Spain - Out with the Old: The Restructuring of Spanish Politics

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Guillem Vidal and Irene Sánchez-Vítores

4.1   Introduction

To paraphrase Polanyi (1944), there are certain critical periods during which time expands. Studying these exceptional periods opens an opportunity to shed light on the transforming dynamics of political phenomena. Since the outbreak of the Great Recession in 2008, time has expanded in Spanish politics. What used to be an imperfect bipartisan system with a stable bipolar conflict structure has now become a fluid landscape with new actors and issues that have rocked the 'old' political system. The combination of a political and an economic crisis at the national and European levels has profoundly transformed a political system that had been broadly stable. In this chapter, we focus on the dynamics of transformation of Spanish politics before and after the crises struck. To do so, we analyse two elections before the beginning of the crisis (2004, 2008) and two elections afterwards (2011, 2015) in depth.

We find that the Spanish story, unlike the Portuguese one (Chapter 7 in this volume) but similarly to that of Greece (Chapter 5), is one of transformation. The elections before the crisis were characterised by two poles identifiable on the left–right scale represented by the two main parties, the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE). Cultural and territorial issues dominated in this period as a satisfactory performance of the economy kept economic issues inconspicuous. After the fall of Lehman Brothers in 2008 and the subsequent European debt crisis in 2009, the public debate shifted dramatically. Initially, the economy was the main concern in the public arena, and economic issues dominated the debate in the 2011 election. However, in the 2015 election we observe corruption and political regeneration gaining prominence. The economic crisis co-existed with a political crisis, which was also expressed in a reinvigoration of territorial issues in a new context (i.e. Catalan independence). In this new multipolar configuration of political conflict, the new radical left

(Podemos) drove these transformations by combining advocacy against austerity and for political renewal.

This new scenario revealed different government–opposition dynamics. While in opposition, the mainstream left (PSOE) followed an accommodating strategy and joined the advocacy for political renewal. Moreover, the PP was challenged for the first time by a new centre-right party – Ciudadanos – which combined issues of political renewal, re-centralisation of the territorial organisation and opposition to Catalan separatism. Overall, we find evidence that the political space evolved from a bipolar configuration before the crisis to a multipolar one.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, in Section 4.2 we contextualise the Spanish cleavage structure and review the main lines of conflict by relying on existing literature. In Section 4.3, we then proceed to describe the main actors and characteristics of the Spanish party system. Next, in Section 4.4, the unfolding of the economic and political crisis dynamics is discussed, allowing us to form expectations about the empirical results. These are presented next in Section 4.5. A general discussion of the Spanish case concludes the chapter in Section 4.6.

4.2   Traditional and New Divides

After a long period of dictatorship, the societal divisions and the political agency that emerged during the transition to democracy responded to patterns similar to those of the democratic period in the 1930s (Gunther et al. 1986: 14). After some turbulent years marked by a consolidation of the party system and high levels of political violence (Bermeo 1997), the election of 1993 set the lines of conflict for the following decades (Castro 2008; Ruiz Jimenez 2007). We argue that the Great Recession shook this configuration of the political space, which had been marked by a strong alignment of the dimensions of conflict and a stable party system.

Spanish political conflicts have traditionally been articulated along the left–right dimension, which Spanish citizens use for heuristic cues (Torcal and Medina 2007: 277). This unidimensional meta-structure comprises both economic and cultural dimensions, which are strongly aligned in the case of Spain (Moreno 1999: 29–30; Rovny and Polk 2014: 8; Vidal 2017) and also encompass traditional cleavages such as religiosity and social class (Cainzos and Voces 2015; Calvo et al. 2010). On the economic dimension, the poles of the axis are represented by economic liberalism on the right and welfare on the left. At the right-wing pole, the PP stood for the promotion of private initiative and market liberalisation (Balfour 2005; Michavila Nuñez 2015). At the opposite pole, the socialist party PSOE and the radical left coalition (IU) supported the

development of the welfare state and the fight against economic inequality (Mendez 2007; Urquizu 2015). However, the conflictual character of this dimension has at times been reduced due to broad agreements on different social and economic policies such as pensions (Fernández-Albertos and Manzano 2012).

In contrast to the pacts and agreements reached over welfare policies, cultural policies generally remained controversial, particularly in the pre-crisis period. While the left aligned itself with cultural liberalism, the right embraced patriotism and the defence of traditional values (Ruiz Jimenez 2010, 2007). This was particularly salient during Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero's first legislature (2004–2008) and led to a peak in polarisation (Balaguer and Sanz 2010). The socialist party pushed for a social rights agenda regarding issues such as equal marriage and abortion rights (Field 2009). Supported by the upper echelons of the Catholic Church and conservative media outlets, the conservative PP launched a campaign against the government, accusing it of shattering traditional family principles (Sampedro and Seoane Perez 2009). At the same time, the fight against terrorism became politicised and salient, an issue that linked security concerns with another structuring dimension of Spanish political conflict: the territorial cleavage.

The territorial cleavage can be considered the third relevant dimension of political conflict necessary to understand Spanish politics (Gunther and Montero 1994; Torcal 2010). This conflict materialises tensions regarding the territorial organisation of the state and results in the presence of actors (i.e. regionalist parties) that have small concentrated constituencies and strong veto power in the national institutions. The 1978 constitution introduced a complex four-level territorial organisation[1] that attempted to dilute the potential territorial conflict in the national arena and channel it into regional institutions (Colomer 1998; Romero 2012). However, ethno-regionalist parties managed to consolidate their presence in regional institutions and enter the national arena, becoming key actors in government formation.

