time series	Austerity measures reduce vote intention for ruling parties
Langsaether et al. (2022)	Micro: ad-hoc survey experiment	Norway, 2020	Impact of austerity on vote intention	OLS	Left-wing voters punish social democrats more than right-wing parties when they implement cutbacks
Wiedeman (2022)	Micro: British Election Study	UK, 2015, 2017 and 2019 general elections	Does increased household debt due to austerity affect electoral behaviour?	Two-stage least squares	Austerity measures trigger larger participation, lower support for right-wing parties and greater support for the Labour party and UKIP
Gabriel et al. (2022)	Macro	124 European regions (eight countries), 1980–2015	Impact of austerity measures on polarisation, turnout and political fragmentation	Instrumental variables	Fiscal consolidation increases polarisation and fragmentation and reduces voter turnout
Giuliani (2022)	Macro	36 developed countries, 2000–15	Does austerity affect incumbents' support?	Random effects panel data	During normal times, citizens do not punish austerity During the Great Recession, austerity reduced incumbents' support
Hübscher et al. (2023b)	Micro: ad hoc survey experiment Macro	16 OECD countries, 1980–2016 Germany, Portugal, Spain and UK	Impact of austerity measures on abstention and polarisation	Multinomial logistic regression model	Austerity increases abstention and political polarisation

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Another strand of literature explores the impact of austerity on political polarisation and voter turnout. Hübscher et al. (2023b) analyse 166 separate election processes from 1980 to 2016 in Germany, Portugal, Spain and the UK, using both macro- and micro-data. They find increased polarisation and electoral abstention after fiscal retrenchments, especially when both mainstream parties advocate cutbacks. Gabriel et al. (2022) and Wiedeman (2022) also analyse more than 200 elections in 124 regions from eight European countries, finding that fiscal consolidation increases polarisation and political fragmentation because of its constraining economic effects. Equivalent results are obtained by Wiedeman (2022) in his analysis of voting intention in the UK in 2015, 2017 and 2019.

In summary, the empirical evidence shows that citizens dislike both deficits and austerity, but they give more weight to the cost of fiscal retrenchment than to the potential benefits for the economy of a balanced budget (Hübscher and Sattler, 2018; Hübscher et al., 2021).

Regarding citizens' attitudes towards different retrenchment policies, the empirical evidence shows that right-wing voters tend to prefer spending cuts, while left-wing voters favour tax increases. According to Alesina et al. (2021), these effects tend to be larger when the policy is implemented during an economic downturn. In any case, Langsaether et al. (2022) find that the reaction of citizens to budgetary consolidation is strongly driven by their expectations about each party's fiscal strategy: it is when governments subvert expectations that voters punish the incumbent. Nevertheless, Hübscher et al. (2021) and Gabriel et al. (2022) show that differences between right-wing and left-wing supporters tend to be small.

The literature has shown that citizens' attribution of responsibility is strongly driven by their individual characteristics, such as their age, gender, human capital, occupation, income, ideology and political sophistication, but that it is also influenced by institutional clarity, the saliency and framing of policies in the political debate and the media, and the credibility of agents supplying the information (Herrero-Alcalde, Goenaga-Ruiz de Zuazu and Tránchez-Martín, 2018). Concerning institutional clarity, the existence of various levels of government can blur the responsibility assumed by each of them (Anderson, 2000, 2006; Cutler, 2004, 2008; León, 2010, 2012; Wlezien and Soroka, 2011; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014a, 2014b). Coalitions can further complicate the identification of the decision-making party within the government. Confusion may also arise when decisions can be made by either the parliament or the executive power (Whitten and Palmer, 1999; Nadeau et al., 2002; Rudolph, 2003a, 2003b; De Vries and Giger, 2013).

The saliency and framing of public policy are also important drivers of citizens' attribution of responsibility (Rudolph, 2003a, 2003b; Arceneaux, 2006; Ben-Porath and Shaker, 2010). These tend to be conditioned by environmental circumstances. For instance, during election times, public policy tends to be more salient in the media. During recessions, information about economic variables also becomes more prominent, according to Lago and Cordero (2016). On the contrary, Talving (2017) suggests that, during crises, information becomes blurry and therefore citizens struggle to identify the government's responsibility. Ciobanu (2024) also proves that saliency in the media has a critical effect on the relationship between austerity measures and voters' intentions. In his analysis of citizens' reaction to the Romanian's government strategy to fight the Great Recession, he finds that the loss of popularity does not take place immediately, but progressively, as the media devote greater attention to the austerity measures.

Barnes and Hicks (2018) show that the media strongly influences citizens' attitudes towards fiscal policy and fiscal balance. Specifically, they find that the framing of information about fiscal policy in the media is quite diverse, and that this diversity shapes voters' attitudes towards fiscal austerity.

The credibility of sources of information also shapes citizens' beliefs (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Ben-Porath and Shaker, 2010; Hobolt, Tilley and Wittrock, 2013). Voters tend to attribute more credibility to certain sources, distinguishing different levels of government (EU versus national government), political parties (ideological bias) or media (Barnes and Hicks, 2018).

Finally, cultural characteristics can also condition citizens' evaluation of public policies. Hübscher et al. (2023a) find that differences in the congruence of voter attitudes towards fiscal trade-offs across

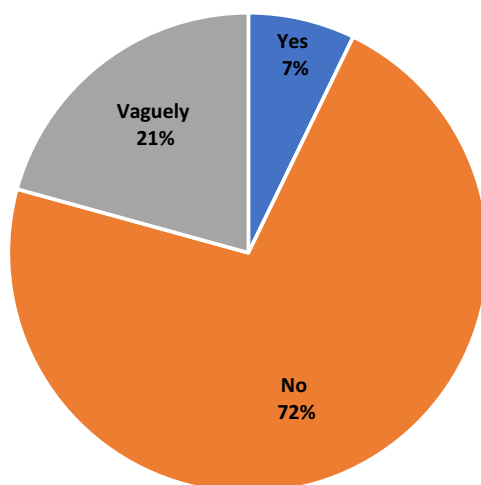


FIGURE 1 Do you know the Fiscal Council (AIReF) and what its main role is? (Q19).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

countries are partly explained by the economic growth model that dominates in each nation, which sometimes reduces (or even eliminates) the effects of party cues. While in Germany citizens of the two largest political parties agree both on the size and composition of the austerity measures, in Spain voters tend to agree on the composition of the retrenchment, but not so much on its size. Finally, citizens in the UK make use of party cues, disagreeing on both the size and composition of the cutbacks.

