Protest cycles in post-transitional Spain (2011–2017): a comparison between the Indignados Movement and the Catalan independence process

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ABSTRACT
This article aimed to determine how the structure of political opportunities in Spain has changed in connection to the cycles of protest associated with the 15-M anti-austerity movement and Catalan independence process between 2011 and 2017. To do this, we compared both episodes of conflict based on an analytical model developed through theories of the political process. In addition, we used evidence from the analysis of statistical records, barometers of public opinion, newspapers, and research carried out by other authors. This article discusses the similarities and differences between both episodes in relation to the different variables making up the structure of political opportunities. We end by identifying the impacts of both episodes on these structures as well as the state responses when trying to manage the challenges launched by them. Finally, the institutionalisation dynamics followed by both movements were compared and we also examined their conclusions in two different outputs: transformation of the party system in the case of the Spanish 15-M movement and repression and imprisonment of the pro-independence leaders in the Catalan one. To conclude, it is made clear that the chances of social co-mobilisation success increase when political opportunities are broadened, when the existence of allies is proven, and when the opponents' weakness are made evident. However, we also expound how, when faced with intensified protests, government forces and the state apparatus may respond with reform or repression, or with a complex combination of both.

Keywords: structure of political opportunities, democratisation, nationalism, social movements

SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Spain has seen an increase in non-conventional political mobilisation within the framework of an economic, political, and territorial triple crisis (Ubasart, 2020). This generated citizen disaffection with respect to institutions, political values, and the consensus that articulated the transitional political culture (Bonet-Martí and Ubasart-González, 2021). In turn, this was based on pride in the transition to democracy and the 1978 constitution, the sense of compatibility between Spanish national identity and the process of European integration, and a positive or optimistic vision of Spain (Muñoz, 2008, p. 179). To all this we must add the temporal coincidence of two particularly intense episodes of protest: the 15 May anti-austerity movement (15-M or the indignados movement) and the Catalan independence process. Although both episodes have been addressed in the literature in a differentiated way, the former, as an anti-austerity social movement (della Porta, 2015) and the latter as a process of political secession (Guinjoan and Rodon, 2016), in this article we propose their comparison in the context of their interaction with the changes produced within the framework of political opportunity structures (POSs). To this end, we use the protest cycle model elaborated by Tarrow (1992) and the revision of the theories of the political process initiated by Eisinger (1973), Jenkins and Perrow (1977), Tilly (1978), Skocpol (1979), and Kistchelt (1986), developed in greater depth in the studies by Tarrow (1989) and Kriesi (1992, 1996).

Our research on protest cycles began with della Porta and Tarrow (1986), who observed that the protest dynamic tends to concentrate in time and space following a cyclical alternation, triggered by an initial moment of innovation which activates the propensity to take part. This is followed by a second phase of ascent, in which new stakeholders are incorporated and compete with the initial ones until they reach the top. Finally, there is a period of decline in the mobilisation, which may be because of an increase in the costs derived from the spiral of tactical radicalisation; of state repression; the exhaustion of mobilising capacity, or the fact of that protesters consider their demands to have been met. Protest cycles are therefore considered as "aggregates of partly autonomous and partly independent episodes of collective action in which new forms of action emerge and evolve. This sector of the social movement grows and changes in position, and new political opportunities develop, in part as a result of the actions, themes, and departures of movements earlier in the cycle." (Tarrow, 1992, p. 65).

Political process theory (PPT) differs from previous theories by placing the configuration of the state at the centre of the explanatory process, so that the degree of success or failure of the mobilisation varies depending on the opportunities and restrictions present in the political context. According to Almeida (2020), PPT has become one of the most influential proposals for explaining the dynamics of social movements, although other authors such as Gamson and Meyer (1996) have pointed out the deficits of its explanatory potential when trying to cover too broad a set of environmental dimensions.

According to the PPT, "the birth of a social movement, its initial objectives, recruitment of its human forces, organisation (material resources and communication media), form and means of action, discourse, [and] construction of collective identity are determined by structures, contexts, institutions, and political elites" (Ibarra, 2005, p. 119). In this sense, the general objective of this current work was to analyse the interaction between the political system and protest

episodes, and the central explanatory element of this interaction are POSs, to the extent that they are "the set of dimensions or factors of the institutional and political framework that provide incentives or facilitating conditions for the development of a collective response action aimed at influencing policies and/or the democratic configuration" (Gomà, Gonzàlez et al., 2018, p. 31–32).

Although the concept of POSs was used for the first time by Eisenger (1973), Tarrow (1997) contributed the most to its operationalisation by identifying its three dimensions: the degree of openness of political access, the degree of stability of political preferences, and the strategic availability of potential allies; to which he later added the political conflict between elites (Tarrow, 1989). These dimensions were synthesised by McAdam (1996) as the degree of openness of the political system, stability of the alignments between elites, presence or absence of allies between elites, and capacity of the state and its propensity towards repression. Based on these four constitutive dimensions, Kriesi pointed out three general properties in relation to the political system: the "formal institutional structure, informal procedures and strategies in force regarding the challengers, and the configuration of power relevant to the confrontation with them" (Kriesi, 1992, p. 117).