The territorial dimension has been articulated through a number of issues, which include amongst others: political decentralisation or the distribution of competences between the state and sub-state entities; and interregional solidarity or the distribution of public investment

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[1] Although the Constitution does not fully set out the nature of the territorial administration, it does mention that besides the national government there will be autonomous communities, provinces and local governments.

amongst the regions or infrastructure policy.[2] Catalonia and the Basque Country stood out in this conflict, claiming self-determination rights using different forms of political action. For instance, one of the salient actors in the Basque self-determination movement was a terrorist organisation (ETA), which led to a close alignment of the territorial conflict with cultural (security) conflicts. The PP campaign transformed the fight against terrorism from a valence issue into a positional issue by connecting it to concerns about national identity (Astudillo 2009; Bonet et al. 2010).

To recapitulate, the structure of political conflict in Spain has three dimensions: economic, cultural and territorial. We have argued that the first two were traditionally aligned along the left–right axis. We expect the content of this configuration to have changed with the economic and political crises that unfolded after 2008. The political change that Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008, 2012) observed in most of western Europe, however, does not capture the recent political transformations in Spain. As discussed in the first chapter of this volume, 'new' cultural issues such as migration, which were at the core of the transformations in NWE, are largely absent from the political agenda in Spain (Encarnación 2004; Fernández-Albertos and Manzano 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2009). Instead, and in line with the overall argument put forward for southern Europe, the combination of deep economic and political crises seems to have triggered changes in the configuration of the party system. Issues concerning political renewal have become more salient, resulting in a reinterpretation of the cultural dimension of conflict. Before discussing these transformations and the crisis dynamics, in the following section we first review the characteristics of the institutional setting and the party system.

4.3   Institutional Setting and Party System

The 1978 Constitution defined Spain as a parliamentary monarchy with high levels of political decentralisation and a fuzzy delimitation of competences between administrations. This institutional design also permeated party organisations, translating into different territorial equilibria within the individual parties (Fabre 2010; Hopkin 2009). During the transition to democracy, the territorial organisation was designed to accommodate the expected territorial conflict but also to avoid the

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[2] The territorial dimension of conflict has frequently comprised national infrastructure investment policies, using them as bargaining chips to obtain the support of ethno-regionalist parties to pass other laws. However, this bargaining has also influenced the internal organisation of parties, even the highly hierarchical PP (Castro 2008: 282), as the conflict over hydroelectric resources has frequently shown.

tensions that marked the Second Republic and led to the civil war in the 1930s (Gunther et al. 1986). As Linz and Stepan (1996: 99) point out, the problem of *stateness* posed by Catalan and Basque nationalism was one of the defining challenges of Spain's transition to democracy, and in their view it was handled comparatively well relative to other countries facing similar situations. Nevertheless, as this chapter will show, the institutional framework set up during the transition to mitigate territorial conflict did not make these tensions disappear, as they later resurfaced to the forefront of political conflict.

In a gamble similar to the territorial reorganisation, in the 1970s the electoral system was also designed behind a veil of ignorance about the true distribution of prospective voters,[3] and it has remained unchanged since (Hopkin 2005: 376–377). Although formally proportional, it includes corrective elements to favour government formation, turning the formally proportional system into an almost majoritarian one (Lago and Montero 2005). Traditionally, those who benefited most from this electoral system were mainstream office-seekers and ethno-regionalist parties with territorially concentrated support. In contrast, parties such as Izquierda Unida (IU) with dispersed support have found the effective threshold to be much higher, turning the electoral system into a strong obstacle against electoral success (Montero 1998; Urdánoz 2008).

The combination of this institutional setting and the political conflict resulted in two main features of the Spanish party system: an imperfect bipartisanship and political parties strongly reliant on subnational structures. Two main parties dominated the political arena, but regional parties also became key players in the case of minority governments (Hopkin 2005). In terms of organisation, political parties struggled to balance two opposing forces: intra-party discipline and territorial diversity. National leaders were able to exert much control inside parliament,

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[3] The Spanish electoral law devises two parallel electoral systems, one for the Congress and one for the Senate. That of the Congress is the main one. In this election the stakes are higher given that it leads to the appointment of the prime minister. Furthermore, its electoral rules are the ones applied by default in regional and local elections whenever the region does not have its own electoral law, making them the most frequent in Spain (Montero et al. 1992). Candidates present themselves in closed and blocked lists. The electoral rules covers fifty-two constituencies, which fill the 350 seats according to their population size, with a minimum of two seats for the least populated constituencies. Most of the constituencies are allocated between three to five seats. That is, their size is very small, contributing to the disproportionality. Within constituencies, the seats are allocated using the D'Hondt formula. The Senate is chosen following different rules. Most of the Senate is elected by direct suffrage in provincial constituencies. Voters can pick the individuals for whom they cast their vote, even from different parties (*panachage*), although this option is not frequently used by voters. The rest of the members of the Senate are elected by the regional parliaments (Villodres and Pereira 2002).

given that Spain is one of the countries with the highest levels of intra-party discipline (Sánchez de Dios 1999: 159). At the same time, subnational entities exerted considerable influence due to their control of resources and regional state institutions and their contribution to the parties' electoral resources (Fabre 2010; Pallarés and Keating 2003; Sánchez de Dios 1999).

