RESEARCH ARTICLE

Times of Crises: Ideology and Party System Transformations in Spain

Francesco Campolongo

University of Calabria

Jose Javier Olivas Osuna

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT: The Spanish party system has recently undergone profound changes, marked by the rapid rise and decline of several political actors, such as Podemos and Ciudadanos, who challenged the imperfect two-party system that had characterised Spain since transition. This article examines how three major crises—the global financial crisis, the Catalan secessionist challenge, and the COVID19 pandemic—, have impacted the social imaginary and created opportunities for new framing and electoral competition strategies. Our research reconstructs changes in the Spanish ideological landscape and the relative salience of political cleavages in each of these crises. We argue that they had asymmetric impacts on party politics. Anti-establishment and nationalist populist discourses were effectively used to harness and redirect public discontent against political opponents. Political parties adapted their ideology strategically. Initially, outsider parties took advantage of the drop of trust in public institutions challenging the two-party system, but in the long run, the mainstreaming of populist interpretative frames, paradoxically, ended up consolidating two antagonistic blocs and enabled the resurgence of the two major parties, the PP and PSOE, as undisputed leaders of each of them.

KEYWORDS: Crises, Framing, Ideological conflicts, Parties, Populism

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS: Francesco Campolongo, francesco.campolongo@unical.it
Jose Javier Olivas Osuna, jjolivas@poli.uned.es

1. Introduction

From the late 1970s to the economic crisis of 2008, the cartelisation of party systems and a centrist shift in party dynamics, coupled with the waning influence of mass parties (Mair 2016) bolstered the idea that ideologies were in decline. Some leaders and parties explicitly have advocated for the transcendence of ideologies and the abandonment of traditional distinctions between right and left, or for the depoliticization of specific decision-making processes (De Nardis 2017). Emotions and affects have also become popular explanatory factors for party strategies and dynamics (Magni 2017). During recent crises —such as the global financial crisis, refugee crises and pandemic crisis— we have witnessed how fears, anxieties and anger were instrumentalized by populist and radical politicians. However, ideologies remain a key factor for party preference (Costa 2021), they evolve and continue to permeate modern politics (Barisione 2021).

The emergence of new parties and the growing government stability problems are also linked to ideological polarisation (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi 2020). The metamorphosis of party systems derives from the ability of political actors to comprehend and ideologically structure the demands emanating from civil society and movements during phases of societal upheaval that upset established equilibriums. The struggles at an ideational over the framing of a crisis may contribute to shifts in political cleavages (Caiani 2023) and opportunities for political entrepreneurs (Moffitt 2015). Notwithstanding, there is a dearth of research examining party system transformations resulting from the ideological interplay amidst crises, political parties, and social movements. We try to fill this gap. Spain is a relevant case study to understand the interplay between crises and ideological standpoints among political players. This country was one of the hardest hit countries by both the Great Recession and the COVID19 pandemic and has suffered a secessionist crisis in Catalonia within a short period of time. Spain illustrates how newly founded parties, such as *Ciudadanos* (2006), Vox (2013) and *Podemos* (2014), challenged and contested the supremacy of the two major ones that have ruled Spain since 1982, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and the *Partido Popular* (PP). This article analyses Spanish political dynamics focusing on how the three crises (the global financial crisis, the territorial crisis in Catalonia and the COVID19 health crisis) impacted the ideological stance and strategy of Spanish parties and how they competed to frame these crises and impose dominant interpretations that would allow them to steer public attitudes and mobilisations in their favour.

2. Ideology, frames, and parties

Scholarly debates on the definition, functions and changing nature of ideology are far from over (Barisione 2021; Anselmi 2023). In the early Marxist critical approach, ideology is conceptualised as a "false consciousness" (Thompson 1990). This viewpoint suggests that ideology serves the purpose of concealing reality and upholding asymmetrical power relations . However, other authors consider ideology as a "system of thought" or a "worldview" (Thompson 1990); as a driving force for political action and contributing to the interpretation of reality (Ostrowski 2022); or as a "set of ideas and values concerning the political order, with the function of guiding collective behaviour" (Bobbio, Matteucci e Pasquino 2004, 169). Following a similar approach, Freeden (1996; 2008) argues that ideology constitutes a sophisticated and nuanced interpretative framework for the existing reality. He defines ideology as "a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions, and values that present a recurring pattern, are supported by relevant groups, compete with each other to provide and control public policy programs…" (Freeden 2008, 42). In essence, ideology becomes a crucial battleground for shaping both language and public policy projects, reflecting the dynamic and competitive nature of political discourse (Freeden 2008, 68-69).

The author adopts a morphological approach that presents ideology as a structured relationship among various concepts, organised into core and peripheral areas, while also introducing the concept of "thin-centered ideology" (1996, 485-550). This term refers to an ideology whose morphology is insufficient to provide comprehensive solutions for the entire spectrum of socio-political issues, unlike traditional full or "thick" ideologies.The dynamic interaction between peripheral and core concepts within the structure of ideology demonstrates the intrinsic openness of ideologies to the incorporation of new concepts, thereby highlighting their evolutionary and adaptive nature (Freeden 2008, 77).

Political actors face the challenge of attributing "uncontested" meanings or "frames" to concepts that may possess contingent or ambiguous interpretations (Freeden 2013, 23) through the process of "decontextualization." In doing so, they exert influence on the perception of reality and political competition (Laycock 2014).Through the imposition of a hegemonic or dominant interpretation of a specific issue or crisis, political parties not only guide policy and political debates in their favour (Ranciere 1995: 11) but also have the capacity to (re)create or promote certain political identities (Freeden 1996: 78). The deliberate emphasis on, or concealment of, information aspects holds significant sway over individuals' values and policy choices and can influence sentiments as well as the significance attributed to specific group attitudes (Nelson and Kinder 1996, 1073). Framing is a key element in this process of decontestation and imposition of dominant interpretations. Framing is "the appeal in perceiving, thinking, and communicating, to structured ways of interpreting experiences" (Fillmore 1976, 20) or "the process by which a communication source constructs and defines a social or political issue for the audience" (Nelson et al., 1997: 221). Words and expressions become associated in people's minds with frames that activate specific schemata — conceptual frameworks or cognitive structures representing generic knowledge (Lakoff 1988). Through framing, politicians selectively emphasise certain aspects or dimensions of an issue and modulate its salience (Entman 1993, 52). In this inherently competitive process political entities seek to shape public perceptions and understandings of crises and other social phenomena in alignment with their strategic goals and ideological orientation.

For ideology to effectively and credibly represent reality, it must take into account the interpretation of the most relevant social phenomena of the historical phase in which it develops, as well as the characteristics of the political system in which it operates (Anselmi 2023). In achieving this, ideology draws upon, reorders, and establishes connections between concepts present in the social imaginary (Castoriadis 1987; Taylor 2004). Ideologies, therefore, help organising and rendering coherent the symbolic and cultural representations and values of the social imaginary that politicians use in their framing processes, serving as a sort of historical anchor. Nevertheless, during "exceptional" moments of crisis, radical alterations in the ideological landscape and social imaginary often take place.

Additionally, within political systems, ideologies serve to (re)define the social divides and key issues that act as central conduits for party competition and acquire special symbolic relevance for political identification purposes. The concept of "cleavage" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967) denotes a social conflict that holds particular significance in a given political context due to its ability to mobilise participation and consensus resources through the "politicisation" of specific actors and the degree of social division it generates. During times of crisis, the ideological structure of a given context can undergo transformations through the emergence, decline, and alteration of specific cleavages, again influenced by the actions of political actors at both the material and ideational realms as we illustrate in this article.