There are different applications of the POSs in Spain, among which the following stand out: those of Adell (2003) for its analysis of the evolution of collective protest during the period of 1975–1996, Sánchez Estellés (2011) for its study of the anti-war movement, Huete (2002) for its analysis of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially those led by Ibarra et al. (2002) and Martí et al. (2018) which aimed to study the incidence of social movements in the creation of public policies. Likewise, in the Catalan case, it is worth noting the work of della Porta et al. (2019) regarding the radicalisation of protest movements and their link with the closure of political opportunities. However, no academic literature comparatively addresses the pro-independence process of 15-M based on the theory of the political process. In this

sense, our objective was to understand how POSs have changed in Spain in relation to the protest cycles associated with the 15-M movement and the Catalan independence process. To do this, we proposed the following specific objectives: highlight and identify the characteristics of protest cycles; compare emerging recurring processes and mechanisms; analyse their impact on the variables and factors comprising POSs; and uncover to what extent these have contributed to modifying their initial configuration.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological design of this work was based on the comparative analysis of two episodes of contention—the movement of the *indignados* (the 'outraged') and the pro-independence process—that share the same temporal and sociopolitical context but present different intensities and territorial variations. Both episodes can be conceived as forms of contentious politics (CP), as long as they meet the criteria set out by McAdam et al. (2005): "the episodic, public, and collective interaction between claimants and their objects when: (a) at least one government is one of the claimants, and (b) the claims, if satisfied, would affect at least one of the claimants."

This work was based on a comparative analysis in order to identify variables that have favoured social and political opportunity, their relationship with institutional politics, the margins that have opened to

non-institutional political action, as well as alliances and divisions established with political elites and the responses of the political system to the actions and claims of the challengers. Specifically, we identified the following variables: access to institutions, orientation at the governmental level, conflict between elites, changes in political alignments, the system of alliances and conflicts, and the variation in the degree of repression, which demonstrates the capacity of the state to manage conflict in both episodes. The analysis of these variables allowed us to identify both the changes in the POSs and the impacts of CP on the political system.

ANALYSIS OF PROTEST CYCLES

To analyse the dynamics of protest cycles, we used different indicators. According to Tilly and Wood (2010), demonstrations constitute one of the main repertoires of contemporary cosmopolitan protest insofar as they are configured as an expression of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (WUNC). In this sense, we used an analysis performed by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Centre for Sociological Research or CIS) of a series of people who declared having attended a demonstration in the 12 months prior as an indicator for Spain. In turn, for Catalonia we used an analysis from the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinion (Center of Opinion Studies or CEO) as well as the number of reported and prohibited demonstrations included in the national statistical records.

**Figure 1** **Demonstration attendance in the 12 months prior.**
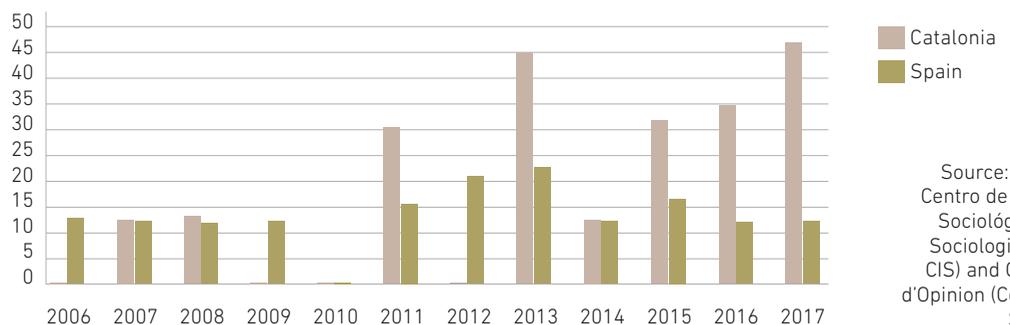
Source: series from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Centre for Sociological Research or CIS) and Centre d'Estudis d'Opinion (Center of Opinion Studies or CEO).

As shown in figure 1, since 2011, there has been a rise in protests both in Catalonia and Spain, as reflected in the increase in the percentage of people who said they had attended a demonstration. This coincided with the emergence of the *indignados* movement and reached its peak in 2013 followed by a downward trend that ended by adopting values similar to those from before the beginning of the cycle. This evolution contrasts with the Catalan cycle in which the tendency was similar to the Spanish case in the initial phase. However, in 2016, there was an upturn in the mobilisation that reached its climax in 2017, coinciding with the referendum on 1 October. It is also evident how, from 2011, the percentage of protest attendees doubled that of the whole of Spain, even tripling it in 2017. However, it should also be noted that this data did not discriminate the orientation of the demonstrations and so, in the Catalan case, the effect of the anti-independence demonstrations held in 2017 must also be considered.