3 | SPANISH CITIZENS' BELIEFS AND CONCERNS ABOUT FISCAL IMBALANCES AND THE FISCAL FRAMEWORK

The first step of our analysis is to explore how Spanish citizens perceive the seriousness of the problem of fiscal imbalances. Citizens' feelings about fiscal imbalances, and their view of the best strategy to address them, may shape their electoral response to different budget retrenchment initiatives. This analysis is based on an ad hoc survey conducted in March 2022, with a sample size of 1,500 citizens and a margin of error of 2.53 per cent. The sample distribution follows the weights shown by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) for gender, age, level of education and autonomous community. The fieldwork was conducted through an online questionnaire, the technical specifications of which are summarised in Tables A.1, A.2 and A.3 in the [online Appendix](#).

Regarding citizens' beliefs about fiscal imbalances and their knowledge of the fiscal framework, the survey shows that only 7 per cent of the people surveyed know the role of the Spanish Fiscal Council (*Autoridad Independiente de Responsabilidad Fiscal*, AIReF), while 21 per cent of them express vague knowledge about it (see Figure 1). Although the results for the current fiscal rules are slightly better, 28 per cent of citizens still reveal a total ignorance of the fiscal framework and 19 per cent express a vague knowledge of the topic (Figure 2). Finally, citizens' perception about the level of public debt in Spain seems to be more accurate, as 40 per cent of the surveyed people give the correct answer and only 9 per cent give a clearly incorrect response (Figure 3).

A first series of econometric estimates focuses on the determinants of the citizens' knowledge about the AIReF, the existence of fiscal rules and the ratio of public debt to GDP in Spain in 2022

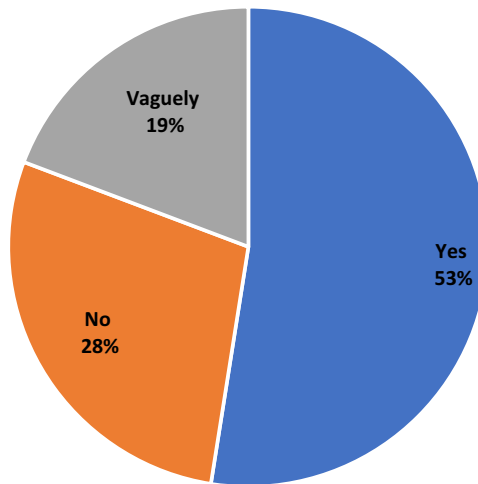


FIGURE 2 Are you aware that there exist European-level fiscal rules about deficit and public debt levels that the EU-27 member states must comply with? (Q20).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

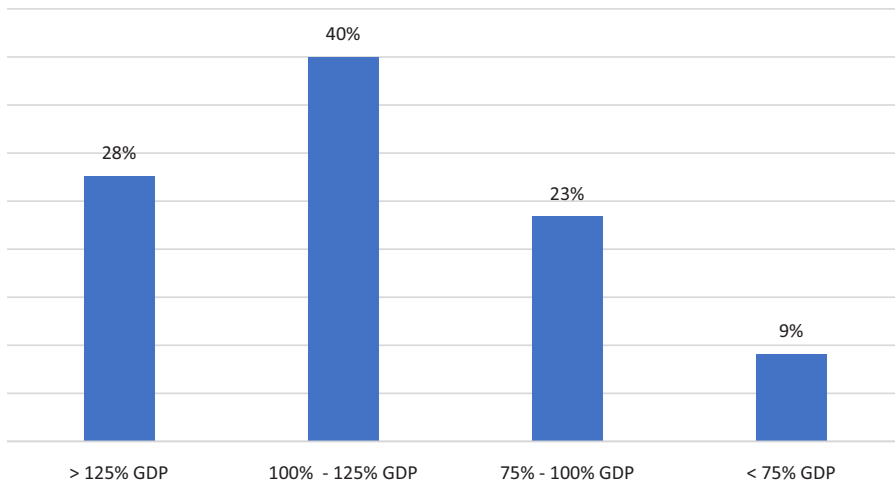


FIGURE 3 What do you think the accumulated public debt due to earlier public deficits represents in Spain in 2022? (Q21).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

(see questions 19, 20 and 21 of the survey in the footnotes of Table 2). Ordered multinomial probit models are used. The endogenous variable ranges from ignorance (1) to knowledge (3) in the questions about the existence of the fiscal council and fiscal rules. As for the debt variable, a score of three was assigned to those who answered correctly, two to those who came close, and one to those who responded that the debt was below 75 per cent of GDP. Common explanatory variables for all the estimations include gender, age, marital status, level of education, occupation, household income,²

² Although the variables reflecting the level of education, occupation and household income might be strongly correlated, we are expecting them to offer relevant nuances regarding voters' electoral behavior.

TABLE 2 Determinants of citizens' information about Spanish fiscal imbalances, the Fiscal Council and fiscal rules.