Table 4.1 summarises the election results and party system features for the years 2004–16.[4] As the table indicates, the 2011 election shows the first signs of transformation of an otherwise stable party system. With the emergence of the two new challenger parties in 2015 – and the subsequent election in 2016 – we observe an explosion of volatility, a corresponding increase in the effective number of parties and the lowest proportion of votes for the mainstream parties recorded. Although voter turnout declined in the 2011 election, the new parties seemed to drive participation back to pre-crisis levels. All in all, the changes initiated in 2011 seem to have been reinforced in 2015 and consolidated in 2016. The Spanish party system went from being dominated by two main parties to a scenario with four parties, two on each side of the ideological spectrum.

PP and PSOE are the two mainstream parties. The period under study starts when PSOE unexpectedly[5] regained office after eight years of PP government. The successes and failures of PSOE in the 1980s and early 1990s left it a party in deep trouble, from which it only managed to recover in the initial phase of Rodriguez Zapatero's leadership (Rico 2007; Urquizu 2015). Zapatero's first legislature was articulated around the extension of civic rights and a revitalisation of the territorial conflict, while the second legislature focused on the outbreak of the economic crisis. PSOE's perceived incapacity to manage the crisis and be loyal to its constituencies generated tensions that led to severe disputes within the party.

On the right of the spectrum, PP had long been the only contestant. From 2003, Mariano Rajoy acted as party leader after a personal decision by former president Aznar (Michavila Nuñez 2015). Rajoy proved to be a political survivor, losing three elections before he won his first in 2011, due to a debacle in the socialist party. During his time

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[4] The recall election held in 2016 is not included in the analyses of political conflict given that the issues are close to the ones dealt with in the preceding campaign. However, we do include the election in the introduction to describe its outcome and to fully cover the crisis period.

[5] This victory was unexpected because the polls predicted that the PP would again win the election, but the 11 March terrorist attacks right before the 2004 election appear to have influenced the electoral result (see Montalvo 2012).

Table 4.1 *Spanish election results and party-system features*

Election	2004	2008	2011	2015	2016
Election results (vote share)[1]					
Mainstream right (PP)	*37.7*	*40.4*	*45.2*	*28.9*	*33.0*
Mainstream left (PSOE[3])	*42.6*	*44.4*	*29.2*	*22.1*	*22.6*
Mainstream others	*5.0*	*5.0*	*11.8*	*3.7*	*-*
IU/Unidad Popular (radical left)	5.0	3.8	7.0	3.7	-
UPyD (center-right)	-	1.2	4.8	-	-
Ethnorregionalist[4]	*11.0*	*7.2*	*10.4*	*9.7*	*9.7*
Challenger left (Podemos)	*-*	*-*	*-*	*18.1*	*18.4*
Challenger right (Ciudadanos)	*-*	*-*	*-*	*14.0*	*13.1*
Party system features					
Turnout (percent)	75.7	73.8	68.9	73.2	66.5
Volatility extra-system	1.3	1.3	2.4	24.8	
Volatility within-system	8.4	2.7	12.2	11.5	
Volatility total	9.7	4.0	14.6	36.3	
Effective number of parties (seats)	2.5	2.3	2.6	4.5	4.2
Mainstream party vote	85.3	89.8	86.2	54.7	55.6
Asymmetry[5]	9.8	6.6	−13.8	−3.1	−10.4
Polarisation (0 to1; own media data)	0.17	0.26	0.19	0.35	-

[1] The table only reports the vote share of parties that made it to Parliament.

[2] Vote share includes the percentage obtained by parties that have ran in coalition with PP such as UPN, PAR or FAC in 2015.

[3] Vote share includes the percentage obtained by PSOE-PSC. Sometimes it is reported separately due to the peculiar relationship between the Catalan party and the national federation.

[4] Some of these parties have changed brands across elections. They have been reported together to ease interpretation of the table.

[5] This indicator is calculated by subtracting the vote for mainstream right to the mainstream left.

Asymmetry = (PSOE+IU/UP) – (PP+UPyD)

Sources: Own calculations, ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2016), volatility from Hernández and Kriesi (2016).

in office, he cultivated the image of a trustworthy man (Botti 2013; Martínez and Rodríguez 2015), allowing him to remain in office despite a succession of corruption scandals and the implementation of drastic austerity policies. During his first legislature, some of the regional allies voiced discontent, one of the most notorious being former minister Francisco Alvarez-Cascos, who founded his own party, FAC. In the 2015 and 2016 elections, however, all of these voices were appeased, and they re-edited existing coalitions such as the one in Navarre with UPN.

Although our results do not show a large presence of regionalist actors in the electoral campaigns,[6] their content and development cannot be understood without the key role of these actors in agenda-setting and government formation (Bonet et al. 2010). Their territorially concentrated political support made some of them government parties in their regions (mainly PNV and CiU) but vote-seekers in the national arena, able to place their demands on the agenda. The overlap of cleavages reflects the difficulties that national parties face in these regions as they compete on every dimension. In other words, there are leftist ethno-regionalist parties like ERC and Bildu, and rightist regionalist parties such as PNV and CiU.