2. Populism, crises, and ideological conflicts

The populist momentum or *zeitgeist* (Mudde 2004) illustrates this complex interplay between crisis, ideologies and party systems that has led to transformations in the symbolic and ideological landscape that

have brought about profound alterations in party dynamics across the world. The concept of populism is subject to extensive and contested debates, with various characterisations, including a personalist strategy of mobilisation (Weyland 2001), an appeal to the "people" against the establishment and dominant ideas (Canovan 1999), a political performative style (Ostiguy and Moffitt 2021), a thin-centred ideology (Mudde 2004), or a discursive logic articulating social, political, or ideological content (Laclau 2005). Yet there is academic agreement on associating the populist worldview with a dichotomous depiction of society, that emphases the division between a virtuous "people" and a corrupt elite, while advocating for the restoration of popular sovereignty by the people.

Populists tend to emerge and thrive in the context of crises of political representation (Laclau 2005; Stavrakakis, Katsambekis, Kioupkiolis, Nikisianis, Siomos 2018). Political, social, economic and health crises tend to erode trust in political representatives, feed grievances, and serve populists as justifications for their radical policy proposals (Roberts 2015). They pay particular attention to the framing of crises as these are perceived as a key source of legitimacy for their claims as an opportunity to demonise ruling elites and institutions who they blame and aspire to replace. Populist leaders not only take advantage of existing crises but also fuel these crises even further existing ones (Moffitt 2015; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Olivas Osuna 2021). They not only take advantage of "material" crises but also of "ideational" crises linked to nostalgia and perceived cultural threats and identity grievances (Inglehart and Norris 2019).

The examination of the interplay between symbolic and ideological contexts during crises, facilitated by the actions of collective actors, represents a crucial variable for understanding the competitive dynamics within political systems. Ideologies, ideas and frames, as well as those who champion them are not in the vacuum. Crises can act as critical junctures and set into motion changes at the ideational context (Campolongo, Scanni and Tarditi 2023). A vast body of literature has demonstrated how external shocks can disrupt the political status quo, impacting the electoral fortunes of political forces and, consequently, the structure and mechanics of party systems (Bedock and Vasilopolous, 2015), the stability of governments, and even the organisational, strategic, and identity transformations of parties (Harmel and Janda, 1994).

The term "crisis" is essentially a label, as "facts never speak for themselves" but "always await the assignment of meaning" (Spector 2020, 306). Crisis communication consequently involves "shaping how people perceive the crisis" (Coman, Dalia, Miloš, Darren and Edoardo 2021, 2) and defining the nature, causes, extent, and protagonists of the specific threat (Boin, Kuipers, and 't Hart 2018). Crises encompass "multiple levels of conflict" in which a cognitive clash unfolds between different groups regarding the framing of the problem ('t Hart 1993, 39). These conflicts revolve around the interpretation of the crisis, its causes, culprits and potential policy solutions. As such, crises become transformative moments, not only shaping the immediate political and social landscape but also setting the stage for the evolution of ideological frameworks and the emergence of novel political actors. Through a process of "politicisation" (Freeden 2008), parties transfer certain material experiences into the public sphere, articulating and conceptualising them in a broader schematisation corresponding to the reference ideology (Stanley 2008). Parties adopt and rework an ideological vision for their primary objectives (votes, office, policy), where the competition for electoral consensus is crucial, as well as for organisational and ideological goals (Raniolo 2013). Often, the development of effective frames in the face of crisis necessitates the revision of one's ideology, creating tension between preserving community identity and the need to adapt to societal transformations and social imagination.

Similarly, through their framing or counter-framing actions (Castells 2012), social movements actively contribute to altering the overarching ideological landscape. They challenge, integrate, or oppose specific aspects of existing party ideologies and, depending on the diffusion of conflict, reshape the dominant interpretations of social phenomena and crises. The actions of social movements thus catalyse the modification of the symbolic and ideological opportunities within a political system. They impact the visibility and popularity of certain ideas (Caiani 2023), facilitating the linkage of their frames by party actors (Snow,

Rochford, Worden e Benford 1986). The evolving relationship between social mobilisation and party actors underscores the dynamic nature of the ideological field during periods of crisis, with both contributing to the reconfiguration of the broader political landscape.

3. Case study and approach

The Spanish party system has been historically structured around two cleavages: the left/right and the centre/periphery divides (Vampa 2020). The Spanish electoral laws and quasi-federal multi-level governance have given rise to a party system that features strong regional and local political actors . Spain traditionally had two major national parties the PSOE and PP and a myriad of smaller parties. Among those the most influential were the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties, both right-wing and left-wing leaning, and radical left *Izquierda Unida* (IU). In the absence of an absolute majority by either of the two major parties (PP and PSOE), governability was often ensured through agreements with moderate right-wing regionalist parties: *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV) and *Convergencia i Unió* (CiU).

Since the 2010s we have witnessed an important transformation of the Spanish party system characterised by the decline of the two big parties PSOE and PP; the rapid rise of new parties, such as left-wing populist Podemos and centre-right Ciudadanos and radical-right Vox; the adoption of an openly secessionist stance by CiU, whose more prominent leaders then created the more radical party *Junts per Catalonia* (JxCat), and the growth of left-leaning pro-independence *Esquerra Republicana de Cataluyna* (ERC). These transformations within the party system can be understood as outcomes of diverse interactions between ideologies and the social imaginary, as well as between parties and social movements, set against the backdrop of at least three crises:

1. **Economic crisis (2011-2015):** The delayed and yet heightened domestic social consequences of the Global Financial Crisis and austerity policies in Spain paved the way to a period in which populist anti-establishment discourses became dominant.
2. **Territorial crisis (2012-2020):** The secessionist challenge in Catalonia brought to the fore some structural weaknesses of the Spanish institutional system and triggered a period of populist discourses built on the ground of national identification and socio-economic and cultural grievances.
3. **Pandemic crisis (2020-2023):** The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity to the existing challenges, including attempts to instrumentalise the crisis via populist discourses and a political realignment into two blocs.

Each of these crises has spurred diverse forms of social mobilisation, ranging in intensity, and has prompted varied framing strategies (Kyriakidou and Olivas 2017; Campolongo and Caruso 2021; Ruiz Casado 2023). These dynamics, in turn, have contributed to reshaping the social imaginary and altering the structure of political opportunities, thereby favouring different political parties in each crisis. We argue that the transformations of the Spanish party system can be interpreted as the result of the interaction between three key components:

Crisis: Each mini-political cycle is distinguished by the heightened prominence of a specific crisis or conflict, representing the primary ideological and symbolic battleground for conflict among diverse social actors.

Social mobilisations: the framing or counter-framing produced by social movements and their mobilisations play a pivotal role. They influence the specific structure of political opportunities and the dissemination of symbolic representations shaped by the actions of these movements.

Party action: The efficacy of parties, whether renewed or newly established, in offering effective frames during the three crises is crucial. This can occur by aligning themselves with the dominant frames among social movements or by trying to shape them. In both cases their action may contribute to the transformation of the ideological landscape within the Spanish party system and the overall structure of party competition.

The first two dimensions delineate the contextual backdrop within which Spanish political parties operate, while the third dimension characterises their varying capacity to elaborate, encompass, and communicate the symbolic and political landscape resulting from the evolving context, offering a renewed and compelling ideological proposition. Thus, our general hypothesis is that the transformations observed in the competitive political landscape —at the level of party politics and ideology— result from the varying abilities of political actors to integrate, represent, organize, and sometimes catalyse transformations within the social imaginary arising from the three crises and subsequent mobilisations. Hence, the rise or decline of certain parties can be explained by their greater or lesser ability to produce effective framing of crises, and their success or failure in constructing broader framing coalitions around new cleavages. In our analysis we explore three interrelated hypotheses:

H1) Crises alter the relative salience of political cleavages in party competition (left vs right, new vs old, centre vs periphery)

H2) Crises become opportunities for populist re-articulations of the political axes of competition.