	Q19	Q21	Q20
Female	-0.056 (-0.71)	-0.13 (-1.82*)	-0.15 (-2.01**)
Age	0.0021 (0.57)	-0.0017 (-0.53)	0.017 (5.09***)
Marital status (baseline:ingle)			
Married/Living in couple	-0.14 (-1.50)	-0.066 (-0.81)	-0.026 (-0.30)
Widower	-0.17 (-0.72)	-0.033 (-0.16)	-0.071 (-0.33)
Separated	-0.22 (-0.83)	-0.23 (-1.00)	-0.26 (-1.06)
Divorced	0.080 (0.51)	-0.069 (-0.48)	0.070 (0.46)
Level of education	0.029 (1.28)	0.037 (1.79*)	0.085 (3.85***)
Occupation (baseline: businessman/liberal profession)			
Employee	-0.16 (-1.26)	0.22 (1.93*)	0.15 (1.20)
Retired	-0.081 (-0.50)	0.43 (3.00***)	-0.23 (-1.49)
Student	-0.35 (-1.84*)	0.11 (0.66)	0.20 (1.15)
Homemaker	-0.18 (-0.93)	0.17 (1.07)	-0.075 (-0.43)
Unemployed	-0.040 (-0.25)	0.20 (1.46)	-0.022 (-0.15)
Income	0.011 (1.09)	0.0014 (0.17)	-0.0026 (-0.30)
Ideology	0.012 (0.63)	-0.0065 (-0.39)	-0.0052 (-0.29)
Interest in general politics	0.069 (4.60***)	0.0078 (0.60)	0.081 (5.88***)
Interest in the economic situation	0.045 (2.70***)	0.045 (3.27***)	0.074 (5.16***)
Main source of information (baseline: radio)			
TV	-0.088 (-0.75)	-0.015 (-0.14)	-0.17 (-1.49)
Press	0.13 (0.86)	0.12 (0.85)	0.029 (0.19)
Social media	0.17 (1.26)	0.041 (0.33)	-0.11 (-0.81)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Q19	Q21	Q20
Ideology (baseline: left)			
Uncategorized	−0.067 (−0.65)	0.089 (0.99)	−0.10 (−1.07)
Right	−0.045 (−0.40)	0.087 (0.90)	−0.14 (−1.39)
Vote intention (baseline: invalid vote, abstention and others)			
Government coalition	−0.27 (−2.34 ^{**})	0.075 (0.75)	−0.029 (−0.28)
Nation-wide opposition parties	−0.083 (−0.73)	0.058 (0.59)	0.081 (0.77)
Region-wide opposition parties	0.022 (0.16)	0.034 (0.26)	0.14 (0.99)
Undecided	−0.19 (−1.59)	0.036 (0.36)	−0.14 (−1.38)
/cut1	1.14	−0.73	1.05
/cut2	2.08	0.91	1.65
<i>N</i>	1,501	1,501	1,501
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.051	0.022	0.11

Note: Ordered probit estimator. The *z*-values are given in parentheses. ^{***}, ^{**} and ^{*} indicate 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels of significance, respectively.

Q19 – Do you know the Fiscal Council (AIReF) and what its main role is?

Q20 – Are you aware that there exist European-scale fiscal rules about deficit and public debt levels that the EU-27 member states must comply with?

Q21 – Due to earlier public deficits, the accumulated Spanish public debt ratio over GDP in 2022 was ... (1, strongly incorrect; 2, incorrect; 3, correct).

ideology, interest in politics and in economics, primary channel of information, ideological orientation of the main media through which the respondent received information and, finally, the political party the respondent would vote for if elections were held at the time of the survey. In this case, to manage the information more easily, we reclassify the political parties into five groups, with values ranging from 1 to 5: government parties (PSOE and Unidas Podemos); national opposition parties (PP, Vox, Ciudadanos, Más País and PACMA); subnational opposition parties (ERC, JxCAT, CUP, EAJ-PNV, EH Bildu, CCa-NC, NA+, Mes Compromís, BNG, PRC); a miscellaneous category that includes blank votes, null votes, abstentions and other minor parties; and, lastly, those who declare that they have not decided. The fourth category serves as the reference. Finally, the general expression of the econometric model is:

$$\text{Knowledge} = f(\text{personal characteristics, ideology, interest, media, vote intention}).$$

The results reported in Table 2 reveal that the most relevant factors that explain the amount of information held by a citizen are their interest in politics and current economic affairs and their level of education. All three factors have a positive effect, while being female has a negative one. In contrast, it should be noted that the source of information is not a relevant determinant in any of the three cases, nor is income level.

We then focus on the citizens' concern about fiscal imbalances. Most of the people surveyed (67 per cent) express a strong concern about the public deficit (Figure 4), and they largely agree with the idea

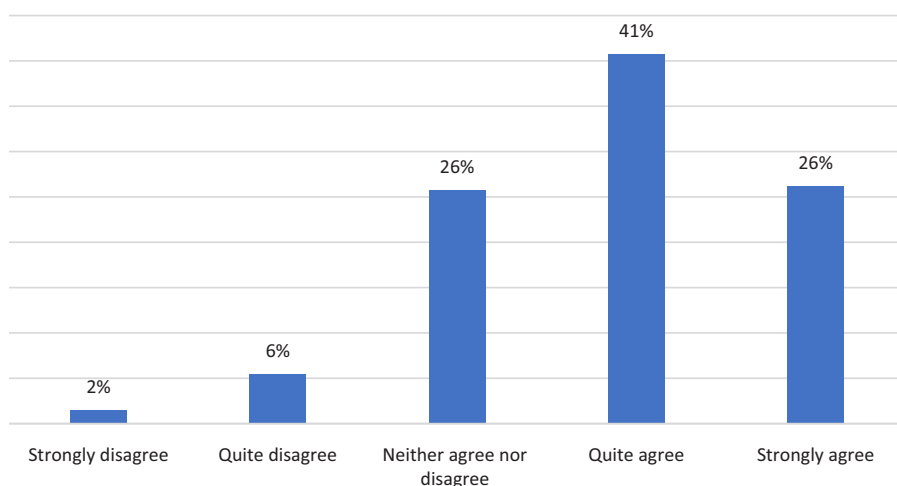


FIGURE 4 Degree of agreement with the statement 'Spanish public deficit is a severe problem' (Q24_1).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

