

BETWEEN CENTER-PERIPHERY AND LEFT-RIGHT: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NEW REGIONALIST PARTIES' STRATEGIES IN GALICIA DURING THE GREAT RECESSION

Entre centro-periferia e izquierda-derecha:
una comparación de las estrategias de nuevos
y viejos partidos regionalistas en Galicia
durante la Gran Recesión

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Abstract

This article explains the rise, success, and subsequent failure of new challenger formations in the Galician party system during the Great Recession. For that, it focuses on the multidimensional electoral strategies developed by Alternativa Galega de Esquerda (AGE) and En Marea, comparing them to that of the traditional Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG). Our analysis shows the different strategies displayed by the BNG and new challengers (AGE, and later En Marea), examining both the electoral supply (framing and party programmatic positions) and demand (voter positions). We find a new subsuming strategy developed by AGE and En Marea, which prioritized left-wing anti-austerity policies over core pro-periphery ones. The paper demonstrates the potential of this new strategy during the Great Recession but

also its limitations, linking its demise to the organizational weakness that prevented electoral realignment, and ultimately allowed the BNG to regain its leading role in the territorial dimension of competition.

Keywords

Regionalist parties; Galicia; internal colonialism; Great Recession; subsuming strategies.

Resumen

Este artículo explica el nacimiento, éxito y posterior fracaso de las nuevas formaciones políticas en el sistema de partidos de Galicia durante la Gran Recesión. Para ello, el artículo se centra en las estrategias de competición multidimensionales desarrolladas por Alternativa Galega de Esquerda (AGE) y En Marea, comparándolas con las del Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG). Nuestro análisis muestra las diferencias en las estrategias planteadas por los nuevos y viejos partidos regionalistas en Galicia, para lo que tomamos en consideración tanto la oferta política (programas electorales) como la demanda (posiciones de los votantes). Nuestros resultados muestran una diferente estrategia de subsunción desarrollada por AGE y En Marea, la cual prioriza aspectos de izquierda sobre los que tienen que ver con el eje centro-periferia que en teoría caracteriza a los partidos regionalistas. El artículo señala el potencial de esta estrategia durante la Gran Recesión, pero también sus limitaciones. Las debilidades organizacionales de los nuevos partidos regionalistas evitaron un realineamiento electoral completo, permitiendo que el BNG recuperase en 2020 su liderazgo dentro del espacio nacionalista gallego.

Palabras clave

Partidos regionalistas; Galicia; colonialismo interno; Gran Recesión; estrategias de subsunción.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Great Recession that hit Europe after 2008, the specialized literature on political parties mainly focused on the emergence of challenger parties competing on new issues, the restructuring of dimensions of electoral competition, and the overall effects of the crises on party systems at the national level (Chaisty and Whitefield, 2020; De Vries and Hobolt, 2020; Hernández and Kriesi, 2015; Hobolt and Tilley, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Hutter *et al.*, 2018). However, the literature largely remained silent as to the early impact of the Great Recession on the territorial dimension of competition, the electoral space of regionalist parties (RPs), and the old and new politicized issues in subnational spaces (for exceptions see Cuadras-Morató and Rodon, 2018; Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Pérez, 2013; Máiz and Ares, 2018; Rico, 2012, Massetti 2018).

This paper focuses on the case of the Galician party system during the Recession to explain the rise and fall of new challenger parties that combined territorial demands with anti-austerity politics. The Galician party system during the Great Recession showed the weakness of the traditional left-wing RP (the BNG) to adapt to a new economic and political scenario, and the paralleled emergence of a challenger coalition (Alternativa Galega de Esquerda, AGE). AGE was the first coalition of parties created in Spain in the heat of the Great Recession in 2012, and it combined a regionalist splinter party from the BNG, Anova, as well as two regional branches of statewide parties, Esquerda Unida (EU), and the ecology party Equo (as well as a minor green party from Galicia, Espazo ecosocialista). On October 22nd, the results of the 2012 regional elections evidenced the success of the new challenger formation, AGE, and the electoral failure of the traditional BNG. For the first time since 1989 the BNG faced successful competition, losing its long-lasting

character as the leading RP in Galicia. However, and despite this electoral outbreak and the fact that the subsequent En Marea, created in 2015 (a coalition integrating the main partners of AGE and other parties), managed to secure the second position in the 2016 regional elections, the electoral change proved to be short-lived. By 2020 the BNG took back its position as the leading Galician RP. In turn, En Marea signed its dissolution in September 2020, putting an end to the trajectory of new challenger RPs.