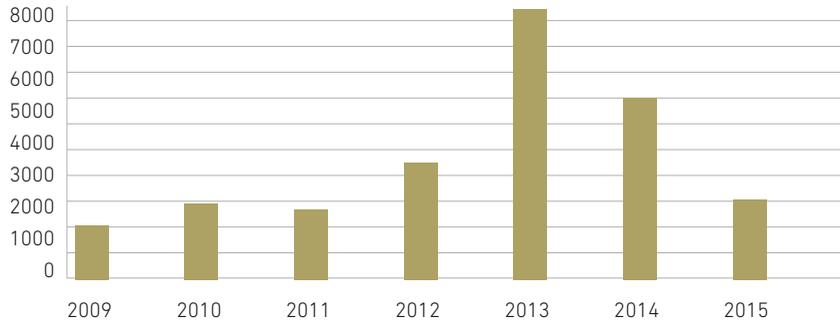**Figure 2** **Demonstrations reported.**
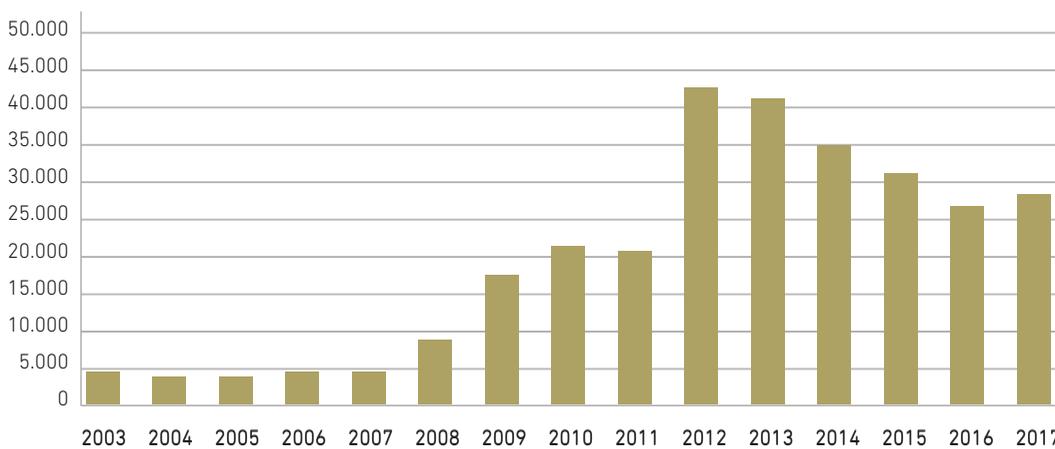
Source: *Anuario Estadístico del Ministerio de Interior* (the Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of the Interior).

According to the indicator of the demonstrations communicated to the Ministry of the Interior[1] (figure 2) there was a trend similar to that shown in figure 1. Starting in 2008, coinciding with the eruption of the crisis, an increase in the mobilising cycle began that reached its peak in 2012 (doubling the size of the demonstrations from the previous year). This was followed by the subsequent start of a downturn, although it still maintained values much higher than those from the start of the cycle. However, this frequency indicator did not inform us about the actual participation in these demonstrations. Nonetheless, it is relevant to understand the spirals of competition and tactical radicalisation that articulate protest cycles, given that an increase in the number of actors involved leads to an increase in the frequency of demonstration calls.

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1 The data from these series do not include the demonstrations called in Catalonia and the Basque Country from 2011 because these are both regional powers. Although, under other conditions, this absence would be problematic, this disaggregation was useful for the purposes of our research in order to differentiate the evolution of the cycle in both territories.
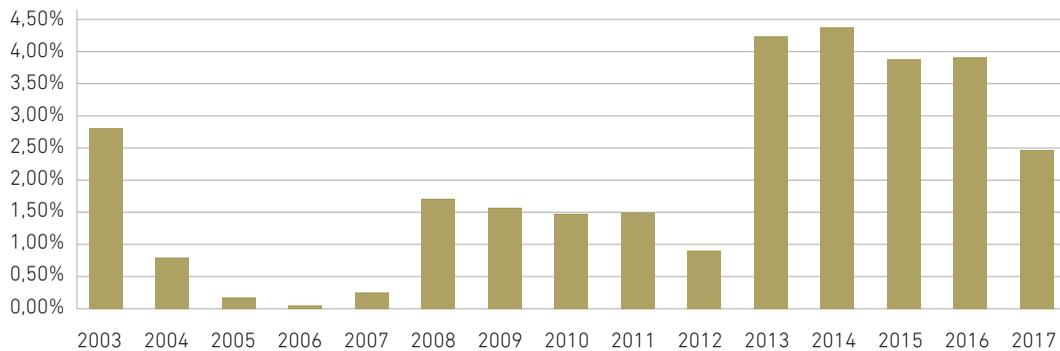
Figure 3 **Manifestations reported in Catalonia.**

In the Catalan case (figure 3), a similar trend to the previous figure was evident, reaching its climax in 2013, followed by a trend of decline. However, the Department of the Interior has not made the data for the 2016–2017 period public, and so we cannot verify whether a rebound in frequency similar to that shown in figure 1 was repeated.

Figure 3 **Banned demonstrations out of the total number of demonstrations held.**

If we look at the ratio between prohibited and reported demonstrations (figure 4), there is evidence of initial growth in the ratio in the 2008–2011 period coinciding with the crisis, followed by a substantial increase during the 2013–2014 biennium that, as Camps Calvet and Vergés (2015) pointed out, may indicate an increase in the capacity of the state's repressive management in the downward phase of the protest cycle.

COMPARISON BETWEEN MOVEMENTS

Comparison of the two dynamics shows the similarities and differences between them both in relation to the POSs (table 3). To achieve this, we first explored the patterns governing the form of mobilisation (table 1) and then explored the character of both these movements which had been progressively imprinting the shaping of this cycle (table 2).