H3) Social mobilisations contribute to the dominance of certain frames about crisis.

H4) Dominant frames on the causes and consequences of crises push parties to ideological realignments.

Our approach entails tracing and comparing the ideological and party system transformations in Spain during the three crises, analysing the role of social mobilization, dominant frames and the main cleavages or divides structuring political competition. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the key processes analysed in the following sections.

4. The Economic crisis and the dominance of anti-establishment populist discourses

Although the effects of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis were not immediately visible in Spain, this country eventually became one of the hardest hit in Europe. The adoption of austerity policies marked by radical cuts in social spending, amplifying social unrest (Royo 2014; Muñoz, Anduiza and Rico 2014). This context fostered a mass mobilisation integral to the transnational cycle of movements against austerity, epitomised by the 15-M, also kown as *Indignados* movement, This movement, that was inspired by the manifesto "Indignez-vous!" (Hessel 2011), requested deep institutional changes to improve the quality of democracy and avenues to keep under control the extractive elites. In the organisation of the movement and its communication, social media play a fundamental role, with coordination and communication taking place through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Anduiza, Cristancho and Sabucedo 2014).

Tab 1. Types of crises and their characteristics

	Social mobilisations	Dominant frames	Party system dynamics	Ideological transformations
Economic crisis (2011-2015)	Spontaneous, claims for "real democracy". 15M mobilisations	The political and economic elites ("la casta") are to blame. Need to protect the vulnerable	New parties Podemos and Ciudadanos grew by adopting anti-establishment discourses from 15-M.	Anti-establishment and regeneration ideas adopted by new parties. Traditional left-right divide loses salience, new vs old divide emerges.
Territorial crisis (2012-2020)	Launched and orchestrated top-down but then perpetuated by bottom-up forces.	Two interpretations: Catalonia is a victim of Spain (an extractive power) vs Separatists are fracturing Catalonia and constitutionalist Catalans are their victims.	A traditional conservative party, CiU, changes its ideological stance mainstreaming secessionism and fuelling the mass mobilisations. New parties Ciudadanos and Vox lead the anti-secessionist reaction.	Secessionism becomes hegemonic among nationalist parties (before divided between autonomist and secessionist) Territorial axis supersedes (for and against independence) left-right axis in Catalonia.
Pandemic crisis (2020-2023)	Top-down but not very successful. Vox tried to turn the health crisis into a political crisis. Growing political and affective polarisation	Political cleavage during pandemic: Need to protect the vulnerable and defend public health vs Need to preserve freedom. Post-pandemic cleavage: It is important to avoid at all costs a government with the "extreme right" vs Avoid at all costs that those who want to destroy Spain (separatists) rule it.	Parties align according to blocs: left-wing and peripheral nationalists against right-wing parties. Populist parties lose votes but retain power as they become pivotal in any ruling coalition.	Left-right and decentralisation-centralisation ideological axes fuse. Ideological and programmatic discussions are overshadowed by confrontational discourses against a dangerous other.

The 15-M identified Spanish two-party system, the European Union, and a representative democratic model as its primary adversaries. Embodying democratic and pragmatic ideologies with short- and long-term demands, the movement held "social democratic" and progressive content (Chaves Giraldo, 2012), grounded in a horizontal and direct conception of democracy (Della Porta, Fernández, Kouki and Mosca 2017) and explicitly opposed to traditional hierarchical politics (Prentoulis and Thomasse 2013). Unlike other populist movements in Europe and the Americas, the 15-M was not a product of a cultural backlash or identitarian anxieties (Norris and Inglehart 2019). This movement has been considered a paradigmatic case of "personalization of contentious politics" and "logic of connective action," in contrast with other social movements that rely on a more formal (usually hierarchical) form of organisation that reflect Olson's (1965) "logic of collective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

The movement's impact on the social imaginary was substantial, reshaping political and symbolic opportunities for actors in the field. Survey data indicates widespread public support for the movement's demands, transcending ideological lines (Sampedro and Lobera 2015; Serrano and Gracia 2015). Criticism

towards established politics, exacerbated by cases of corruption within major parties (PSOE and PP), intensified the prevailing disillusionment with mainstream party actors (Lobera and Ferrándiz 2011). The 15-M movement generated a transversal demand for political renewal and against austerity policies, varying in intensity across different social sectors. Although formally non-partisan and transversal, the 15-M was mostly a progressive movement that requested policies to achieve a more participatory "real democracy", fight corruption, higher degree of transparency and accountability, new electoral laws and increased controls on political parties. Additionally, they also proposed social and economic policies related to the improvement of working conditions, public education and public health, banking regulation, affordable housing, and sustainable energy. The Spanish press helped the 15-M action and frames, adopting a rather positive tone in their reporting of the protests, incorporating voices of protesters and covering the festive aspects of the movement more than the violent incidents (Kyriakidou and Olivas Osuna 2017).

Left-wing parties and the largest trade unions approached them and expressed their support. However, the 15-M movement refused repeatedly to be co-opted by who they considered to be part of the establishment responsible for the situation and expelled politicians that tried to join their demonstrations. [1] Precisely, the failure of political parties to capitalise on the movement and the self-proclaimed political independence of the indignados was welcomed by the media and the public. The growing popularity of this anti-establishment populist discourse and the transformations operated in the Spanish social imaginary brought three discernible effects on the party system:

In the initial phase, criticism directed at the traditional parties and the incumbent government fueled an increase in abstention rates. The 2011 elections witnessed a decline in voter participation compared to the 2008 elections. Notably, the PSOE experienced a substantial loss of 5 million votes, while the PP secured victory despite a drop of 500 thousand votes. The implementation of additional austerity measures by the PP government coincided with numerous corruption scandals, further intensifying public disillusionment with political processes (Orriols and Cordero 2016). This discontent consolidated the "new vs old" political cleavage that transcended traditional right-left divisions. The activity of 15-M started to dwindle in 2012 but their ideas remained well entrenched and popular in society. Two years after the inception of this movement 78% of Spaniards thought that the Indignados were right in their claims. [2]

The second effect manifests as the rise of new political parties, the most successful being Podemos and Ciudadanos, but they collaborated with many others which operated at a local level. While traditional political parties had failed to capitalise the 15-M movement, new parties, such as Podemos and Ciudadanos, managed to articulate some of the main grievances and critiques and offer an alternative to those disenchanted with the political establishment (Rama, Cordero and Zagórski. 2021). The rhetoric employed by these nascent parties is notably less ideologically "thick" and focuses on drawing chains of equivalence and homogenising a myriad of grievances across the cleavages (internal frontiers) "gente" vs "casta" (people vs caste) as "new vs old", with a strong focus on renewal, direct democracy, and anti-corruption initiatives. Their leaders, Pablo Iglesias and Albert Rivera adopted different performative styles but a somewhat populist rhetoric pitting citizens against the corrupt politicians of traditional parties (Alcaide Lara 2019).