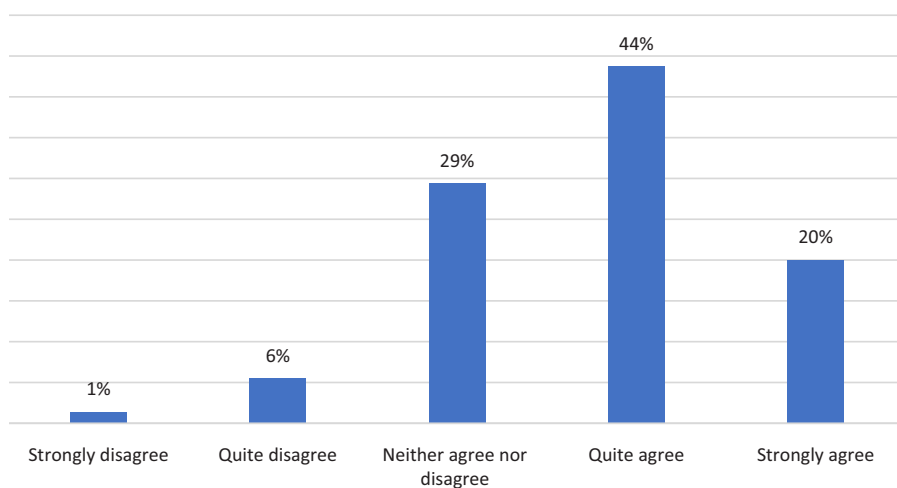


FIGURE 5 Degree of agreement with the statement 'Spanish public deficit should receive more attention in Spain' (Q24_2).

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

that more attention should be paid to this problem (Figure 5). Moreover, a vast majority consider that party election platforms should include information about the proposed strategy to address the public deficit (Figure 6).

The factors explaining the diverse levels of concern about fiscal stability among the respondents are reported in Table 3. The columns correspond, respectively, to the responses regarding whether the public deficit is a serious problem (question 24_1), whether it should receive greater attention (question 24_2), whether reducing the deficit is a priority over increasing spending or reducing taxes (question 24_7) and finally, whether the role of the AIREF is crucial in controlling the public deficit (question 24_6). Once again, an ordered multinomial probit model is employed, and the explanatory variables are the same, except for the last estimation, in which the degree of knowledge about AIREF

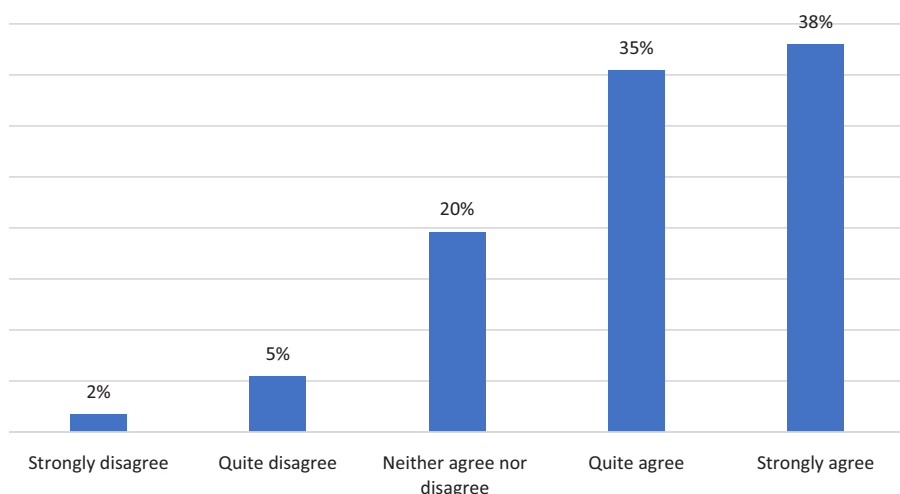


FIGURE 6 Degree of agreement with the statement ‘Party electoral platforms should include information about parties’ electoral strategies to address public deficit’ (Q24_3).

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

itself is added. The general expression of the econometric model is

$$\text{Concern} = f(\text{personal characteristics, ideology, interest, media, vote intention}).$$

Concern for fiscal stability seems to increase with citizens’ level of education, age, interest in current economic affairs, ideology to the right of centre, and intention to vote for an opposition party. On the negative side, interest in politics stands out, contrasting with the result for an interest in current economics. One potential explanation is that attention to current economic affairs increases sensitivity to the problems generated by the deficit, while interest in politics places those problems behind other social priorities. Because our survey was run during the last period of the COVID-19 pandemic, those ‘other social priorities’, such as health care, could be particularly salient at the moment. As Durán-Cabré et al. (2023) show, citizens’ willingness to pay taxes to support larger public programmes devoted to protecting the population increased after the pandemic. Our results could be capturing this effect as well. Interestingly, and unlike the results obtained by Barnes and Hicks (2018), the results here offer no evidence that the greater saliency of fiscal imbalances in the right-of-centre media improves their readers’ knowledge about the fiscal framework.

4 | DETERMINANTS OF THE ELECTORAL COST OF FISCAL CONSOLIDATIONS

To determine the electoral factors influencing fiscal consolidation, a crucial inquiry revolves around citizens’ preferences about the extent of public spending reductions in a hypothetical budget consolidation. To estimate this, we rely upon another ordered multinomial probit model, with four options ranging from 0 to 100 per cent for the weight of spending cuts and tax raises, along with three additional explanatory variables approximating quality, the comparative cost of public services and opinions about the role of the public sector, to reveal preferences about spending cuts in a hypothetical fiscal consolidation (see question 25, in the notes of Table 4). The general expression

TABLE 3 What drives citizens' concern for fiscal stability? (Q24_1, Q24_2, Q24_6, Q24_7).