Finally, during the pre-crisis period, two parties became proto-challengers: Izquierda Unida (radical left) and UPyD (moderate right). Both parties tried to challenge the status quo, advocating for a better quality of democracy, amongst other issues. Izquierda Unida is a coalition of very small radical left parties, including the Communists. The short-lived UPyD was founded by Rosa Díez, a former socialist leader, in 2007 after discontent with the way the party managed issues related to decentralisation. It dissolved after the 2015 election.[7]

4.4   Crises and Crisis Dynamics

The electoral dynamics of the crisis followed a two-stage process. First, as the economic voting literature would predict, the incumbent was punished and voters turned to the mainstream opposition. PSOE lost the 2011 election to PP, which won an absolute majority (186 seats and 44.6 percent of the vote). Second, the poor performance of the incumbent and the incapacity of the opposition to offer different policy solutions opened a window of opportunity for new actors to enter the political competition. In the 2015 election, although PP remained the most voted party, its vote share decreased substantially (123 seats and 28.7 percent of the vote), while PSOE was unable to capitalise on the shifting vote (ninety seats and 22 percent of the vote). Two new forces emerged on either side of the political spectrum – Podemos (new radical left) and

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[6] Regionalist parties are excluded from the empirical analysis due to the low number of observations that are reported in the selected newspapers. Given that the newspapers analysed have a national readership, they tend to over-represent national actors at the expense of regional parties. This explains the limited number of cases compared to their prominence in the political arena.

[7] UPyD and IU have been labelled proto-challengers because they intended to play this role in the political system but were never able to succeed in the way Podemos and Ciudadanos did. UPyD disappeared because Ciudadanos occupied its space, and IU is struggling to find a place, whether as a competitor of Podemos or as an ally.

Ciudadanos (centre-right) – which benefited from these floating voters, putting an end to the political dynamics that had been dominant for decades.

After apparently solid economic growth since the mid-1990s, Zapatero's cabinet faced the financial crisis following the fall of Lehman Brothers in 2008 with optimism, assuring citizens that 'the Spanish economy is well prepared to face a situation like the one that we have gone through with the turbulence of the financial sector'.[8] However, such optimism proved to be ill-founded (for a review of the causes, see Royo 2014). By 2010, the same socialist government had completely shifted its discourse and talked about 'special, singular and extraordinary efforts' regarding the austerity policies introduced to face the economic down-turn, including raising taxes, cutting salaries, reducing pensions and reigning in social spending.

The implementation of the neoliberal recipes foisted on Spain by the Troika continued with the approval of a labour market reform and a change to the constitution agreed with PP to cap public debt (article 135 of the Constitution). In a fashion very similar to the dynamics behind the collapse of many Latin-American party systems during the 80s as described by Roberts (2013), the Spanish party system witnessed a neoliberal convergence of the two main parties. PSOE favoured 'responsibility' instead of 'responsiveness' (Mair 2009), at the cost of being perceived to be an undifferentiated alternative to the mainstream right. In Lupu's (2016) words, this produced a brand dilution that reduced the differences between the two mainstream parties.

It was precisely this lack of perceived differences between the two mainstream parties that was voiced with the slogan 'PP and PSOE are the same' in the protests that took place in May 2011, triggered by several organisations, amongst which 'Democracia Real Ya' (Real Democracy Now!) stood out. As in other countries (della Porta 2015), a wave of anti-austerity protests gave way to a new movement: the Indignados or '15-M' movement. Their claims were not limited to anti-austerity but also arose from concerns about the Spanish political system and widespread corrup-tion (Anduiza et al. 2014; Calvo 2013). Amidst the turmoil in the protest arena and after a rocky legislature, Prime Minister Zapatero called an early election for November 2011.

This election was mainly dominated by economic concerns and the government's lack of ability to restrain unemployment rates. Although the Indignados movement had already raised concerns relating to the

[8] See www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/09/16/espana/1221587906.html (accessed 12 April 2018).

political crisis, soaring unemployment and worsening economic indicators monopolised the political discussion. In fact, unemployment remained the most important problem in the eyes of the citizens.[9] At the time of the election, the political crisis did not materialise institutionally, amongst other things because no institutional actor credibly represented preferences for democratic renewal.

PP's landslide victory, however, neither deterred the introduction of further austerity measures nor appeased a growing sense of political dissatisfaction reflected in the growing levels of mistrust towards key political institutions (García-Albacete et al. 2016; Muro and Vidal 2016). In fact, a series of corruption scandals further contributed to the widespread disenchantment. As Orriols and Cordero (2016: 6) point out, the three largest scandals were the Gürtel case, the Bárcenas papers and the 'black credit cards' of Caja Madrid/Bankia. Unsurprisingly, corruption and the political elite soon became the issues of most concern to the Spanish citizenry. Given the new government's incapacity to ameliorate the economic situation in addition to the corruption scandals, it did not take long for its support to decline.

In 2014, a new party called Podemos ran in the European election and surpassed all expectations in the polls, obtaining close to 8 percent of the vote. With an explicit anti-austerity agenda and an unequivocal populist rhetoric, the new formation presented itself as a party of the people inspired by the Indignados movement. Founded by a group of political science lecturers and leftist activists, Podemos at first tried to appeal to a heterogeneous platform by focusing on political discontent and anti-elitism. However, leftist activists and their own electorate soon pushed them within the radical left, to the despair of those in the party who advocated against left–right politics (Fernández-Albertos 2015; Galindo et al. 2015). This inconsistency seems to have hindered Podemos' capacity to fully benefit from the turbulent situation amongst the socialist ranks.

In a very short period the newcomer managed to connect with the wider sense of dissatisfaction deriving from the economic and political crisis, particularly appealing to the young, urban and educated strata of society that showed clear signs of distrust towards the main political institutions (Vidal 2017). In 2015, with the support of smaller factions of the party at the municipal level in large Spanish cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia and A Coruña, Podemos obtained 20.7 percent of the vote.