These new political organisations, though exhibiting diverse and at times contradictory forms, encapsulated social demands in alignment with the principles of the 15-M movement. They advocated for a more horizontal model of democracy both internally and externally, albeit coexisting with robust personalist leadership

---

[1] El Mundo. Los 'indignados' zarandean a Cayo Lara. 15 June 2011.
https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2011/06/15/madrid/1308133330.html; La Razón. Indignados contra el PSOE y los sindicatos. 19 February 2012. https://www.larazon.es/historico/4337-los-indignados-abuchean-a-representantes-de-partidos-y-sindicatos-PLLA_RAZON_436105/
[2] El País. El 15-M mantiene la simpatía ciudadana dos años después. 18 May 2013.
https://elpais.com/politica/2013/05/18/actualidad/1368894896_892384.html

structures, representing the new politics (Orriols and Cordero 2016). Podemos, founded in 2014, epitomises a left-wing populist party theoretically inspired by Laclau's theory (Campolongo and Caruso 2021, Errejon and Mouffe 2015). While aligning itself ideologically with the radical left through programmatic proposals, Podemos rhetorically preferred the dichotomy of "the people vs the caste" over the traditional "left vs right divide". It initially adopted a more horizontal organisational structure and advocated for radical measures in combating corruption, promoting redistribution, and reforming the Spanish democratic system (Campolongo and Caruso 2021, Kioupkiolis 2016). The party's leader, Pablo Iglesias, a young political scientist, gained prominence through appearances on various political talk shows, and the party's image became closely intertwined with his persona. Following a personalist populist strategy Podemos obtained 5 seats in 2014 European elections and participated in local and regional coalitions that achieved significant success in the 2015 municipal and regional elections. The 2016 general elections consolidated them as a major player. In the case of Podemos, there has also been talk of a 'party movement' bound to 15 M by the emulation of organisational models, a certain membership spillover and the adoption of very similar proposals and rhetoric (Irene Martin 2015).

Ciutadans de Catalunya, a small Catalan centrist party created as a reaction against Catalan nationalism in 2006 and led by the also young Albert Rivera, launched a strategy to become a national party in 2014 by establishing alliances with a variety of small independent and centrist parties. In 2014, already under the Spanish name Ciudadanos they obtained 2 seats in the European Elections and in 2015 they achieved considerable success in the local, regional and general elections in 2015. Ciudadanos also denounced corruption within established parties and advocated for the rejuvenation of politics through discourse grounded in market principles, meritocracy, and skills. While adhering to a rhetoric associated with progressive neoliberalism, Ciudadanos initially emphasised opposition to various regional parties, particularly those in Catalonia. Remarkably, Ciudadanos chose a pragmatic approach to alliances, securing agreements with both the PSOE and PP. These developments result in a temporary challenge to the dominance of major parties on both the left (Podemos) and the right (Ciudadanos), rendering them pivotal in the formation of governments at national, regional, and local levels. In this case, the link with 15-M is symbolic and is embodied in its ability to represent the "new politics", the fight against corruption and political renewal.

A third notable effect is the erosion of Spanish two-party system due to the loss of support of the two big parties that pushed them to adapt their party strategy and internal organisation. While in 2008, the PSOE and PP harvested 84% of the votes, in 2011 their combined support had dropped to 73% The downward trend continued. The 2015 general election, in which they received only 54% of the votes, was considered by many analysts as the end of the two-party system that had dominated Spanish politics since transition (Orriols and Cordero 2016). This trajectory facilitated a shift in the power balance within coalitions, fostering greater instability in governments and making electoral repetitions a new normal feature in the Spanish system. The 2015 election was considered by many analysts as the end of the two-party system that had dominated Spanish politics since transition. Podemos obtained support mainly from politically disaffected left-wing voters, while Ciudadanos attracted younger and ideologically moderate voters who had lower levels of political trust. Moreover, the ascendancy of Podemos and Ciudadanos provoked a process of normative institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) among the two big parties. In the PSOE and PP, the concepts of direct democracy and rejuvenation prompted certain organisational changes albeit with different timelines and modalities, leading to the adoption of primaries and the election of two young leaders not supported by their respective establishments: Pedro Sanchez (PSOE) and Pablo Casado (PP).

In sum, these "new vs old" cleavage and the ascendancy of new parties and leaderships with more radical proposals and stances on democracy, contributed to a new axis of polarisation of the party system that added to the traditional left-right divide. The adoption of a populist rhetoric helped these new actors exploit the extant social grievances, cross-cutting support for redistributive policies, and pervasive disaffection towards politics,

enabling ideological transformations and a shift in the Spanish party system from a two-party to a multi-polar one. In this period the nationalist/territorial cleavages are less impactful in the development of political identities as regenerating the institutional system and displaying solidarity with the most vulnerable ones became dominant societal claims.

5. Territorial Crisis and rise of nationalist populism

In Catalonia, important segments of civil society and nationalist parties of both right and left-wing orientation have historically requested a higher degree of autonomy (some cases full independence). The abovementioned economic and social crisis created a crisis of trust on Spanish institutions, and opportunities for questioning their legitimacy and shifting blame regarding governance failures towards Madrid (Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel 2017; Della Porta and Portos 2021). In this context, many Catalan political and social entrepreneurs strategically radicalise the autonomist framework through a populist articulation that took advantage of many symbolic opportunities to build chains of equivalent grievances and narratives of victimhood.

Before this crisis, support for the idea of outright independence had been limited. CiU, a federation between the two most prominent Catalan nationalist parties (Convergencia Democrática de Cataluña and Unión Democrática de Cataluña), has been the most prominent party of Catalanism and has always supported greater administrative autonomy and developed a nation-building plan based on the promotion of a differentiated Catalan socio-linguistic identity.[3] Yet, until the economic crises CiU had always rejected the notion of independence. Partly taking advantage of the unrest provoked by this crisis, and partly seeking to divert the attention away from emerging corruption scandals and the unpopular austerity policies its regional government had implemented, CiU made a radical change in its strategy and openly embraced secessionism. In December 2012 CiU signed a government agreement with ERC that included the binding commitment to celebrate a referendum of self-determination.[4] This marks the inception of the so called "sovereignist process of Catalonia" or "procés". This shift in stance by the major Catalan party has transformed an ideological position traditionally considered radical (independence) into a mainstream one (Rico and Liñeira 2014), facilitating the departure of the Democratic Union of Catalonia from the federation and the subsequently leading to formation of Junts per Catalunya.

The Constitutional Court ruling against some articles of the new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia in 2010, following an appeal by the PP, also helped nationalist parties to present Catalonia as victims of the Spanish system. This ruling marks a turning point in how nationalist politicians frame their relationship with Spain, many of whom argued that dealing with the Spanish state was impossible (Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel 2017; Ruiz Casado 2020). This growing institutional territorial conflict reached its zenith during October 2017 when Catalan nationalist organisations celebrated an independence referendum, despite the explicit ban by Spanish Courts, and the President of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, declared independence. This was followed by the temporary suspension of autonomy and judicial prosecution of several of the key actors involved in the organisation of the unilateral secession attempt, which in turn also generated outrage among Catalan nationalist and a new opportunity to present themselves as victims (Domènech, Moreno, Latorre and Rubiés 2020, 335–336).