Table 1 **Comparative chronology.**

	15-M			Independence process	
PHASE I: Taking public squares	05/15/2011 'Real Democracy Now' demonstration which began with the occupation of public squares. 27/05/2011 Failed eviction of the Plaza Cataluña (120 wounded). 15/06/2011 'Stop Parliament' mobilisation (Barcelona) against governmental spending cuts. In 2014, 20 people were tried in National Court for this act. 15/08/2011 Eviction from the Plaza del Sol.		PHASE I: 'Right to decide' citizen initiative	18/02/2006 'We are a nation, and we have the right to decide' demonstration against the public spending cuts defined in the Statute, organised by the Right to Decide Platform (RDP). 13/09/2009 Citizen consultation in Arenys de Munt that started the different waves of citizen consultations; 812,934 votes in favour of independence. 10/06/2010 'We are a nation, we decide' demonstration against the Constitutional Court ruling, organised by Òmnium Cultural.	
PHASE II: Citizen tides	15/10/2011 Global demonstration called in 951 cities in 82 countries. 25/09/2012 'Surround Congress' demonstration (34 arrested and 64 injured). 14/11/2012 General European Strike against austerity policies. 23/03/2013 'Citizen surge' against the devastated markets.		PHASE II: Institutional cooptation	11/09/2012 September 11 'Catalonia, new state of Europe' demonstration organised by the Catalan National Assembly. 25/09/2012 Catalan elections: Convergència i Unió (Convergence and Union, or CiU), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia, or ERC), and Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidacy, or CUP reached a total of 1,741,088 votes (47.87%). 09/11/2014 Participatory process on the political future of Catalonia: 1,897,274 votes in favour of independence.	
PHASE III: Institutionalisation of the movement	14/01/2014 The 'Manifiesto Mover Ficha' (Make a Move Manifesto): to turn indignation into political change. 22/03/2014 The 'Dignity' marches. 01/04/2014 European Parliament Elections. 24/05/2015 Municipal Elections.		PHASE III: Challenge to the State by the autonomous political power	27/09/2015 Catalan Elections: Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes) party and the CUP total was 1,966,508 votes (47.8%). 01/10/2017 Independence Referendum. 2,044,038 votes in favour of independence. 03/10/2017 Anti-repression work stoppage. 27/10/2017 Declaration of independence and temporary suspension of self-government (via article 155 CE of the Spanish Constitution).	

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on hemerographic data.

According to table 1, we can establish three phases: a first one running from May 2011 up until the eviction of the Plaza del Sol, with its epicentre in the occupation of public squares that were converted into a WUNC demonstration of the movement. In this first phase, the seizure of public squares and demand for 'real democracy' functioned as repertoires of innovation, imitating those developed in Tahrir Square in Cairo and Syntagma Square in Athens, and later replicated in Zuccotti Park by Occupy Wall Street (Bonet-Martí, 2015a).

The second phase began with a global demonstration on 15 October 2011 and the creation of the *mareas ciudadanas* (citizen surges). This phase was marked by the transfer of protest dynamics to neighbourhoods and demonstrations in defence of public services, as well as the rise of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (platform for those [negatively] affected by mortgages or PAH). In this phase, the CP was reinforced by incorporation of the main trade unions—the Comisiones Obreras (Workers' Commissions or CCOO) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers or UGT)—which had not been very present during the first phase, and culminated in the General European Strike of 2012. The citizen surge of 2013 and citizen consultation on public health held between 5 and 10 May 2013 also converged in these demonstrations. This second phase was marked by the new political cycle that configured access to the right to power, which would motivate measures such as 'Surround Congress' in 2012, that called for a constituent process and an audit of the public debt to be opened. Likewise, there was a shift in the discursive framework of the challengers: the emphasis started to be placed more on social democracy than on the democratic regeneration that had galvanised the first phase.

Finally, in 2014, the decline phase was articulated, coinciding with the beginning of its institutionalisation process. This crystallised in the European elections in which Podemos burst onto the scene as a new political formation and in the municipal elections of 2015, in which different citizen platforms won the mayoralties of different Spanish cities.

We can also establish three phases, in relation to the pro-independence process, albeit over a longer period of time. The first began with the Plataforma por el Derecho a Decidir (Right to Decide Platform or RDP) demonstration in 2006. This mobilisation was discursively framed within the demand for the right to decide upon independence, but also by the organisation of citizen demonstrations by entities that were autonomous from the political parties. In this phase, the mobilising initiative was sponsored by citizen organisations, firstly by the RDP and, from the July 2010 demonstration onwards, by Òmnium Cultural, which in this period adopted a marked political vocation in favour of the demand for a referendum on self-determination. The public debate from this period concentrated both on the question of the constitutionality of the 2006 statute and on the successive waves of citizen consultations for independence. Therefore, three key elements were articulated in this phase: emergence of the discursive framework around the right to decide, massive demonstrations called by various organisations, and use of consultation as an element of democratic innovation.

The second phase began with the 11 September 2012 demonstration and extended up until the participatory process on 9 November 2014. This phase corresponded to the partial co-optation of the process by Catalan institutions and elites. The mobilising initiative remained within the entities, but leadership of the process was shared with the Catalan executive, which initiated a sovereigntist paradigm shift by publicly committing itself to organise a consultation on the political future of Catalonia. In this second phase, Òmnium and the recently created Assemblea Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly, or ANC) continued to function as a motor for citizen demonstrations, but also as a pressure group demanding that a binding referendum be held.

Finally, a third phase can be seen that began in the 2015 elections and corresponded to the phase of defiance of the state, culminating in the call for the unilateral referendum for independence on 1 October 2017. The institutionalisation/governmentalisation of

the movement took place in this third phase, with hybridisation between entities and political parties through the Junts pel Sí (Together for Yes) candidacy and the assumption of a clearly confrontational dynamic of political struggle between the Catalan executive led by Carles Puigdemont and the Spanish government. The discursive framework of the right to decide was progressively replaced by that of independence during this phase. Likewise, the repressive response of the state culminated in a progressive judicialisation of the conflict and in the temporary suspension of self-government via article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, as well as imprisonment of the main pro-independence leaders. From 27 October 2017, we can consider that the process entered a fourth phase, marked by the mobilising anti-repression dynamics, a demand for amnesty, constitution of a negotiating table, and a pardon decree by the Spanish government in June 2021. The latter requires a separate in-depth analysis, which is why we limited our analysis to the period of 2011–2017 to exclude it. Table 2 compiles an initial comparison between both these episodes.