	Q24_1	Q24_2	Q24_7	Q24_6
Female	-0.087 (-1.33)	-0.12 (-1.90*)	-0.084 (-1.31)	0.13 (1.85*)
Age	0.011 (3.68***)	0.0079 (2.62***)	0.012 (4.06***)	0.0054 (1.66*)
Marital status (baseline: single)				
Married/living in couple	-0.050 (-0.65)	-0.039 (-0.51)	-0.11 (-1.49)	-0.15 (-1.83*)
Widower	-0.64 (-3.37***)	-0.37 (-1.92*)	-0.38 (-2.03**)	-0.40 (-1.92*)
Separated	-0.42 (-1.97**)	-0.15 (-0.71)	0.089 (0.42)	-0.31 (-1.30)
Divorced	-0.042 (-0.31)	-0.026 (-0.19)	0.13 (0.98)	-0.12 (-0.84)
Level of education	0.069 (3.48***)	0.063 (3.20***)	0.059 (3.07***)	0.055 (2.63***)
Occupation (baseline: businessperson/liberal profession)				
Employee	-0.061 (-0.56)	-0.013 (-0.12)	0.073 (0.68)	0.05 (0.42)
Retired	0.050 (0.37)	0.22 (1.65*)	0.077 (0.58)	0.23 (1.60)
Student	-0.0075 (-0.05)	0.037 (0.24)	0.20 (1.30)	-0.085 (-0.50)
Homemaker	-0.043 (-0.28)	-0.12 (-0.76)	0.15 (0.98)	0.081 (0.48)
Unemployed	-0.20 (-1.53)	-0.13 (-0.97)	0.098 (0.76)	-0.040 (-0.28)
Income	-0.0028 (-0.35)	-0.0057 (-0.72)	0.0073 (0.94)	-0.0090 (-1.04)
Ideology	0.042 (2.68***)	0.035 (2.23**)	0.035 (2.27**)	0.015 (0.92)
Interest in general politics	-0.023 (-1.82*)	-0.0046 (-0.37)	-0.019 (-1.58)	0.000094 (0.01)
Interest in the economic situation	0.093 (7.06***)	0.069 (5.35***)	0.04 (3.17***)	0.049 (3.49***)
Main source of information (baseline: radio)				
TV	-0.13 (-1.34)	-0.050 (-0.51)	0.02 (0.21)	0.17 (1.58)
Press	-0.18 (-1.44)	-0.021 (-0.17)	0.066 (0.53)	0.044 (0.33)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Q24_1	Q24_2	Q24_7	Q24_6
Social media	-0.19 (-1.59)	-0.055 (-0.48)	-0.040 (-0.36)	0.085 (0.69)
Ideology of the main source of information (baseline: left)				
Uncategorised	0.0056 (0.07)	0.054 (0.63)	-0.078 (-0.94)	-0.21 (-2.27**)
Right	-0.038 (-0.41)	0.067 (0.73)	-0.0084 (-0.09)	-0.011 (-0.12)
Vote intention (baseline: invalid vote, abstention and others)				
Government coalition	-0.11 (-1.12)	-0.11 (-1.14)	-0.072 (-0.78)	0.18 (1.70*)
Nation-wide opposition parties	0.27 (2.87***)	0.15 (1.64)	0.19 (2.09**)	0.14 (1.37)
Region-wide opposition parties	0.19 (1.57)	0.067 (0.56)	-0.045 (-0.38)	0.15 (1.17)
Undecided	0.025 (0.27)	0.039 (0.42)	-0.044 (-0.48)	0.19 (1.87*)
/cut1	-1.03	-1.15	-0.65	-1.17
/cut2	-0.33	-0.44	0.090	-0.55
/cut3	0.77	0.76	1.26	1.73
/cut4	1.96	2.05	2.25	2.76
N	1,501	1,501	1,501	1,501
Pseudo-R ²	0.057	0.047	0.028	0.028

Note: Ordered probit estimator. The z-values are given in parentheses. ***, ** and * indicate 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels of significance, respectively.

Q24_1 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, ‘public deficit in Spain is a serious problem’?

Q24_2 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, ‘public deficit in Spain should receive more attention in Spain’?

Q24_7 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, ‘reducing public deficit should be prioritised over increasing expenditure or reducing taxes’?

Q24_6 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, ‘the role of AIReF is crucial to control public deficit’?

of the econometric model is

$$\text{Preferences on composition} = f(\text{personal characteristics, ideology, interest, media, vote intention, opinions on public services}).$$

The results show that preferences for fiscal retrenchments based on spending cuts are more pronounced in individuals with a strong interest in current economic affairs and an ideology to the right of centre, in those who obtain information from media with a right-of-centre editorial line, and in those intending to vote for state-level parties currently in opposition. In contrast, the preference for giving taxes a greater weight in the composition of the adjustment is higher among: employees, students and homemakers; individuals with an intense interest in politics; those who intend to vote in the upcoming general elections for a party currently in government; people who respond more favourably to questions about the quality of public service management and about the role of the public

TABLE 4 Determinants on citizens' preferences on the composition of fiscal retrenchment (question 25).

	Q25	
Female	-0.074	(-1.09)
Age	0.0012	(0.40)
Marital status (baseline: single)		
Married/living in couple	0.16	(2.03**)
Widower	0.26	(1.30)
Separated	0.32	(1.39)
Divorced	0.24	(1.69*)
Level of education	-0.0036	(-0.18)
Occupation (baseline: businessperson/liberal profession)		
Employee	-0.24	(-1.99**)
Retired	-0.22	(-1.50)
Student	-0.33	(-2.09**)
Homemaker	-0.34	(-2.06**)
Unemployed	-0.069	(-0.49)
Income	0.0062	(0.76)
Ideology	0.085	(5.05***)
Interest in general politics	-0.059	(-4.46***)
Interest in the economic situation	0.032	(2.28**)
Ideology of the main source of information (baseline: left)		
Uncategorised	0.16	(2.06**)
Right	0.30	(3.14***)
Vote intention (baseline: invalid vote, abstention, and others)		
Government coalition	-0.19	(-1.95*)
Nation-wide opposition parties	0.21	(2.17**)
Region-wide opposition parties	-0.075	(-0.60)
Undecided	0.086	(0.87)
Q17_3	-0.13	(-4.06***)
Q17_1	-0.088	(-2.83***)
Q18	-0.18	(-3.65***)
/cut1	-1.91	
/cut2	-1.33	
/cut3	-0.24	
N	1,501	
Pseudo-R ²	0.082	

Note: Ordered probit estimator. The z-values are given in parentheses. ***, ** and * indicate 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels of significance, respectively.

Q25 – Should fiscal consolidation be needed in Spain during 2023, to reduce public deficit, what would you prefer the most?

*Public spending reduction.

*Tax raises.

*A combination of 75% of spending reduction and 25% of tax raises.

*A combination of 25% of spending reduction and 75% of tax raises.