The construction of nationalist/secessionist populist framing of the crisis by party elites and civil society was facilitated by an increasingly polarised interpretation of Catalan and Spanish identities (Tobeña 2021),

---

[3] El Periódico, La estrategia de la recatalanización. 28 October 1990.
[4] El País. CiU y ERC pactan la consulta de autodeterminación para 2014. 18 December 2012.

now often construed as incompatible, as well as by the adaptation of the regeneration and direct democracy languages popularised by the 15-M movement to justify the need for a new different state (Ruiz Casado, 2020). Secessionists present their project as "inclusive" and transcending traditional "left vs right" divide, and the independence referendum as an expression of a "right to decide" (*dret a decidir*), that acts as a "floating signifier" (Laclau 2005) transversally coalescing social discontent within Catalan society. They also successfully articulated "othering" discourses that combined welfare chauvinism elements ("Spain steal from us"), with ethnolinguistic grievances, and appeals to the will of the Catalan People (Barrio et al. 2020; Newth 2021). The creation of the *Junts pel Sí* coalition for the regional elections in 2015, uniting CiU and ERC, traditional rivals with ideological disparities, and the support of the nationalist anti-capitalist *Candidatura de Unidad Popular* (CUP) demonstrates that this sovereignist project was conceived as a hegemonic political project.[5] Support for Catalan independence increased from 16,1% in 2009 to 46,4% in 2013.[6]

This crisis also entailed several impacts at the level of party competition. The independence bloc secured a combined victory in both the 2015 and 2017 regional elections.In 2017 elections ERC and CUP, both parties that had always held secessionist positions, grew while the new party JxCat that reunited most figures from*,* the Catalan section of PSOE, Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC) and PP lost ground. Ciudadanos, credited as the principal opponent to the independence agenda, was the most voted party in 2017 regional elections, yet unable to form a government. The territorial cleavage intersected in Catalonia with the "new vs old" divide that dominated Spanish politics. Catalans voted differently in national and regional elections. Rather than specific policy proposals, symbolic frames evoking the struggle around Catalan independence dominated the 2017 political campaign and media reporting (Carratalá and Palau-Sampaio 2019).

The outcomes of general elections in 2015 and 2016 in Catalonia revealed *En Comú Podem*, a coalition that included Podemos and was led by Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau, as the leading force. The independence bloc that dominated regional elections only reached a third of the votes. The escalation of institutional conflict, marked by the 2017 referendum and subsequent mobilisations (for and against independence) amplifies the significance of the Catalan territorial issue beyond Catalonia, for instance by propelling support for Ciudadanos and Vox, a party that entered the Spanish parliament for the first time in 2019. These parties adopted a confrontational rhetoric against Catalan nationalists who they accused of being "coup plotters" (*golpistas*) while self-identifying as "constitutionalists". They also denounced and instrumentalised the growing social fracture, across linguistic and socio-economic lines between the two camps (Tobeña 2021). To provide a civic response to the very successful pro-independence mobilisations that took place in 2017 and 2019,[7] these parties collaborated with civil society organisations and oganised large-scale anti-independence demonstrations.[8] The framing and ideological struggle at the ideational level was mirrored by competing mass mobilisations in the streets of Catalonia.

During this period, populist othering discourses were no so much based on a vertical logic of exclusion ("the people vs the elites") as on a more horizontal one (national identification) (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). Although their anti-elitist claims were not very infrequent, these were very selectively employed. Secessionists criticised Spanish elites and institutions, but did not question Catalan ones, which traditionally

---

[5] Programa Electoral, Junts pel Sí (2015) and Programa Poític Per a les Eleccions al Parlament de Catalunya del 27 de Setembre de 2015. Assemblea Vallès Occidental. Programes electorals de Junts pel sí i de la CUP.
https://vocxi.assemblea.cat/2015/09/12/programes-electorals-de-junts-pel-si-i-de-la-cup/

[6] Gencat. Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió. Barómetro. https://ceo.gencat.cat/es/barometre/index.html

[7] The Guardian. Catalonia: detention of secessionist leaders sparks large protests. 17 October 2017; BBC News Mundo. Protestas en Cataluña: qué se sabe de Tsunami Democràtic, el misterioso movimiento detrás de las masivas manifestaciones. 16 October 2019.

[8] La Vanguardia, Una gran multitud defiende la unidad de España en Barcelona. 29 October 2017. El País. El constitucionalismo sale a la calle en Barcelona para exigir el fin del 'procés'. 28 October 2019.

CiU epitomises. Conversely, Vox, Ciudadanos and unionist civil society organisations focused their attacks on secessionist elites and the institutions they controlled,and defended the part of the establishment targeted by Catalan nationalists (*"procesistas"*). The fall of Mariano Rajoy's PP government in a vote of no confidence, motivated by a corruption scandal, helped to translate part of this territorial crisis to Madrid in 2018. Ever since, Pedro Sánchez's governments have necessitated the support from secessionist parties, opening a new opportunity for the utilisation of the territorial crisis as an ideological axis for polarisation. The successive negotiations between PSOE and nationalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country and the concessions in exchange for their votes have met with severe criticism by the PP, Ciudadanos and Vox. These parties continuously made calls for national unity and the defence of Spanish identity. They turned the fear of secession and the outrage against the "privileges" that these regions with strong nationalist parties enjoyed, into key elements in their ideological proposals and electoral toolkit.

6. Pandemic Crisis and the consolidation of antagonistic blocs

Spain emerged as one of the countries more negatively affected by the pandemic both economically and in public health terms. The outbreak of the pandemic coincided with the formation of Spain's first coalition government between the PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* (UP), that enjoyed parliamentary support from ERC, PNV and the Basque nationalist coalition Bildu. The arguments about the legitimacy of adopting extraordinary health and economic measures to combat the pandemic dominated much of the political narrative in 2020. As other radical-right parties Vox sought to capitalized discontent with cultural and social changes (Norris and Inglehart 2019). During the pandemic, Vox tried to exploit conspiracy thinking by and blaming China and the World Health Organisation for the spread of the disease. They also accused the Spanish government of criminal negligence and of "euthanising" thousands of people.[9] Vox's strategy was to leverage the COVID19 crisis to position itself as the primary party-in- waiting in the right by establishing an increasingly antagonistic relationship with the left-wing government and distancing itself from PP (Zanotti and Turnbull-Dugarte 2022). Vox intensified its anti-immigration[10] and anti-European discourses and organised anti-government protests during lockdown.

Despite Vox's aggressive opposition during the lockdown, it failed to mobilise Spanish society as anticipated and harvested mild electoral results (Plaza-Colodro and Miranda Olivares 2022). However, it appears to have contributed to the spread of confrontational populist rhetoric (Olivas Osuna J. J., G. Jorge-Botana, J.A Martinez-Huertas, R. Olmos Albacete e A. Martínez-Mingo 2023). The central axis of polarisation became support or opposition to the government's pandemic measures. On one hand, the PP, while using a softer rhetoric than Vox, shifted from a more collaborative to adversarial stance with the government (Olivas Osuna and Rama 2021). On the other hand, left-wing and peripheral nationalist parties also used hyperbolic accusations against Vox.

The leaders of the PSOE and UP, constructed a framing that legitimised the adoption of extraordinary measures as a safeguard for the vulnerable. They emphasised a social rhetoric, presenting the government's measures as a clear departure from those implemented by the PP whom they associated to austerity policies. UP, and to a lesser extent the PSOE, adopted an institutional discourse of support vis-a-vis the policies launched by the governments in which they were coalition partners (central and some regional governments),

[9] El Mundo. Vox acusa al Gobierno de aplicar la eutanasia "por la vía de los hechos" en las residencias de mayores. 14 April 2020.
[10] Vox Murcia. VOX denuncia que la inmigración ilegal se ha visto agravada por la crisis del Coronavirus. 7 Octubre 2020. https://www.voxespana.es/noticias/vox-lleva-tiempo-advirtiendo-pesima-gestion-gobierno-sanchez-no-toma-medidas-crisis-inmigracion-20201007?provincia=murcia.

but also used a Manichean populist communicative strategy against the opposition parties and the regional governments they controlled (Campolongo *et al.* 2023). Meanwhile, Catalan nationalists continuously tried to differentiate as much as possible their pandemic policies from those of the central government and blamed Madrid for much of the mismanagement of the crisis (Parker 2022).