Changes were not limited to the configuration of the left camp in the party system. The right also saw the rise of a challenger: Ciudadanos,

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[9] Corruption only started becoming a main issue in 2011 (see Orriols and Cordero 2016). Until then, unemployment was the main issue.

which obtained 14 percent in the 2015 election. Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio (2015) identify two main reasons for this breakthrough. On one hand, the continued uncovering of corruption scandals within PP facilitated Ciudadanos' capitalisation on demands for "political renewal, transparency and democratic regeneration" (Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio 2015: 2), a fertile ground also exploited by Podemos. On the other hand, the strengthening of the territorial dimension in Catalonia weakened the Catalan branch of PSOE (PSC), opening a space for an outspoken anti–Catalan nationalist party.

The Catalan secessionist challenge was, in fact, a fundamental aspect of the political crisis. While the pre-crisis period was dominated by security concerns and disagreement over the way to defeat terrorists in the Basque country, the within-crisis period revolved around Catalan claims for independence. A reform of the Statute of Autonomy and a ruling by the Constitutional Court led to a surge in confrontation between Catalan and national elites. The arrival of PP in government and the implementation of austerity only added fuel to this conflict (Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel 2016: 10). A demonstration on 11 September 2013 showed that the conflict had taken on a different meaning amongst citizens, producing a whole new level of support.[10] Instead of further autonomy, independence became the main demand. The revival of the Catalan issue has been attributed to a process of ethnic polarisation based on elite-driven motivations (Barrio and Rodríguez-Teruel 2016) in which identity, as well as partisanship, were the main drivers of support for secession (Muñoz and Tormos 2015). While PP and Ciudadanos had a clear position regarding the territorial organisation, both PSOE and Podemos struggled to place themselves on this issue. Podemos supported holding a referendum but PSOE rejected it, supporting a constitutional reform instead.

The reinvigoration of the Catalan conflict and the emergence of two new parties on different sides of the political spectrum left the socialists in a difficult situation. Despite the initial reluctance to take a position in the political spectrum, Podemos became a solid competitor on the left, while Ciudadanos positioned itself on the moderate right. In this new scenario, the socialist party had little choice but to adapt its discourse and distance itself from its recent past, although the new leadership did not

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[10] The movement in favour of Catalan independence holds demonstrations every 11 September, the Catalan national day, commemorating the fall of Catalonia to Bourbon troops in 1714. Since 2012, mass demonstrations have been held but none as successful or as widespread as the one held in 2013. That year, the Catalan National Assembly coordinated citizens to make a human chain that stretched over 400 km.

necessarily reflect this change.[11] If the party was to retain its image of a transformative force in Spanish politics, it had to incorporate the demands for political renewal raised by the new challengers. We expect that being in opposition facilitated PSOE's adoption of the demands for political renewal.

In sum, the crisis dynamics in Spain were the product of an interplay between a deteriorating economy, a substantial loss of credibility on the part of the traditional parties and a strengthening of the Catalan territorial conflict that followed. Following a period marked by stability, the economic shock introduced these new issues onto the political agenda and brought about volatility and political incertitude. We expect our evidence to show the potential for a new multipolar structure of conflict revolving around austerity, political renewal and the reinvigoration of the territorial conflict. After the socialists' debacle in 2011, a space opened up for a leftist alternative to tap into feelings of anti-elitism and anti-austerity (see Hutter et al. 2018). We expect Podemos, the new left challenger, to induce an alignment of left economic issues and democratic renewal. Likewise, a space on the centre-right opened up for a challenger able to combine the transversal claims for democratic renewal (i.e. anti-corruption) with a new strain of the territorial conflict expressed in the Catalan secessionist challenge. Ciudadanos, the new liberal party, seized this new space. Finally, we also expect government–opposition dynamics to be reflected in these transformations.

4.5   The Content and Structure of Party Competition

In this section, we describe the dynamics of party competition during the electoral campaigns as reported by the media. To observe the impact of the crisis we cover two elections before the outbreak of the Great Recession (2004, 2008) and two elections afterwards (2011, 2015).[12] We begin by discussing the salience and politicisation of the main issues that structured the campaigns over time together with the parties' positioning on these issues. We then explore the transforming configuration of the political spaces.

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[11] In fact, the new candidate was Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba, who had previously acted as vice-president, minister of the interior and spokesperson for the government, thus not signifying a strong break with past policies.

[12] Although some of the results of the 2016 election are also discussed, this election became mostly about parties blaming each other for the need to repeat the election. Moreover, the story told in this chapter is about the transformative nature of the elections in which new challengers emerged, and which the 2016 one did not change.
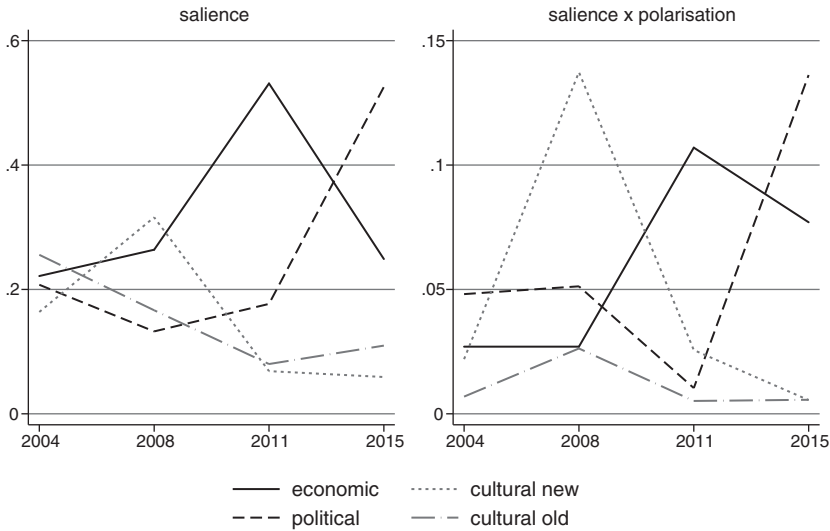
Figure 4.1 Salience and politicisation by issue domain in Spain
Note: The salience and politicisation measures are based on aggregates of the respective sub-categories shown in Table 3.2. For Spain, we coded the following two newspapers: *El Mundo* and *El País* (for details, see Chapter 3).