Q17_1 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, 'the public sector plays a necessary role for society'?

Q17_3 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, 'in general terms, public services are managed correctly'?

Q18 – According to your knowledge on the level of taxes paid in other European countries and on the level and quality of public services provided in exchange, do you think that this relationship in Spain is worse/equal/better?

sector; and those who consider that the relationship between quality and cost for Spanish services is similar to or better than that in other European countries (Table 4).

To find the drivers for the reaction to fiscal retrenchments in terms of voting intention, we first estimate another ordered multinomial probit model. The reference category of the endogenous variable here is that fiscal consolidation has no significant effect on voting for the coalition government parties. The estimated parameters correspond, therefore, to cases where the probability either increases or decreases. The general expression of the econometric model is

$$\text{Electoral costs} = f(\text{personal characteristics, ideology, interest, media,} \\ \text{vote intention, opinions on public services}).$$

Secondly, we perform a quasi-experiment in the analysis by using two similar, but not identical, questions for the control and treatment groups. In the case of the former, fiscal consolidation is imposed by the European Union. In contrast, for the latter, the deficit reduction decision is presented as an autonomous decision by the Spanish government.

The first two columns of Table 5 show the results of the multinomial model in which the fiscal adjustment involves cuts in spending on health care, education and pensions. The third and fourth columns summarise the results of the multinomial model when the adjustment involves a generalised increase in personal income tax. The results of the model referring to spending cuts indicate that the reduction in the probability of voting for the coalition government is strong for women, employees, and declared voters of both the ruling and opposition parties at the national level, but also for the undecided and those who believe that the public sector plays a necessary role in society. In contrast, this negative effect on the probability of voting for the governing party is weakened for those who receive information from media outlets with an editorial line located on the right side of the political spectrum.

Regarding those who respond that the adjustment would increase the probability that they would vote for the coalition government parties, the profile is that of young people who have previously declared an intention to vote for those same parties and who consider that public services are managed correctly. Interestingly, the level of government ultimately responsible for the fiscal adjustment (national or supranational) does not seem to be relevant when citizens express their voting intention.³ The credibility of the EU does not serve to make the sacrifices related to the budgetary adjustment more acceptable.

When the adjustment is specific to a general increase in personal income tax, the results, summarised in the third and fourth columns, are quite different. The reduction in the probability of voting for the coalition government particularly affects employees, retirees/pensioners and homemakers, and also those who declare that they would vote for state-wide opposition parties, undecided voters and ideologically right-leaning individuals. However, an increase in the probability of voting for the ruling party occurs for people who have previously declared their intention to vote for the government parties and those who consider that public services are generally well managed. Once again, the variable that distinguishes the control from the treatment group is not significant.

In summary, the negative effects of a hypothetical tax increase on voting intention are concentrated for people who show a preference for the opposition parties at the national level and who have an ideology that tends to be to the right of centre. Although both variables tend to overlap, they capture different dimensions of the political stance of citizens: one captures voting preferences and the other reflects individuals' self-perception within the political spectrum. Nevertheless, cuts in spending on health care, education and pensions do not seem to attract voters who prefer other political options, and they displease supporters of the coalition government parties.

³ Although there is a large amount of evidence on the lack of knowledge of the vertical distribution of powers among Spanish citizens (León, 2010, 2012; Herrero et al., 2018; López-Laborda, Rodrigo and Sanz-Arcega, 2023), we are not expecting this to affect our results, as the interviewer explicitly offers this piece of information to the interviewed person.

TABLE 5 How do citizens' vote intentions react to fiscal consolidation?

	Q27 (baseline: no effect) Spending cutbacks		Q28 (baseline: no effect) Tax rises	
	Effect on probability of voting for the government coalition		Effect on probability of voting for the government coalition	
	Increase	Reduce	Increase	Reduce
Female	0.21 (1.88 [*])	-0.12 (-0.80)	0.063 (0.56)	-0.30 (-2.08 ^{**})
Age	0.0018 (0.34)	-0.018 (-2.49 ^{**})	0.0068 (1.31)	-0.017 (-2.42 ^{**})
Marital status (baseline: single)				
Married/living as couple	0.031 (0.23)	-0.13 (-0.73)	0.023 (0.17)	0.11 (0.63)
Widower	-0.70 (-2.16 ^{**})	-1.09 (-1.77 [*])	-0.25 (-0.76)	-0.037 (-0.08)
Separated	-0.23 (-0.63)	-0.12 (-0.23)	-0.56 (-1.50)	-0.45 (-0.84)
Divorced	-0.27 (-1.17)	-0.16 (-0.52)	-0.057 (-0.25)	0.11 (0.36)
Level of education	-0.032 (-0.95)	-0.064 (-1.36)	0.0074 (0.22)	-0.058 (-1.27)
Occupation (baseline: business/liberal profession)				
Employee	0.32 (1.73 [*])	0.091 (0.36)	0.50 (2.63 ^{***})	0.37 (1.45)
Retired	0.34 (1.47)	0.30 (0.93)	0.39 (1.68 [*])	0.50 (1.59)
Student	0.40 (1.51)	0.0071 (0.02)	0.32 (1.21)	0.025 (0.07)
Homemaker	0.16 (0.61)	0.31 (0.86)	0.46 (1.73 [*])	0.81 (2.33 ^{**})
Unemployed	0.042 (0.19)	0.091 (0.31)	0.33 (1.44)	0.30 (1.00)
Income	-0.013 (-0.94)	-0.019 (-1.02)	-0.020 (-1.45)	0.0057 (0.32)
Ideology	0.034 (1.21)	-0.052 (-1.45)	0.10 (3.79 ^{***})	-0.027 (-0.78)
Interest in politics	0.0033 (0.16)	0.015 (0.50)	-0.0038 (-0.18)	0.014 (0.19)
Interest in the economic situation	0.019 (0.87)	-0.0023 (-0.07)	0.017 (0.74)	0.027 (0.89)
Main source of information (baseline: radio)				
TV	-0.16 (-0.983)	0.072 (0.29)	-0.0020 (-0.01)	-0.15 (-0.67)
Press	-0.087 (-0.41)	-0.37 (-1.09)	0.048 (0.22)	-0.25 (-0.87)
Social media	-0.0013 (-0.01)	0.21 (0.74)	0.040 (0.21)	0.11 (0.42)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	Q27 (baseline: no effect) Spending cutbacks		Q28 (baseline: no effect) Tax rises	
	Effect on probability of voting for the government coalition		Effect on probability of voting for the government coalition	
	Increase	Reduce	Increase	Reduce
Main source media's ideology (baseline: left)				
Uncategorised	-0.40 (-2.77 ^{***})	-0.22 (-1.14)	-0.20 (-1.35)	-0.31 (-1.70 [*])
Right	-0.29 (-1.88 [*])	-0.081 (-0.38)	-0.14 (-0.87)	-0.28 (-1.34)
Vote intention (baseline: invalid vote, abstention, and others)				
Government coalition	0.36 (2.21 ^{**})	1.19 (5.39 ^{***})	0.14 (0.85)	0.921 (4.40 ^{***})
Nation-wide opposition parties	0.46 (2.95 ^{***})	0.159 (0.66)	0.56 (3.53 ^{***})	0.24 (1.05)
Region-wide opposition parties	0.27 (1.31)	0.50 (1.75 [*])	0.27 (1.28)	0.14 (0.50)
Undecided	0.36 (2.29 ^{**})	0.25 (1.05)	0.41 (2.61 ^{***})	0.0073 (0.03)
Treatment group	0.12 (1.29)	-0.21 (-1.60)	-0.10 (-1.06)	-0.034 (-0.27)
Q17_3	-0.022 (-0.42)	0.13 (1.72 [*])	-0.076 (-1.40)	0.22 (3.17 ^{***})
Q17_1	0.18 (3.56 ^{***})	0.11 (1.61)	0.060 (1.21)	0.048 (0.72)
Q18	-0.058 (-0.72)	-0.08 (-0.76)	-0.057 (-0.70)	-0.024 (-0.24)
Constant	-0.91 (-1.93 [*])	-0.58 (-0.90)	-1.40 (-2.96 ^{***})	-1.25 (-1.99 ^{**})
<i>N</i>	724	161	626	182