Decentralisation and the complex multi-level governance in Spain provided an opportunity to all parties to modify their discourses strategically across different government levels, from supportive to antagonistic. Blame shifting strategies and growing polarisation resulted in a more prominent role of partisan cues in the attribution of responsibilities during this health crisis (León and Jurado 2021) and further fuelled populist simplistic frames and polarisation. The confrontational reactions and recriminations against populist leaders, in this case against Vox, may have contributed to make more pervasive populist frames and articulations (Stavrakakis et al.2018) and create an opportunity for those leaders to instrumentalise narratives of victimhood (Homolar and Löflmann 2021).

In the post-pandemic electoral cycle, a new axis of polarisation crystallises around the struggle between two antagonistic blocs: the opposition forces, the PP and Vox, against the the PSOE, UP and the regional nationalist parties that support the government coalition. Populist rhetoric helped consolidate as hegemonic a dichotomous interpretation that presented voters with two choices: a PP coalition with the "extreme right," or a PSOE's government with "communists and separatists." Voters were primarily urged to vote against the rival bloc, rather than on programmatic considerations. Politicians in each of these emerging blocs accused each other of authoritarianism and of restricting individuals' liberties in the governments they lead. Policy areas such as LGBTQIA+ rights, gender violence, education and health policy become highly polarised

In this context of fear against a political rival, the PSOE and PP benefit from the "rally around the flag" effect because their leaders are seen as those with the higher chances to defeat the "dreaded enemy". In the 2023 general elections, both parties performed better than in the 2019 elections. They were considered the most reliable choices to avert the dangers signaled by the dominant frames imposed in each of the two blocs. The PP became the most voted party but it was unable to secure enough support to rule. The fear of a government with Vox proved a key element in mobilising left-wing voters and enabled Sánchez tostay in office. During this period, Vox entered several regional governments as a junior coalition partner of the PP but overall Vox' popularity upward trend was truncated. Ciudadanos, the party ideologically closer to the centre of the left-right spectrum, almost completely disappeared. UP leadersgradually abandoned its anti-establishment discourse but their coalition experienced a significant decline at the local and regional level. After very disappointing results in the 2021 Regional Elections, Pablo Iglesias resigned as its leader. His successor, Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, created a new coalition for the 2023 elections. Although obtaining fewer seats than UP did in 2020, Sumar became a junior partner in Sánchez's new government. Meanwhile, Catalan nationalists see their popularity and support for independence drop. Although they manage to secure the Catalan government after the 2021 regional elections, the PSC, the Catalan branch of PSOE, becomes the biggest party in terms of votes. The poor results achieved in Catalonia by ERC (fourth) and JxCat (fifth) in the 2023 general elections confirms this downward trend.

However, the dominance of the "two blocs" frame has contributed to a paradoxical situation. Despite their drop in popular support, secessionist parties have become more influential than ever because the left coalition needs them to stay in government and the government's concessions to the demands of the PNV and JxCat have increased. Some of these concessions clash with the PSOE's electoral pledges and its traditional left ideology. These contradictions are currently utilised by PP and Vox who claim to be the sole parties that fight for the equality of citizens and Spain's unity. They accuse the PSOE and Sumar of accepting the territorially-bounded economic and identitarian privileges requested by Catalan and Basque nationalists.

In sum, this pandemic crisis period has seen a mainstreaming of populist rhetoric that has contributed to reify two political blocs and the fusion of the left-right and territorial axes of polarisation. The electoral results

and interdependence between different players within each of the blocs have brought to the fore new adjustment in their ideological positions as means to justify political concessions to allies.

7. Conclusions

Crises have an asymmetric impact on political dynamics and can trigger different types of civil society mobilisations and reactions among political parties, as this article has shown. Firstly, the global financial crisis triggered spontaneous grassroots mass mobilizations in Spain that challenged the political establishment and promoted widespread social demand for democratic reforms and public policies to protect the most vulnerable, thus transforming the economic crisis into a crisis of representation. . Outsider parties, such as Podemos and Ciudadanos, aligned themselves with these interpretative frames and entered the ideational competition to decontest the notion of democracy. They successfully used, to varying degrees, a populist rhetoric victimising Spaniards and pointing the finger at corrupt politicians in the traditional parties as guilty, encouraging the decline of bipartisanship. A "new vs old" divide partially replaced the "left vs right" cleavage as axis of political competition.

Secondly, the Catalan territorial crisis presents an example of how some traditional parties modify their ideological standpoint to adapt and shape an impending crisis. CiU, the nationalist party that had dominated Catalan politics since transition, shifted its political strategy from autonomist into secessionist and adopted a populist rhetoric. This ideological and discursive change acted as catalyst, mainstreaming secessionism, and spurring mass mobilisations in favour of this cause. The new framing promoted by Catalan nationalist parties and civil society organisations, that presented the break-up with Spain as democratic and empowering endeavour ("the right to decide"), became dominant in Catalonia garnering wide support from social sectors previously indifferent to the issue and thereby enhancing the credibility of secession.

While Spanish traditional parties did not initially react to this secessionist challenge, Ciudadanos and Vox focused their discourses into raising awareness on the gravity of the threat for the integrity of Spain by channelling apprehension towards Catalan independence. The territorial cleavage largely superseded the "left vs right" one as the primary battleground for party competition in Catalonia. Populist narratives competed to redefine the sovereign "people," seeking to homogenise groups, fueling antagonism, and reimagining the nation. This was translated to the rest of Spain where the positions regarding centralisation-decentralisation became further polarised. Thirdly, Vox attempted to instrumentalize the COVID-19 pandemic, transforming it into a political crisis through conspiratorial rhetoric and attempts to mobilise the citizenry. They exploited conspiratorial thinking and leveraged the disruptions caused by isolation and human tragedy. Although Vox did not succeed in gaining popular support or in overturning the government, their populist confrontational tone contributed to a polarisation spiral in which two political blocs have crystallised. While the PP, Vox, and Ciudadanos vehemently accused left and nationalist parties of the dismantling of Spain. the coalition supporting the government adopted antagonistic tones and claimed that the PP and Vox planned meant a return to right-wing authoritarianism.

During this period, there have also been notable changes at the ideological level. The territorial (centralisation vs decentralisation) and left vs right cleavages merged, orthodox ideological stances have taken a back seat in political debate and policy proposals. Parties have prioritised the defeat of the rival bloc, which entailed concessions to allied parties, even to those with clearly discrepant ideological views. Paradoxically, it appears that the mainstreaming of populist rhetoric and the hegemonic antagonistic interpretation of politics as a two-blocs playfield developed since 2020, has prompted many Spaniards to vote for the two large parties: the PP and PSOE. In the absence of strong anti-establishment discourses such as those in the previous economic crisis, traditional parties are presented as the safest bet to defeat the feared and morally illegitimate

enemy bloc. Therefore, the decline in support for some populist parties, can be construed as the product of their own success in imposing a populist framing of the political arena as a fight between two antagonistic and irreconcilable blocs.

We confirm our hypothesis H1 in each of the three crises analysed. During the economic crisis the "new vs old" political cleavage partly replaced the traditional "left vs right" one. During the Catalan secessionist challenge, unsurprisingly, the most actively exploited social divide was that regarding the territorial organization of Spain. The pandemic crisis saw the consolidation of two opposing blocs that merged the territorial "decentralisation vs cetralisation" component with the "left vs right" divide. H2 is also confirmed, given that in each of these crisis, populist discourses were key in fueling grievances and establishing new antagonistic dynamics against the traditional parties and economic elites, against and "oppressive state" (or those who wanted to break Spain), and finally against an "irresponsible and ill-intentioned" government (or its opposition). H3 is partially corroborated as the role of social mobilisations was key to provide impulse to new dominant frames and ideological realignments in the economic and territorial crises, but not so much in the pandemic crisis. H4 also appears to be confirmed, as anti-establishment and secessionist frames, and later those depicting Spanish politics as a confrontation between two blocs, pushed most parties to ideological flexibility and realignments.