Salience and Politicisation

A comparison of the salience and politicisation (salience x polarisation) of the main issues covered in the pre-and post-crisis campaigns largely confirms our expectations about the main issues that structured party competition in Spain. Figure 4.1 illustrates the salience and politicisation of a set of aggregate issues during each of the campaigns covered. Figure 4.2 illustrates the party positions with regard to the different issue levels.

In the 2004 campaign, the most salient category is that of 'old' cultural issues, which encompasses issues relating to security and defence. One of the key components of this issue is related to terrorism. At the time, the Basque terrorist organisation ETA was being relentlessly pursued by the police with notable detentions. Fighting terrorism thus became the most discussed issue during the campaign. PP tried to build issue ownership on security and the fight against terrorism, particularly after Carod Rovira (the ex-leader of the left-wing Catalan nationalist party ERC) was found to have met with members of the organisation and received offers of
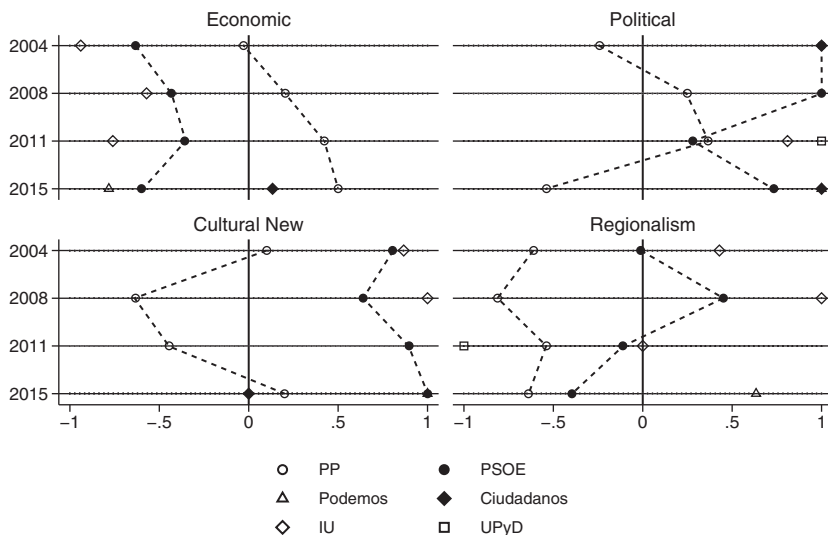
Figure 4.2 Positions of the Spanish parties by issue domain
Note: The positional measures exclude the two 'vague' categories referring to the need for economic and political reforms in general (see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3 on methods).

a ceasefire only in Catalonia. Until then, fighting terrorism had been a valence issue, but disagreements over the strategy to disband ETA led PP to put the issue on the agenda,[13] which explains the low levels of politicisation of the issue reported in Figure 4.1. The participation of Spain in the Iraq war also contributed to the salience of the category, with PSOE promising to withdraw troops and PP planning to keep them in the field. The Iraq war issue, however, was secondary to terrorism.[14] These issues would linger on into the next legislature, when the socialist government pursued negotiations that led to a permanent ceasefire (Leonisio et al. 2016) and pulled out the troops from Iraq. At the same time, this period was also characterised by growing demands of the Catalan and Basque autonomies for further recognition, which led to a negotiation of new autonomy laws in an attempt to mitigate territorial tensions.

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[13] PNV/Abertzale left were strongly criticised for their ambivalence regarding terrorism. At this point, the Ajuria Enea Agreement was broken, and PP and PSOE stopped being a united front supporting each other's policies.

[14] Note that three days before the election Spain witnessed its worst Al-Qaeda terrorist attack. The proximity to the election day made it largely absent from the sample.

One of the substantial differences between the 2004 and 2008 campaigns is the emphasis on cultural liberalism. During the legislature, the winning party of the 2004 elections, PSOE, focused heavily on civil rights issues such as abortion, allocations for dependents, gender quotas and equal marriage, despite the social resistance rallied by the Catholic Church. This is reflected in the most salient issues of the 2008 campaign in the 'new' cultural category, which encompass all these cultural issues relating to civil rights but also immigration-related issues. The socialist government eased the process of naturalisation, and this was not well received by the conservatives. The PP responded by trying to build a position problematising migration, particularly that from Muslim countries. This is clearly reflected in the high degree of polarisation and the correspondingly high level of politicisation of 'new' cultural issues in Figure 4.1. Although early signs of the economic crisis already started to show during the 2008 campaign, issues relating to welfare had not yet become polarised. However, the debate around cultural issues also spurred the debate around democratic reform. UPyD ran for the first time in this election to capitalise on this issue,[15] although with very modest results, as can be seen from Table 4.1. Overall, these results suggest that the pre-crisis elections were dominated by the territorial and cultural dimensions of conflict, reflecting a bipolar configuration of the political space. Furthermore, the results confirm the highly polarising nature of cultural issues, except for terrorism, which remained salient but not polarised.