Table 2 **Comparison between the 15-M and independence process movements.**

	15-M	**Independence process**
Time dimension	2011–2014	2006-2017
Spatial dimension	Main Spanish cities.	Whole territory of Catalonia.
Objectives of the claim	End bipartisanship. Democratisation of society.	The 'right to decide.' Independence of Catalonia.
Dimensions	Social Democracy	Territorial Democracy
Outputs	Creation of the Podemos political party and municipal citizen platforms. Transformation of the party system. Citizen Safety Law and Penal Code Reform.	Increased support for independence. Transformation of the nationalist centre-right into an independentist movement. Imprisonment of the pro-independence leaders. Chronification of the territorial conflict.
Simultaneous global events	Arab Spring. Anti-austerity protests (Greece and Occupy Wall Street, etc.).	Scottish independence referendum in 2014.

Source: Prepared by the authors

Likewise, we must point out the effect that global historical events of the time had. In the case of 15-M, it is worth noting the imitating and reinforcing the effect of the Arab Spring and anti-austerity protests, which opened a window of opportunity (Romanos, 2016) or, in the same way, the effect that the Scottish referendum had on the Catalan independence process (Castelló et al., 2016).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

The application of the POSs analysis model for the two movements (table 3), including a detailed visualisation of the system of alliances each movement articulated with institutional political actors (figure 5) and the type of relationships that predominated in each case (figure 6), completes the panorama of the political relationships that make it possible to understand how the closing of this protest cycle occurred.

Table 3 **Structure of political opportunities.**

| Dimensions	15-M	Independence process
Institutional access	Only at the local level at the end of the third phase.	Access to Catalan institutions.
Centrality of power	Central power oriented.	Oriented towards autonomous political power.
Conflict between elites	Weakness of the Partido So-cialista Obrero Es-pañol (Span-ish Socialist Workers Party, or PSOE) government in dealing with the beginning of the protests.	Conflict between elites according to their level of government (autonomous versus central).
Change of political alignments/ elections	General Election 2012 (PSOE–PP alternation). European elections 2014 (49.05% bipartisanship).	Catalan elections 2012 (institutional coop-tation). Catalan elections 2015 (institutionalisation).
Alliance system	Sindicatos, IU, partidos nacionalistas de izquierdas (desarrollado en la Figura 5)	Partidos políticos nacionalistas/inde-pendentistas (desarrollado en la Figura 5)
Conflict system	Bipartisanship. Economic powers.	Spanish government. Judicial power.
Degree of repression	Eviction of the Plaza Catalunya and Plaza del Sol. Repression of the Dignity Marches and Surround Congress actions. Trial of detainees from the Stop Parliament mobilisation.	Suppression 1–0. Initiation of a sedition crime offence. Imprisonment of pro-independence leaders.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 3 shows the differences in the POSs. In relation to institutional access, the 15-M movement only managed to access the institution in the municipal elections of 2015, while the Catalan process achieved this goal in 2012 through partial cooptation. This institutional access was associated with the orientation of the movements. While 15-M directed its demands towards the central executive (that maintained a strategy of exclusion), the pro-independence process did so in relation to the autonomous executive (which showed itself to be permeable to the assumption of its claim agenda).

In relation to the processes of conflict/misalignment between elites, in the case of 15-M, this was reflected in the weakness of the PSOE executive because of the imposition of austerity policies, which resulted in its inability to manage the protest in its initial phases. In turn, in the independence process, this misalignment of elites became evident with the initial cooptation and conversion of the ruling nationalist centre-right into an independentist movement. However, at the national level, the independence movement failed to establish a solid system of alliances; it had

only gathered the support of Unido Podemos and the Basque and Galician nationalist groups, while the rest of the main parties were aligned with the Spanish government, as reflected in the Senate's vote on Article 155.

Figure 5 represents the systems of alliances between 15-M and the Catalan independence process represented in concentric circles according to the analysis model by Bonet-Martí (2015b) for 15-M. Because the systems of alliances evolved over time, we focused on