We acknowledge some limitations in our analyses. The wide scope of this article, covering three different crises at both the ideational and electoral competition levels, has pushed us to prioritise certain dominant frames and overlook other important cleavages such as the gender rights. We encourage a more in-depth exploration of these factors in future studies.

The three abovementioned crises and their impact on the Spanish polity help illustrate the complex interplay between critical events, social movements and political party strategies. Crisis are windows of opportunity for new and old political actors to gain support. Through different framing strategies they compete to impose a hegemonic interpretation of the crisis, attribute blame, and steer social discontent to their advantage. These manoeuvres can alter political dynamics by dispersing or concentrating the vote.

In sum, this article has provided an illustration of how, at times of crises, parties try to quickly adapt and harness changes in public perceptions to their advantage. Parties achieve this by incorporating new concepts, and revisiting extant ones, in the peripheral and central areas of their ideologies. Established parties may operate adjustments in their ideological identity. Meanwhile new political actors, often with a lighter ideological baggage, may emerge and skillfully adopt the frames and interpretations generated by mobilisations. In some instances, the crisis itself may be a result of the adeptness of specific party and political entrepreneurs in fueling outrage-inducing frames that may become dominant or hegemonic thereby influencing the collective imaginary. The interplay between existing and new political actors captured in this paper, shows that ideologies evolve in response to crises in dynamic and multifaceted ways.

References

Alcaide Lara E. (2019), "Discursos populistas en la política española actual: el caso de Podemos y Ciudadanos. Political Discourses at the Extremes", in F. Sullet-Nylander, M. Bernal, C. Premat and M. Roitman (eds.) *Expressions of Populism in Romance-SpeakingCountries*, Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.

Anduiza E., C. Cristancho and J.M. Sabucedo (2014), "Mobilization through online social networks: the political protest of the *indignados* in Spain", *Information, Communication e Society*, *17*(6), 750-764.

Anselmi M. (2023), Ideologie politiche [Teorie e problemi], Milano: Mondadori Education S.p.a

Barisione M. (2021), *Polar stars. Why the political ideologies of modernity still matter*, Milan: Milano University Press.

Barrio A., J. Rodríguez-Teruel (2017), "Reducing the gap between leaders and voters? Elite polarization, outbidding competition, and the rise of secessionism in Catalonia", Ethnic and Racial Studies, 40(10), 1776-1794.

Bedock C., P. Vasilopoulos (2015), "Economic hardship and extreme voting under the economic crisis: A comparison between Italy and Greece", *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 53.1: 177-196.

Bennett W.L., A. Segerberg (2012), "The logic of connective action", *Information, Communication e Society* 15(5): 739–768.

Bernacer J., J. García-Manglano E. Camina, and F. Güell (2021), "Polarization of beliefs as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of Spain", *PloS one*, 16(7), e0254511.

Bértoa F. C., Z. Enyedi (2021), *Party System Closure: Party Alliances, Government Alternatives, and Democracy in Europe*, Oxford University Press.

Bobbio N., N. Matteucci, and G. Pasquino(2004), *Il dizionario di politic*a. Torino: Utet

Boin A., A. McConnell, and P.T. Hart, eds. (2008), *Governing after crisis: The politics of investigation, accountability and learning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Boin A., P.T. Hart, and S. Kuipers (2018), "The crisis approach" in H. Rodríguez, W. Donner and J.E. Trainor (eds.) *Handbook of Disaster Research*, Springer. 23-38.

Caiani M. (2023), "Framing and social movements", *Discourse Studies*, *25*(2), 195-209.

Campolongo F., L. Caruso (2021), *Podemos e il populismo di sinistra: dalla protesta al governo*, Mimesis

Campolongo F., F.M. Scanni, and V. Tarditi (2023), *Virus populista?: narrazioni della crisi pandemica in Italia, Francia e Spagna,* Franco Angeli Editore

Canovan M. (1999), "Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy", *Political studies*, 47(1), 2-16.

Carratalá A., D. Palau-Sampio (2019), "Entre el activismo y la mediatización: encuadres de partidos y prensa en la campaña catalana de 2017", *Revista de Comunicación*, *18*(2), 73-91.

Castells M. (2012), *Redes de indignación y esperanza*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Castoriadis C. (1987), *The imaginary institution of society*, Polity Press, Cambridge

Chaves Giraldo P. (2012), "La movilización de los" indignados": una explicación sociopolítica", *Paideia: Revista de Filosofía y Didáctica Filosófica* 32 (94):141-162

Coman I. A., E. Dalia, G. Miloš, L. Darren, and N. Edoardo (2021), "Introduction: Political communication, governance and rhetoric in times of crisis", in *Political communication and COVID-19* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Costa M. (2021), "Ideology, not affect: What Americans want from political representation", *American Journal of Political Science*, *65*(2), 342-358.

De Nardis F. (2017), "The concept of de-politicization and its consequences.", *Partecipazione e conflitto* 10.2: 340-356.

Della Porta D.,M. Portos (2021), "A bourgeois story? The class basis of Catalan independentism", *Territory, Politics, Governance,* 9.3: 391-411.

Della Porta D., J. Fernández, H. Kouki and L. Mosca (2017), *Movement parties against austerity*, Cambridge : John Wiley e Sons.

DiMaggio P. J., W.W. Powell (1983), "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields", *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147-160.

Domènech X., J. Moreno Luzón, M. L. Latorre, and J.-P. Rubiés (2020), "El Procés de Cataluña en Perspectiva Histórica (Debate)", *Ayer* 120 (2): 327–355

Entman R. (1993), "Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm", in McQuail's Reader in Mass Communication Theory. Edited by Denis McQuail 390-397.

Enyedi Z., F. C. Bértoa (2020), "Party systems: types, dimensions, and explanations", *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*

Errejón Í., C. Mouffe (2015), *Construir pueblo." Hegemonía y radicalización de la democracia*, Icaria, Barcellona

Fillmore C. J. (1976), "Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language", Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences: Conference on the Origin and Development of Language and Speech 280 (1): 20–32.

Freeden M. (1996), *Ideologies and political theory: A conceptual approach*, Oxford University Press on Demand.

Freeden M. (2013), *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeden M., C. Minozzi (2008), *Ideologia*, Torino: Codice edizioni

Gest J., T. Reny , and J. Mayer (2018), "Roots of the radical right: Nostalgic deprivation in the United States and Britain", *Comparative Political Studies* 51(13), 1694-719.

Harmel R. and K. Janda (1994), "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change", *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6(3): 259-287.

Hart P. T. (1993), "Symbols, rituals and power: The lost dimensions of crisis management", *Journal of contingencies and crisis management* 1(1), 36-50.

Hessel S. (2011), *Time for outrage: Indignez-vous!,* Hachette UK.

Homolar A., G. Löfflmann (2021), "Populism and the Affective Politics of Humiliation Narratives", *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1, 1. doi:10.1093/isagsq/ksab002 Available at: https://academic.oup.com/isagsq/article/1/1/ksab002/6185295

Hurrelmann A., S. Kerr, A. Gora, and P. Eibl (2020), "Framing the Eurozone crisis in national parliaments: is the economic cleavage really declining?", *Journal of European Integration*, 42(4), 489-507.