Building upon an in-depth examination of the Galician case, we investigate the changing interaction between the dominant traditional territorial core ideology of RPs (identity and self-government) and the second left-right dimension in a context shaped by the Great Recession. Our case study-approach is most importantly supported by the focus on descriptive inferences, exploratory analysis, and causal mechanisms (rather than causal effects) including interactions between factors (Gerring, 2004). It focuses on pathways rather than causal relationships (Blatter and Blume, 2008), and as such can be understood as an example of case-oriented research prioritizing the explanation of a particular outcome rather than testing/creating theories (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). Following this design, our study provides a fine-grained narrative to show that center-periphery and left-right politics are still inextricably linked in old and new Galician politics. However, while the traditional BNG subsumed left-right politics into the center-periphery dimension, new challengers altered the strategy, subsuming center-periphery into left-right politics. Our study also evidences the challenges associated with the strategy developed by new RPs in Galicia, ultimately leading to incomplete electoral realignments, organizational disarray, and the disappearance of En Marea in September 2020.

The main results of this paper, which complement previous analysis with a more quantitative orientation (Máiz and Ares, 2018), contribute to the understanding of rapid changes in the multidimensional electoral platforms of RPs in the peripheries (Alonso *et al.*, 2017). We consider the generalizability of main results in the last section. In this vein it is crucial to highlight that Galicia is a representative setting to analyze political competition in European peripheries for two reasons. Previously an objective 1 region in the European regional programs, and more recently part of the regions under the cohesive policy framework of the European Union (2014-2020), Galician economy is characteristic of a relatively poor backward peripheral region. While the Great Recession was not especially virulent in Galicia, the inability to respond to the economic decline reinforced previous regional inequalities vis-à-vis other Autonomous Communities (Cuadrado-Roura and Maroto, 2016), and fueled anti-austerity politics. Second, the region has always exhibited a multidimensional space with a strong link between center-periphery

and left-right politics, a clear-cut example of left-wing nationalism since the inception of the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) in 1982, which corresponds to the ideal type of “internal colonialism” (Hecther, 1975).

The article proceeds as follows. The first section presents the framework to analyze regionalist parties’ positioning in multidimensional spaces of competition and the rise of new challengers. This theoretical framework will be applied to explain the origins and evolution of RPs’ positioning in Galicia in the following second and third sections. Here we compare the alternative subsuming strategies of BNG and AGE-En Marea laying out their supply and demand and their respective electoral trajectories during the past decade. The fourth section explores the organizational issues that contributed to the demise of En Marea, its electoral failure and disappearance in September 2020. The fifth section concludes with the implications of this political trajectory for our understanding of party system change during the Recession and the evolution of the territorial dimension of competition with the rise and fall of new RPs.

II. THEORIZING REGIONALIST CHALLENGER PARTIES IN THE PERIPHERIES

RPs are a manifestation of the contemporary relevance of the center-periphery cleavage theorized by Lipset and Rokkan (1976), as they focus on territorially defined identities and look to increase self-government, aiming to transform the organization of the state in different forms: from autonomy to independence, obtain, maintain, or increase self-government for the territory they represent (Alonso, 2012; De Winter and Tursan, 1998; De Winter *et al.* 2006; Massetti and Schakel, 2015). RPs present a special relation to the territory, as they look to modify the vertical allocation of political power to benefit a specific region, which is ontologically different from other regions (Keating, 2009; Mazzoleni and Mueller, 2017). In fact, the importance of the territory for RPs is such that some considered they are only interested in issues related to the center-periphery cleavage. Accordingly, some scholars suggest RPs prefer unidimensional forms of competition, focusing exclusively on a pro-periphery niche (Adams *et al.*, 2006; Meguid, 2005; Wagner, 2011).

However, and despite the unquestioned salience of territorial issues, many theories on RPs underscore that their strategies of competition are multidimensional, which is well reflected in their complex and diverse political platforms (De Winter and Tursan, 1998; Elias *et al.*, 2015; Massetti and Schakel, 2015). In this regard, Alonso, Cabeza and Gómez (2017) argue that

RPs exhibit a complex issue structure, offering different “issue packages” and a high degree of diversification in their programs, and many authors highlight that, besides territorial identity, a secondary left-right dimension of competition is very relevant in the politics of RPs (Dandoy and Sandri, 2006; Erk, 2010; Massetti, 2009; De Winter *et al.*, 2006; De Winter and Tursan 1998). Thus, RPs commonly compete on two electoral dimensions (i.e., center-periphery and left-right), even if other dimensions may also exist (De Winter and Tursan, 1998).