Table 3 **The 15-M alliance system (2011–2013) and pro-independence process (2012–2017).**
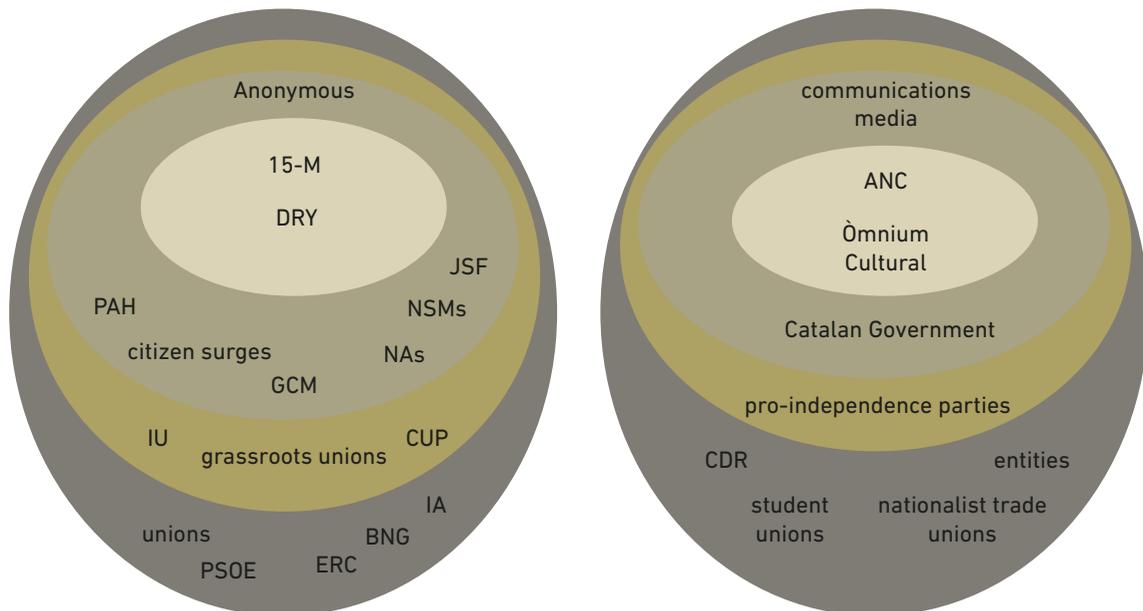
the 2011–2013 period for 15-M and the 2015–2017 period for the independence process. The central circle in each diagram shows the stakeholders who acted as the drivers of each episode. In the case of 15-M, we identified the plazas and Democracia Real Ya (real democracy now, or DRY) movements, while in the case of the independence process, we identified the ANC and Òmnium Cultural.

In the adjacent circle, we find the Catalan government from the institutionalisation phase onwards, while in the case of 15-M we find the organisations and movements most directly involved in the organisation of the public squares protests and their subsequent transfer to neighbourhood and sectoral protests: the PAH, Juventud sin Futuro (Youth without a Future,

or JSF), neighbourhood associations (NAs), grassroots Christian movements, new social movements (NSMs), citizen surges in defence of public services, and the hacktivist group Anonymous. In the third circle from the decision-making centre, in the case of the independence process, we can find the pro-independence parties—Esquerra Republicana (Republican Left), Convergencia Democrática (Democratic Convergence) re-founded as the Partido Demócrata Europeo Catalán (Catalan European Democratic Party, or PDeCAT), and the electoral coalition Junts pel Sí that incorporated the aforementioned groups and the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidacy, or CUP)—and especially the Catalan media system represented by the media of the Catalan Audiovisual Media Corporation (TV3 and Catalunya Radio) and some private

communication groups. In the case of 15-M were the grassroots unions such as the Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labour, or CGT) and Confederazione dei Comitati di Base (Confederation of Grassroots Committees, or COBAS), Izquierda Unida (United Left), and the CUP.

Finally, in the last sphere of alliance, but without decision-making capacity regarding the mobilising dynamics of the phase currently being analysed, in the case of the independence process it is worth mentioning the Referendum defence committees—later called Committees for the Defence of the Republic—created just prior to 1 October and which acquired a greater role in the fourth anti-repressive phase, independentist student unions, and nationalist minority unions. While in the case of 15-M, in a more remote position and in contradictory senses, we can find the majority unions (UGT and CCOO) and the leftist parties: the PSOE, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia, or ERC), Abertzale Left, Galician Nationalist Bloc, and Coalició Compromís (the Compromise Coalition).

In relation to the conflict system, in the case of 15-M this was marked, on the one hand, by opposition to the bipartisanship represented by the two main parties, the Partido Popular (Popular Party or PP) and PSOE, and to economic powers and financial capital. On the other hand, in relation to the process, the conflict system was in opposition to the Spanish executive, Constitutional Court, and, as of 2017, also the judiciary, after the latter held trials for disobedience and embezzlement for holding the 9-N consultation and for those derived from holding the referendum on 1 October. Finally, in relation to the degree of repression, it is evident how both movements led to a change in anti-repressive strategies. While as a result of 15-M, there was evidence of an increase in the repressive dynamics that culminated in the approval of Organic Law 4/15, of 30 March on the Protection of Citizen Safety, popularly known as the Gag Law, as well as reform of the Penal Code. The repressive dynamics of the process were concentrated especially in the political elites after the consultation on 1 November, and especially after the referendum on 1 October, and it would not be until 2018 and especially, 2019 that it would begin to spread to all citizens as a result of protests against the sentence.