Kioupkiolis A. (2016), "Podemos: the ambiguous promises of left-wing populism in contemporary Spain", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21.2: 99-120.

Kriesi H., T. Pappas, (2015), *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, Colchester: ECPR Press.

Kyriakidou M., J.J. Olivas Osuna (2017*)*, "The indignados protests in the Spanish and Greek press: moving beyond the 'protest paradigm'?"*, European Journal of Communication*, 32(5), 457-472.

Laclau, E. (2005), *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso.

Lakoff G. (1988), "Cognitive Semantics", In Meaning and Mental Representations edited by Umberto Eco

Laycock D. (2014), "Conceptual Foundations of Continuity and Change in NDP Ideology.", *Reviving Social Democracy: The Near Death and Surprising Rise of the Federal* NDP, 109-139.

León, S., I. Jurado (2021), "Attributions of responsibility in multilevel states", in I. Lago (eds.), Handbook on Decentralization, Devolution and the State, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 197-212.

Lipset S.M., S. Rokkan (1967), "Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments: an introduction", in Lipset S.M., S. Rokkan (eds), Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-national perspectives, New York, Te Free Press, pp. 1-64.

Lobera J., J. P. Ferrándiz (2013), "El peso de la desconfianza política en la dinámica electoral en España.", in I. Crespo *et al* (2013): 41-65.

Magni G. (2017), "It's the Emotions, Stupid! Anger about the economic crisis, low political efficacy, and support for populist parties", *Electoral Studies* 50, 91–102.

Mair P. (2016), *Governare il vuoto*, Roma: Rubbettino

Mazzoleni G. (2014), "Mediatization and political populism", in F. Esser , J. Strömbäck (eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*, Springer, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014. 42-56.

Moffitt B. (2015)," How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism", *Government e Opposition*, 50 (2), 189–217.

Mudde C. (2004), "The Populist Zeitgeist", *Government e Opposition* 39, no. 4: 542–63.

Muñoz J., E. Anduiza., and G Rico (2014), "Empowering cuts? Austerity policies and political involvement in Spain", in Kumlin, S., I. Stadelmann-Steffen. (Eds.), *How welfare states shape the democratic public: Policy feedback, participation, voting, and attitudes*, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.19-40.

Nelson T E., D.R. Kinder (1996), "Issue frames and group-centrism in American public opinion", *The Journal of Politics* 58(4): 1055-1078.

Nelson T. E., Z.M. Oxley, and R.A. Clawson (1997), "Toward a psychology of framing effects", *Political behavior*, 19, 221-246.

Norris P., R. Inglehart (2019), *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*, Cambridge University Press.

Olivas Osuna J. J. (2021), "From chasing populists to deconstructing populism: A new multidimensional approach to understanding and comparing populism", *European Journal of Political Research*, 60(4), 829-853.

Olivas Osuna J. J., J. Rama (2021), "COVID-19: a political virus? VOX's populist discourse in times of crisis", *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3, 57.

Olivas Osuna J. J., G. Jorge-Botana, J.A Martinez-Huertas, R. Olmos Albacete, and A. Martínez-Mingo (2023), "Quantifying the ideational context: political frames, meaning trajectories and punctuated equilibria in Spanish mainstream press during the Catalan nationalist challenge", *Political Research Exchange*, 5:1, DOI: 10.1080/2474736X.2023.2287036

Orriols L., G. Cordero (2016), "The breakdown of the Spanish two-party system: The upsurge of Podemos and Ciudadanos in the 2015 general election", *South European Society and Politics*, 21(4), 469-492.

Ostiguy P., B. Moffitt (2021), "Who Would Identify With An 'Empty Signifier'?", in P. Ostiguy, F. Panizza, and B. Moffitt (eds), Populism *in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach*, 73–97. New York: Routledge.

Parker J. (2022), "Europe's Secessionist Movements and Covid-19.ì", *Nationalities Papers* 50.1: 118-129.

Plaza-Colodro C., N.M. Olivares (2022), *Spain: Different Populist Responses with Similar (and Limited) Outcomes. In Populists and the Pandemic,* in N. Ringe, L.Rennò (eds), *Populists and the pandemic. How populist around the world responded to Covid-19,* Routledge, (pp. 79-91),

Prentoulis M., L. Thomassen (2013), "Political theory in the square: Protest, representation and subjectification", Contemporary *Political Theory* 12: 166-184.

Rama, J., Cordero G., and P. Zagórski (2021), "Three is a Crowd? Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox: The end of bipartisanship in Spain", Frontiers *in Political Science*, 3, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.688130.

Raniolo F.(2013), *I partiti politici*. Roma: Laterza.

Rico G., R. Liñeira (2014), "Bringing Secessionism Into the Mainstream: The 2012 Regional Election in Catalonia.", *South European Society and Politics,* 19 (2): 257–280.

Roberts K. (2015), "Populism, Political Mobilizations, and Crises of Political Representation," in De la Torre, Carlos (eds), *The promise and perils of populism: Global perspectives*, University Press of Kentucky

Royo, S. (2014), "Institutional Degeneration and the Economic Crisis in Spain", *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(12), 1568-1591.

Ruiz Casado J. A. (2020), "Articulations of populism and nationalism: The case of the Catalan independence movement", *European Politics and Society*, 21(5), 554-569.

Ruiz Casado J. A. (2023), "When "the people" of populism is constructed by the relatively privileged: the case of Catalan secessionism", *Comparative European Politics*, 1-17.

Sampedro V., J. Lobera (2014), "The Spanish 15-M Movement: a consensual dissent?.", *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 15.1-2 (2014): 61-80.

Serrano J. L., J. R. García (2017), "Medición de la cristalización electoral de un movimiento de protesta: De la indignación al voto", *Empiria: Revista de metodología de ciencias sociales,* 38: 151-176.

Snow D. A., E. Burke Rochford, S.K. Worden, and R.D. Benford (1986), "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation.", *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986): 464–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581.

Spector B. (2020), "Even in a global pandemic, there is no such thing as a crisis", *Leadership*, 16, 3: 303-310.

Stanley B. (2008).ì, "The thin ideology of populism.", *Journal of political ideologies* 13.1 : 95-110

Stavrakakis Y., G. Katsambekis, A. Kioupkiolis , N. Nikisianis, and T. Siomos (2018), "Populism, anti-populism and crisis", *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17, 4-27.

Taylor G.H. (2005), *Gli immaginari sociali moderni*, Meltemi, Roma (2004)

Thompson J.B. (1990), *Ideology and Modern Culture. Critical Social Theory in the. Era of Mass Communication*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tobeña A. (2021), *Fragmented Catalonia. Divisive legacies of a push for secession*, Policy Network. Papers future of Europe.

Vampa D. (2020), "Competing forms of populism and territorial politics: the cases of Vox and Podemos in Spain", *Journal of Contemporary European studies*, 28(3), 304-321.

Weyland K. (2001), "Clarifying a contested concept: Populism in the study of Latin American politics", *Comparative Politics* 34(1): 1–22.

Zanotti, L., S. J. Turnbull-Dugarte (2022), "Surviving but not thriving: VOX and Spain in times of Covid-19.", *Government and Opposition,* 1-20.

AUTHORS' INFORMATION

Francesco Campolongo is a Researcher at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Calabria (UNICAL). His main research interests include energy transition, populism, and democracy.

José Javier Olivas Osuna is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and Administration at the National University of Distance Education (UNED) in Madrid, and Research Associate at Conflict and Civicness Research Group at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He currently leads the project "Populism and Borders: a Supply and DemandSide Comparative Analysis of Discourses and Attitudes." Jose's research interests also include illiberal attitudes, radical right parties, disinformation and democratisation.