In terms of issues, the picture changed radically with the first crisis election in 2011. Economic liberalism and welfare became the most salient issues by far, completely structuring the conflict in the campaign. The economic crisis was unleashing its full effects, and the political debate mostly focused on issues relating to austerity measures and reforms, such as privatising health care, reducing unemployment, estate tax, budgetary rigour, retirement provisions and social justice. The increase in salience of economic issues trumped that of cultural issues. Political renewal, mostly pushed by UPyD, obtained some traction after the 15-M mobilisations, but the political issues were overshadowed by economic concerns.

As anticipated, the 2015 campaign shows a different stage of the crises. Economic liberalism and welfare-related issues were still highly salient. However, the results also show some differences with respect to 2011. For instance, regionalism was no longer related to Basque terrorism but to the Catalan claim for independence. The Catalan secessionist challenge was by far the most recurrent issue during the

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[15] Although UPyD ran for the first time in the 2008 election, our results do not include it because of the low number of observations.

campaign. Traditionally, territorial organisation had related to democratic and power-sharing views: leftist parties in Spain supported a more decentralising approach while the right preferred more centralisation. Faced with the challenge of a secession referendum, circumstances forced both old and new parties to take positions, as Figure 4.2 shows. Ciudadanos has run on a platform against Catalanism since its foundation and stands strongly against independence. Likewise, PP defended national unity as a strategy to improve its electoral gains outside Catalonia. In the left camp, the limits of power-sharing caused more tensions within the parties. While Podemos advocated holding a referendum but campaigned in against secession, the socialists were divided between different forms of federal solutions.

Besides the economy and the Catalan referendum, the political crisis re-emerged, agitated mainly by the new parties. Issues such as political renewal, reforms of the political system, direct democracy and the fight against corruption became an integral part of the political conflict. If in the regionalist conflict Podemos stood alone against all the other national parties, with respect to political renewal it was the PP which was opposed to all the others. The dominant dynamic was that of government–opposition. The new parties had strong incentives to build platforms on these issues, insisting on their novelty as opposed to existing institutionalised bad practices.

Overall, the crisis campaigns show a picture that is very different from that of the pre-crisis campaigns, with a new radical left party leading these transformations. Cultural issues are replaced by issues relating to political reforms, while regionalist issues change in content and are largely intensified. The 2015 election was dominated by issues concerning political renewal and the Catalan secessionist challenge, confirming the incapacity of the political system to circumscribe the territorial conflict to the subnational arenas. To better observe the conflict alignments, structuring dimensions and government–opposition dynamics, we turn to the more sophisticated methods of multidimensional scaling to observe the relational distances between the different issues and actors across the elections.

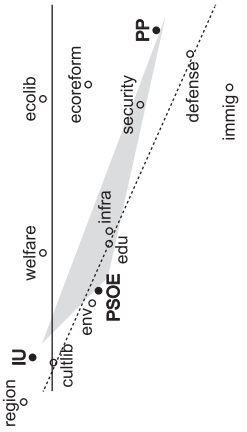### The Political Space in Spain

Using graphical representations of multidimensional scaling for the issues and party positions, we can shed light on the structures of party competition over time and observe how conflicts relate to one another. Figure 4.3 shows the structure of political spaces in the 2004, 2008, 2011 and 2015 campaigns.

At first glance, we observe a similar structure for the first two elections. This begins shifting in 2011 and fundamentally transforms in 2015.
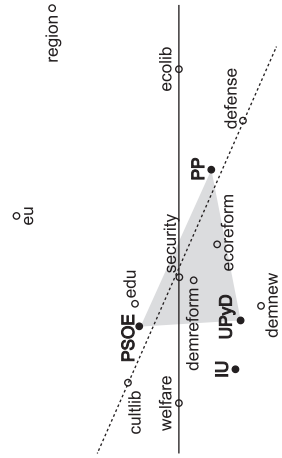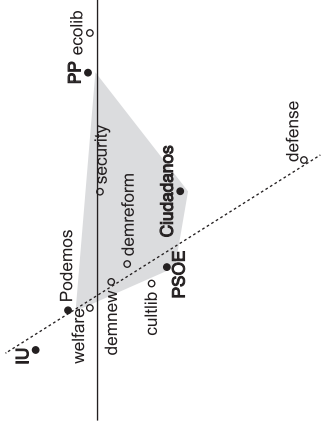
2004
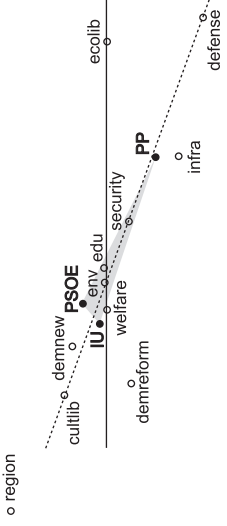
2008

2011

2015

Figure 4.3 The structure of the Spanish political space

The evidence shows that in the pre-crisis elections there is a strong integration of the economic and cultural dimensions, the opposite poles being represented by PP – closer to issues such as economic liberalism, defence, security and immigration – and PSOE – closer to welfare, cultural liberalism, education, regionalism and the environment. This largely confirms the expectation of an aligned structure of conflict on the left–right dimension producing a bipolar configuration, which has been reported to be of particular importance in the case of Spain (Rovny and Polk 2014).

A closer look at the configuration in 2011 shows the first signs that a transformation was under way. Both IU and UPyD stand close to political reform and new politics, foreshadowing the structure that ultimately defined the 2015 election. However, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, the 2011 election largely focused on economic issues. It nonetheless represents a transition stage to a period where the mainstream options were not able to truly differentiate from one another and new alternatives emerged.