Figure 6 System of relationships between stakeholders
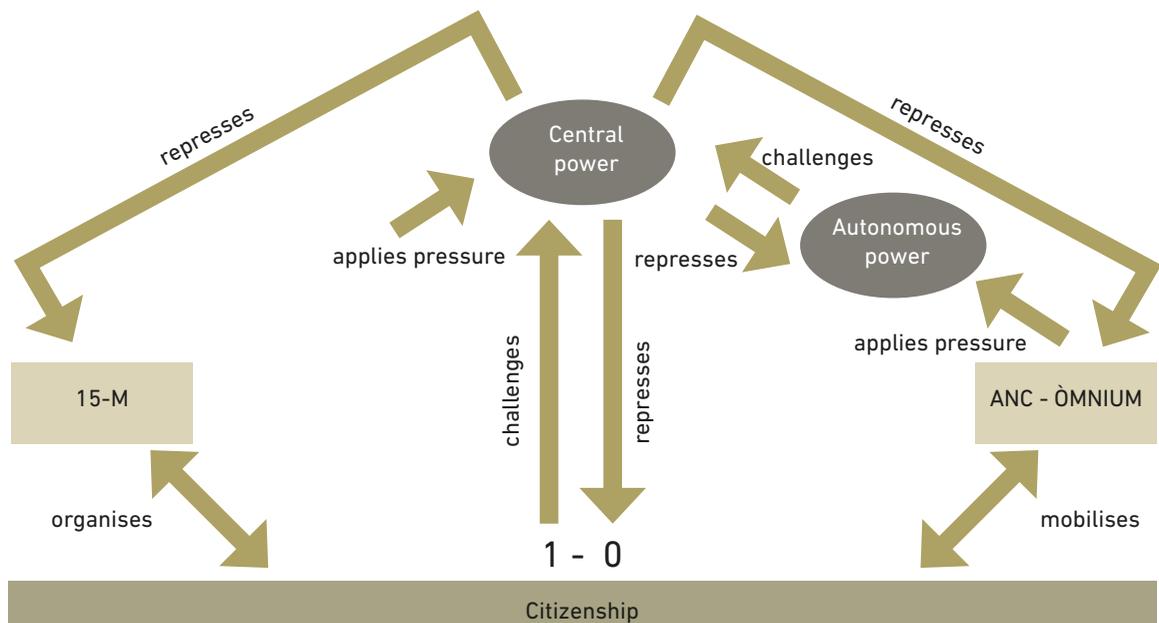
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 6 identifies the relationships between the different actors comprising 15-M and the independence process. As represented, the central actors in the process did not put pressure directly on the state but rather, on Catalan political powers so that they would challenge the state. They simultaneously mobilised citizens by connecting various enclaves of action to facilitate their participation in pro-independence demonstrations. These then turned into WUNC demonstrations through the performativity of the demonstration activities: the demonstrations of 11 September were meticulously organised by the convening entities to develop a form of patriotic performance (Dowling, 2020) that aimed to strengthen the nation-building process (García, 2016). This dynamic of citizen mobilisation culminated in their involvement in the challenge represented by the referendum of 1 October, which would lead to episodes of police repression. Likewise, it is worth noting how the two repertoires of mobilisation (demonstration and consultation) ended up coming together in the case of the referendum on 1 October.

15-M emerged as an expression and instrument of citizen organisation with the goal of demanding the end of social spending cuts and austerity policies by the state, as well as petitioning for greater citizen participation. Nonetheless, challenges to the state were concentrated in the WUNC demonstrations as occupation of public squares and later, through actions such as Surround Congress or the Dignity Marches. Unlike the pro-independence model, which exhibited marked protest ritualisation, the 15-M mobilisations were dominated by spontaneity, the dynamics of self-organisation, and use of techno-politics as an extension of the conversation in public squares and as a device for coordinating their protests (Monterde, 2015).

The state had differing responses to the two movements. In the indignados movement they opted for a dynamic of police containment which later translated into legislative reforms against the guarantee of individual rights. In turn, in the case of the independence process, the initial repression was administrative—through judicial warnings—and only in 2017, did this become a police and judicial matter with the imprisonment of the leaders of the independence process and prosecutions of citizens who organised the referendum via police intervention.

IMPACTS ON POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Both 15-M and the independence process emerged in a context marked by the crisis in legitimacy of the transitional political culture, as shown by the breakdown of the consensus on the social and territorial model (Bonet-Martí and Ubasart-González, 2021). While there was agreement that the origin of the rupture of the consensus on the social model lay in the imposition of austerity policies and social cuts in response to the economic crisis of 2008–2014, there was greater debate about where to place the origin of the territorial crisis: in the 31/2010 ruling declaring certain articles of the Catalan Statute as unconstitutional, in the beginning of the statutory process in 2006 (Vilaregut, 2011), or even in the unrest generated by the centralising shift developed during the second Aznar government. In any case, these two trends converged from 2011 to 2017 and are at the root of the episodes of contention examined in this current study insofar as they involved an accumulation of grievances that acted as catalytic mechanisms.

On the one hand, it should be noted that the rise in support for the Catalan demand for independence was driven by elements of national identity but also by pragmatic–instrumental reasons (Muñoz and Tormos, 2015) that allowed the movement to penetrate beyond its traditional enclaves. Two phenomena have contributed to this: the discursive frameworks activated by redefining the demand for independence in a democratising key, and the role played by the Catalan media, especially from the second phase of the pro-independence process onwards. In fact, instead of serving as a means of moderation for political claims, institutionalisation of the Catalan process operated as a radicalisation

mechanism by transforming the initial citizen claim into an institutional challenge (Bonet-Martí and Ubasart-González, 2021).

It is also evident how alignment of part of the Catalan elite with the pro-independence process expanded the sphere of opportunities for collective action by amplifying the echo of the demand, especially through the use of the media. The cohesion of elites at the state level, in this case using the state media to amplify their position in defence of territorial integrity, entailed an institutional polarisation that led to the current chronification of the conflict (Bonet-Martí and Ubasart-González, 2021). In relation to the repressive dimension, as Camps Calvet and Di Nella (2020) pointed out, the capacity to manage the social conflict derived from 15-M was developed by increasing police operators. In particular, this was achieved by modifying the Criminal Code and Law 4/2015 on citizen safety, which gave the State greater scope to punish behaviours associated with

protest as crimes against public order. They also used administrative offences, involving the use of new criminal offences (crimes against state institutions) and the use of a single jurisdiction to the detriment of judges of ordinary jurisdiction (as opposed to one appointed to hear a specific issue), through the intervention of the Audiencia Nacional in the case of the Stop Parliament trial. On the other hand, the repressive strategy in relation to the independence process implied an aggravation of criminal offenses (the crime of sedition) and imprisonment of the leaders of the independence movement after the referendum on 1 October 2017.