Note: Unordered probit estimator. The *z*-values are given in parentheses. ^{***}, ^{**} and ^{*} indicate 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels of significance, respectively.

Q27 – **Control group:** Imagine that the EU forces the Spanish national government to reduce public deficit to improve its financial condition and that the Spanish national government decides to cut health care, pensions, and education expenditure. What effect would this have on your vote intention for the following national election? **Treatment group:** Imagine that the Spanish national government decides to reduce public deficit to improve its financial condition and, in order to do that, it decides to reduce health care, pensions and education expenditure. What effect would this have in your vote intention in the following general election?

Q28 – **Control group:** Imagine that the EU forces the Spanish national government to reduce public deficit to improve its financial situation, and to do so, the Spanish government decides to increase the Personal Income Tax (IRPF) to all taxpayers. What effect would this have on your vote intention in the following general election? **Treatment group:** Imagine that the Spanish national government decides to reduce public deficit to improve its financial situation, and to do so, it decides to increase the Personal Income Tax (IRPF) to all taxpayers. What effect would this have on your vote intention in the following general election?

Q17_1 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, 'the public sector plays a necessary role for society'?

Q17_3 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement, 'in general terms, public services are managed correctly'?

Q18 – According to your knowledge on the level of taxes paid in other European countries and on the level and quality of public services provided in exchange, do you think that this relationship in Spain is worse/equal/better?

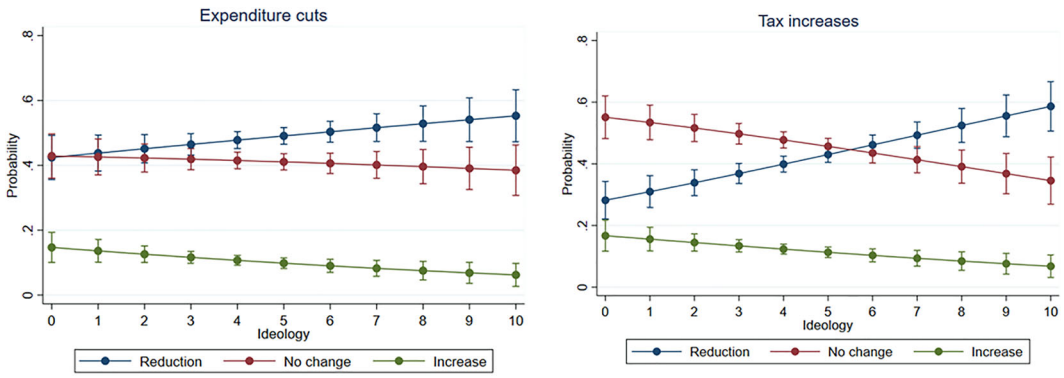


FIGURE 7 Marginal effects of ideology.
 Note: Ideology values range from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Confidence intervals defined at 95 per cent.
 Source: Authors' elaboration.
 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

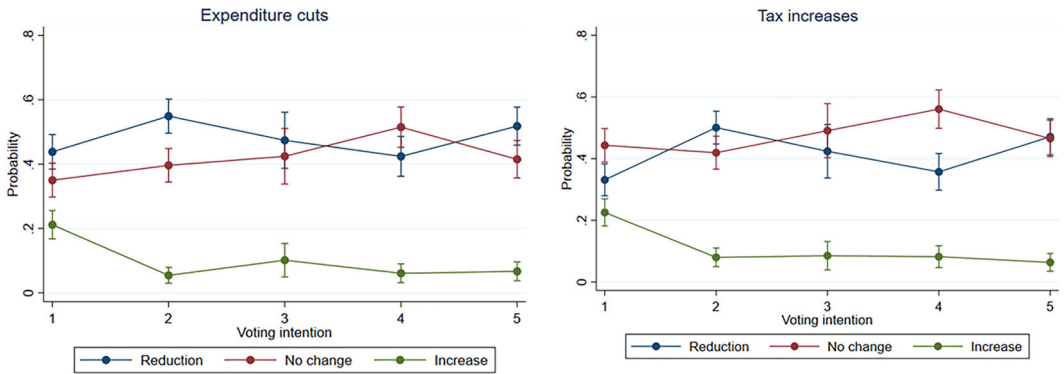


FIGURE 8 Marginal effects of vote intention.
 Note: Voting categories are as follows: 1, government coalition; 2, nation-wide opposition parties; 3, region-wide opposition parties; 4, blank vote, abstention, and others; 5, undecided. Confidence intervals defined at 95 per cent.
 Source: Authors' elaboration.
 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