Lastly, the 2015 campaign data shows the aftermath of a political earthquake. Two new parties enter the scene, raising democratic renewal issues. Three points call for attention. First, Podemos and Ciudadanos were aligned with issues regarding democratic reform. Even if Ciudadanos successfully capitalised discontent on the right, Podemos, the new left, should be credited with having put the issue on the agenda, institutionalising demands that had frequently been heard at demonstrations since the outbreak of the crisis. Second, the fact that two direct competitors gave salience to issues of democratic renewal forced PSOE, the mainstream left, to reposition itself. It could do this because it was in opposition. Third, the territorial dimension remained a cross-cutting conflict throughout the entire period, even if the content substantively changed. While the new parties shared views on the need for renewal, they were strongly split over how to address the Catalan situation, with Podemos defending the negotiations to hold a referendum and Ciudadanos opposing them on the grounds that consultations are illegal and against national unity. These dynamics created a new configuration of conflict with multiple poles, as can be observed from the enlargement of the grey areas in Figure 4.3. Whereas in the pre-crisis period the main actors aligned along a single dimension, the 2011 and most notably the 2015 elections show how the public debate enlarged around the issues of political renewal and austerity.

4.6   Conclusions

In line with the ideal-typical scenarios for southern Europe depicted in the introduction to this volume, the story of Spain is that of a process of transformation. The Great Recession triggered a political crisis of major

proportions that introduced pronounced changes in the party system configuration and the political agenda. We find that the pre-crisis elections displayed a stable bipolar competition between PP and PSOE, supported by ethno-regionalist parties. Cultural issues, security concerns and the territorial conflict dominated the public debate. In contrast, the crisis elections exhibited volatility and change. This change was driven by demands for political renewal and anti-austerity positions together with the Catalan secessionist crisis facilitating Spain's transformation to a multipolar party system with the emergence of two new parties: Podemos and Ciudadanos. Overall, the Spanish experience deviates from the general southern European expectations in two main respects. First, a new liberal party emerged, linked to the activation of the territorial conflict. Second, no populist radical-right party emerged during the crisis period.

As in the other southern European countries, the economy played a prominent role in the first Spanish crisis election (2011). Although some signs of political dissatisfaction and demands for political renewal were already present in the protest arena, the debate centred around austerity measures and reforms. The implementation of austerity policies by the socialist government during the legislature showed a certain degree of convergence between the main office-seeking parties. This lack of a clear political alternative opened the space for new actors to enter the political competition. The second crisis election (2015) reflected this new structural space with the emergence of a new populist left party: Podemos. Comparable to the Greek experience (Chapter 5), a new party on the left could capitalise on the erosion of the social-democrats due to the implementation of austerity policies enforced by supranational institutions, even if the Spanish socialist debacle was a lot more moderate.

While the emergence of Podemos fits the general story of SE quite accurately, the Spanish case deviates from the expected general pattern, as a new centre-liberal party, Ciudadanos, also emerged. Building on its experience in Catalan politics, it ran both as a response to the Catalan secessionist challenge, which became an integral part of the political crisis, and as another option to renew the political landscape and substitute the existing corrupt elite. A second particularity of the Spanish case is that none of the new challenger parties belonged to the populist radical right. Several interpretations have been advanced for this phenomenon, such as the fact that the territorial dimension in Spain implies that the nativist discourse is already 'occupied' (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015), that migrants were already amongst the unprotected in a strongly dualised labour market (Fernández-Albertos and Manzano 2016; Zapata-Barrero 2009) and that there simply was no political agent capable of succeeding. In this respect, our findings show that despite the PP's feeble attempt to politicise the

immigration issue in the 2008 campaign neither the structural space nor the content of political conflict facilitated any possibility for such a type of party to capitalise on the discontent. This might be changing with the emergence of VOX, a populist radical right party that obtained 11 percent of the vote in the regional elections of Andalucia on December 2018 and that could make it to the national Parliament in the next general elections.

Although the story told in this chapter stops with the emergence of the new challengers in the 2015 election, it is important to add some lines on the events that followed. The 2015 election resulted in a virtual tie between the four front-runners, to the point that none of them could form a government coalition, and so a new election was held in 2016. Conflict in this campaign was largely about how the preceding negotiations had developed. Few substantive policies were discussed. After tense negotiations, PP finally managed to form a government again with the abstention of PSOE and the support of Ciudadanos. Paradoxically, while the multi-party scenario seems to reflect demands for change in the political system, the 'out with the old' discourse driving these transformations did not materialise in the conservatives being kicked out of office, and Mariano Rajoy became president for the third time. Yet, in an unexpected turn of events, PSOE took back the government thanks to a vote of no confidence against Rajoy supported by regionalist parties held on 13-14 June 2017.

Whether the new actors and lines of conflict will stabilise in the long term remains to be seen. Despite some signs of crystallisation, the demand-side structure of political competition in Spain remains largely unidimensional in terms of economic and cultural issues (Vidal 2017). Moreover, the issues concerning political renewal, upon which the new parties campaigned, have an expiry date. That is, once parties are established or have assumed government responsibility, they can hardly sustain a discourse of political renewal. While political issues have contributed to a reinterpretation of the cultural dimension, they may in the long term be replaced once again by 'new' cultural issues. Indeed, one possibility is that the current configuration evolves into one like that of the north-western European countries, with a new cultural divide cross-cutting the economic dimension of political competition, encompassing issues such as European integration, nationalism and immigration. This would open up political spaces through a combination of new 'issue packages' onto which challengers could consolidate their positions. For the time being, in this rather exceptional transition period we find little evidence, however, of such a convergence to a north-western European type of conflict structure.