Finally, in relation to the impacts of these events on the political system, we can distinguish, following Kriesi (1992), between procedural impacts, the capacity of movements to open channels of participation, substantive impacts, the political changes achieved by the movement, and structural impacts as those that affected the configuration of the system.

Table 4 Comparison of impacts

	15-M	Proceso independentista
Procedural impacts	Promotion of citizen participation and social innovation.	Creation of an informal structure of coordination between entities and the government to hold the 1 October referendum.
Substantive impacts	Democratic regeneration policies (transparency, ethical codes, and anti-corruption measures, etc.).	Policies for the creation of so-called state structures suspended by the Constitutional Court.
Structural impacts	Transformation of the party system. Transformation of the repressive strategy. Creating new opportunities for new expressions of protest.	Political polarisation around the territorial divide. Transformation of the repressive strategy.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 4 shows the impacts both these mobilisations have had on the configuration of the political system. In relation to the procedural impacts, it is evident that although 15-M did not manage to institutionalise an access route to the political system, its demands did contribute to strengthening new channels of communication between the institution and citizenry through a deepening of citizen participation and the promotion of social innovation (Pradel and García, 2018). While in relation to the independence process, the procedural impact was produced informally, through the creation of a coordination structure between entities and part of the Catalan executive, informally called 'the general staff of the process', which was responsible for organising the referendum on 1 October (Casas, Pruna, Martínez et al., 2019).

In relation to substantive impacts, it is worth noting the concern on the part of administrations to establish legal reforms aimed at curbing revolving doors (Law 3/2015) and increasing transparency (Law 19/2013) and the accountability of political parties (Organic Law 3/2015). Meanwhile, in relation to the pro-independence process, the most important substantive impacts were related to the creation of the self-styled 'state structures': the Catalan treasury, project to create a Catalan social protection agency, and plans to control strategic infrastructures suspended by the Constitutional Court.

What we can anticipate for the moment is that both 15-M and the pro-independence process will operate as two key vectors of collective mobilisation framing a political cycle whose resolution is still in dispute; we still do not know whether it will lead to a democratising or a de-democratising process. We can also anticipate that at stake in the resulting EOP of the period is the strengthening or weakening of the state's real capacity to manage the diverse set of demands and dynamics that are active today (including the rise of the extreme right). In this regard, our research indicates that the complex combination of legal reforms, resorting to judicialisation of the protest, and use of police repression are, together, more the response of a weak structure. However, neither the type of state that offers it nor its character is very evident, because these aspects have been masked by a dynamic of intensified demand for more democracy, both by the mobilisations of 15-M and by the independence process in Catalonia. If the response of the Spanish State was indeed that of a weak state (as we affirm in light of our current analysis), then a process of de-democratisation has probably been promoted from 2017 onwards, because "in weak states, de-democratisation takes place even more frequently than in medium and strong states (…)" (Tilly, 2007, p. 207). However, on the contrary, if what has been exposed is a low level of development of its democratic culture (and this is the reason for the repressive and judicial response) then, even if the current state is strong in terms of its organisational and institutional capacity, it will also be less democratic culturally.

The most significant structural impact of 15-M was the transformation of the party system, marking the end of the two-party dynamics after the 2015 European elections. It is also worth mentioning the transformation of the repressive strategy and creation of new opportunities for protest that would later be seized by the feminist movement in the mass mobilisations of 8 March and 25 March 2018 and 2019, demonstrations in defence of the pension system in 2018, and mobilisations against climate change by the Fridays for Future movement. While, in the Catalan case, the structural impacts were concentrated, above all, in the transformation of the repressive strategy through the use of certain types of criminal offences (sedition) which would lead to a new stage in the independence process, marked by an anti-repressive dynamic and protests against the sentencing of the pro-independence leaders.

CONCLUSIONS

As has become evident in the course of this article, both movements contributed to the crisis of transitional consensus. On the one hand, by challenging

both the modernising narrative inherited from the transition and the territorial integration project—which led to the radicalisation of Catalan nationalism in the form of independence—and as a reaction to the resurgence of an exclusionary Spanish nationalism represented by the entry of the extreme right into institutions. Likewise, on the side of 15-M, it has also made visible the authoritarian enclaves still present in the judicial system, as reflected in the repressive dynamics represented by the approval of Organic Law 4/2015, of 30 March, on the protection of citizen safety and the reform of the criminal code in 2015. In turn, the pro-independence movement has made visible the judicial persecution of the Catalan elites sponsoring the process, followed by police repression against participants in the referendum of 1 October and in subsequent mobilisations against the conviction of pro-independence leaders. In conclusion, the main premise of the POSs model is evident: the chances of success of calling for protest and social mobilisation increase when political opportunities are expanded, when allies are demonstrated, and when opponents' weaknesses are highlighted. However, its other complementary premise was also affirmed: in the face of intensified protest, government forces and the state apparatus have a range of response choices, varying from reform when faced with pressure from demonstrations, repression of demonstrations, or a complex simultaneous combination of both these options.

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