Elias *et al.* (2015) argue based on a combination of party positioning, issue emphasis, and issue framing, that political parties in two-dimension competition spaces can choose between four prototypical strategies. First, “unidimensional” strategies prioritize a single core dimension of competition, being it left-right or center-periphery, ruling out other dimensions (as proposed by definitions of ERPs as niche parties). Second, parties following “blurring” strategies choose a primary dimension of competition and adopt ambiguous positions regarding the second one. Third, parties preferring “subsuming” strategies also choose a main dimension of competition but treat the second dimension coherently linked to the main one, fusing both. Fourth, “two-dimension” strategies make parties position themselves independently on the two axes, defining an orthogonal competition space (*ibid.*: 840-844).

Besides confirming their pro-peripheral core character, literature on RPs observed that these forces were found at very different points in the left-right ideological spectrum (Dandoy, 2010). Although most RPs were located at the left or center-left of the political ideological axis (de Winter, Gomez-Reino, and Lynch 2006), no unique connection was established between the two dimensions. That is, RPs, consistent in their defense of pro-peripheral demands, could do so in combination with a left or right-wing electoral platform. In fact, two factors may condition the agency of RPs to locate themselves in the left-right axis. First, RPs’ positioning might be influenced by historic and contextual factors that make it more likely that pro-peripheral demands go hand in hand with left or right wing political ideology in a given region (Erk 2005; Erk 2010; Newman 1997). Second, and often complementing the first explanation, the economic structural characteristics of the regions represented by RPs might shape their positioning in the left-right axis (Massetti and Schakel, 2015). According to the latter theory, substantiated by the authors in a comparative study of RPs across Europe, the relative economic status of the region is expected to influence RPs’ orientation in two ideal types. Towards the right, if the region is comparatively more affluent (bourgeois regionalism), or the left, if the region is comparatively poorer (internal colonialism) (see Hechter, 1975).

Nevertheless, *new* challenger RPs' positioning in the left-right continuum may be more complex to investigate when they enter an electoral space where a consolidated RPs already exists. Overall, new political parties will be more likely to run for elections if costs of entry are low, benefits are high if seats are obtained, and there is a good probability of getting support (Tavits, 2008). To improve their chances of being elected (probability of getting support), it seems plausible that new RPs will try to distinguish themselves from the consolidated RPs in one or several dimensions of competition (see Wagner, 2012). However, this decision might not be entirely up to the will of the RPs' leaders but conditioned again by the socio-economic structure of the region and existing alignments in the party system. In structurally heterogeneous regions (e.g., regions with a wide range of relevant economic sectors and social groups), new RPs can emerge in the political space which is "free" from direct competitors, optimizing the differentiation from previously existing forces, and appealing to the portion of the electorate that support pro-peripheral demands but is not represented by old RPs in the left-right dimension. In more structurally homogeneous regions, and coherently with the subsuming strategy outlined above, new RPs may face problems choosing this path, as the existing economic conditions may limit their electoral success (primarily, there might be no space for a different positioning in the left-right scale attending to electoral demand). Therefore, new RPs may instead distinguish themselves by radicalizing the positions of consolidated RPs in one or more dimensions of competition (Masseti, 2009; Massetti and Schakel, 2015).

Moving to the Galician case, Great Recession politics included the struggle of the BNG, traditionally subsuming left-right into center-periphery demands, to adapt to a changing economic and political scenario, and the emergence of a new challenger coalition, AGE. This early competition provoked political changes that crystalized in Galicia on October 22nd, 2012, with a major political breakthrough for the new challengers (Casais, 2013). Already in 2012, the success of the new challenger AGE and the parallel failure of the BNG in regional elections, fragmented the political space of Galician nationalism. Although the Popular Party (PP) retained its power in the region, changes in 2012 reveal a profound alteration of the link between center-periphery and left politics in the Galician party system, later confirmed in the 2016 regional elections with the success of a new coalition integrating AGE and other parties under the label *En Marea*. For the first time since 1989, the BNG faced successful competition within the regionalist space, which made it lose its long-lasting character as single representative of Galician nationalism (recovered again in 2020, see Table 1).