5 | SIMULATING THE ELECTORAL IMPACT OF THE ADJUSTMENT

Based on the estimates from the previous section, the marginal effects on voting intention of hypothetical scenarios of cuts in spending on health care and pensions or increases in personal income tax are simulated. Given that there is no distinction between the control and treatment groups, the effects are simulated for the entire sample.

Figure 7 shows the effect of ideology, for each of 11 possibilities, ranging from the extreme left (0) to the extreme right (10). The left panel refers to spending cuts, and the right panel to tax increases. Voters who self-identify as more right-leaning have a lower probability of voting for the governing party after fiscal retrenchments are applied, and this is true for both spending cuts and tax increases. The reduction in the intention to vote for the parties in government is larger for citizens closer to the far-right. In the case of left-leaning voters, the reduction in the probability of voting for the coalition government is clearly greater in the case of spending cuts than in the case of tax increases.

In Figure 8, the analysis is repeated for the variable of voting intention, yielding results consistent with the previous findings. For voters who declare an intention to vote for the coalition government

parties, a spending cut would decrease the probability of following through with their previously stated intention to a greater extent than an increase in taxes. In fact, the confidence intervals for the increase and decrease in voting intention are remarkably close to each other in this second case. For opposition party voters, at both the national and regional levels, both avenues of adjustment have a similar negative impact. For those who choose to abstain or nullify their vote, or who support other parties that do not have representation in Congress, the negative effect on intention to vote for the governing parties is greater in the case of spending cuts. Finally, for undecided voters, this result is repeated, although the difference is smaller.

Therefore, fiscal consolidation, whether achieved through identifiable tax increases or visible spending cuts, generates a negative effect on the probability of citizens casting their vote for government coalition parties. However, this effect on coalition party supporters, undecided voters and abstainers is greater in the case of spending cuts than under the hypothesis of a tax increase.

6 | Summary and conclusions

Budget sustainability has gained saliency in public debate in the last few decades. Although citizens' knowledge about their country's fiscal stance is not always exact, concern for long-term fiscal stability has also gained relevance in their evaluation of public policy and incumbents' performance. However, fiscal austerity, as a response to problems of budget unsustainability, has been revealed to increase political polarisation and to reduce voter turnout. Even when this is not the case, governments tend to fear that implementing fiscal retrenchments will put them out of office because of the negative electoral consequences of reducing spending or increasing taxes.

In this paper, we first analyse the extent to which Spanish individuals have correct information about the severity of the public debt problem and the institutional framework aimed at addressing it. Secondly, we investigate the potential electoral effect of fiscal austerity measures on Spanish citizens' voting intentions. For both analyses, an ad hoc survey was conducted in March 2022, with a sample size of 1,500 citizens.

Regarding citizens' perceptions of the debt problem, the survey shows that they have a fairly accurate understanding of its size, although they do not know about the existence of fiscal rules and the AIREF. Those with a deeper interest in politics and economic affairs and with a higher level of education tend to express a greater knowledge about the level of public debt and the fiscal rules framework. In contrast, income level does not seem to have any explanatory power on the accuracy of the respondents' answers. Unlike the evidence found by Barnes and Hicks (2018), a greater saliency of sustainability issues in those media to the right of the centre does not seem to improve Spanish individuals' knowledge of the fiscal framework.

Most citizens are aware that a high and chronic public deficit is a problem and believe that more should be said about how to tackle it. This concern for fiscal stability is positively correlated with the level of education, age, interest in current economic affairs, an ideology to the right of centre, and an intention to vote for state parties in opposition. Although citizens dislike budget imbalances, our results tend to outline incoherent behaviour when it comes to addressing them, as the respondents strongly disagreed with the implementation of consolidation measures. This is in line with findings in the previous literature (Talving, 2017; Hübscher and Sattler, 2018; Alesina et al., 2021; Hübscher et al., 2021; Bojar et al., 2022).

Regarding citizens' views about how to restrain the public deficit better, a vast majority of respondents seemed to agree that the adjustment should fall mainly on the spending side and not on tax increases. Preferences for consolidations based on spending cuts were more marked in people with a strong interest in current economic affairs, who are informed through media with an editorial line to the right of centre, and who intend to vote for state parties in opposition – in line with the results of Alesina et al. (2021) and Langsaether (2022). Besides, like Hübscher et al. (2023b),

we found that cutbacks would seem to foster abstention, which ultimately could increase political instability.

In contrast, the preference for taxes to have a greater weight in the composition of the adjustment was more intense in people with an interest in politics, those who are inclined to vote in the next general election for the parties currently in power, and those who respond more favourably to questions about the quality of management of public services, about the role of the public sector, and about whether the relationship between the quality and the cost of Spanish services is similar to or better than that in other European countries.

The negative effects on voting intention of a hypothetical increase in personal income tax are concentrated among individuals who express a preference for opposition parties at the national level and whose ideology tends to be to the right of centre. Conversely, the avenue of spending cuts in income-related programmes such as health care, education, and pensions fails to attract voters who prefer other political options, and is less attractive to those who have previously declared an intention to vote for the governing parties.

Finally, in contrast to previous empirical evidence on the credibility hypothesis (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Ben-Porath and Shaker, 2010; Hobolt et al., 2013), our results are not sensitive to changes to the public authority that imposes the austerity measures, whether the European or the national government. Potential changes in electoral behaviour seem to be independent of the level of government that decides on the implementation of fiscal consolidation strategies.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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