Table 1. *Electoral results. New and old RPs in Galician regional elections (2012-2020)*

| | 2012 | 2016 | 2020 |
|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>AGE (2012); En Marea (2016); Marea Galeguista (2020)</i> | 200,828 votes (13.9%) 9 seats | 273,523 votes (19.1%) 14 seats | 2,863 votes (0.2%) 0 seats |
| <i>BNG</i> | 146,027 votes (10.11%) 7 seats | 119,446 votes (8.3%) 6 seats | 311,340 votes (23.2%) 19 seats |

Source: authors' elaboration.

III. INTERNAL COLONIALISM AND PARTY STRATEGIES IN GALICIAN POLITICS

Massetti and Schakel's adaptation of the internal colonialism thesis advanced by Michael Hechter (1975) focuses on the idea of uneven development. State choices hurt the economic development of certain regions because they do not provide enough direct (investments) or indirect (welfare) transfer of resources to close the development gap with other regions (Massetti and Schakel, 2015: 867).

The discourse of internal colonialism was adopted by left nationalist organizations in Western Europe during the decolonization process. Part of the liberation movements and parties in Western Europe, Galician nationalist organizations in the 1960s and 1970s were no exception. A variety of Galician minor organizations proliferated in the 1970s, spreading across the left-right political spectrum yet mostly left-leaning (Beramendi and Núñez Seixas, 1996; Máiz, 1996). Before the birth of the BNG, the main political party in Galician nationalism, the Communist Union do Povo Galego (UPG) epitomized the quest to emulate a national liberation movement. Galicia was defined as a colony based on historical, economic, psychological and affinity factors with other national liberation movements in the Third World (Quintana, 2010: 30-40). The BNG, which will become the dominant RP in Galicia in the 90's, was born in 1982 combining demands of self-determination with left programmatic proposals, inheriting the ideological features of the UPG in coalition with the Partido Socialista Galego (PSG).

The position of the Galician BNG derives its ideological roots in the variety of Marxist and Socialist parties that were sequentially integrated in the party front. Its leader, the professor of Economics Xosé Manuel Beiras, always

embraced the thesis of Galicia as a peripheral nation declaring that “Galicia had an underdeveloped economy and an underdeveloped society, and constitutes a peripheral people within the system it is inserted” (Fernán-Vello and Pillado Mayor, 1989: 107). In 1982 the BNG defined Galicia as “a nation with the right to self-determination”, and the party took a clear anti-system stand refusing to recognize both the Spanish constitution and the 1981 Galician *Estatuto de Autonomía*. From 1989 onwards the BNG adopted a more pragmatic attitude, moderating its radicalism (J. Beramendi and Núñez Seixas, 1996; Lago Peñas, 2004).

The BNG first obtained representation in 1985. During the 1980s the BNG competed with other RPs that also crossed the threshold of regional representation (Gómez-Reino, 2011). By the 1989 regional elections, however, the BNG became the first Galician RP in votes and seats. In 1993, the BNG became the only RP with representation in the Galician Parliament. By 1994 the integration of the other RPs in the party-front was completed (Gomez-Reino, 2006; Lago Peñas, 2004). Thus, the BNG integrated a plurality of different ideological and organizational currents within a single party (Lago Peñas, 2004; Lago Peñas and Lago Peñas, 2006), although it characteristically retained its nationalist and left-wing character.

The discourse of the BNG framed territorial grievances based on Galician dependency. The party agenda linked center-periphery and left-right politics, but also subsumed left politics into the core center-periphery dimension. The original influence of the discourse of internal colonialism in the BNG is illustrated by Ibarra and Máiz’s study of the evolution of the BNG frames (Ibarra and Maiz, 2010). They analyzed the party diagnosis (Galicia as an internal colony of the Spanish imperialist state including the state of autonomies and the European Union), its prognosis (“authentic” nationalism and self-government) and its motivation (the opposition between “us”, a homogeneous Galicia, and “them”) (Ibarra and Maiz, 2010: 111-127). Although post 1980’s ideological moderation involved the reformulation of its anti-colonialist vocabulary, the emphasis on Galician dependency, its economic and political marginalization, the industrial crisis, and comparative grievances with other regions and nationalities still remained central to the formulation of territorial grievances. The discourse also emphasized the misgivings of the Spanish state, the Galician PP government, and the European institutions. Although the discourses and policies were moderated over the period 1994-2012, the BNG never formally renounced its 1982 political principles (Beramendi and Núñez Seixas, 1996; Máiz, 1996; Máiz and Ares, 2018).

Following the theoretical model by Massetti and Schakel (2015), we describe how traditional Galician RPs utilized a subsuming strategy: left-right politics were

Table 2. *Voting for the BNG in the period between 1997 and 2009*

| | 1997 | 2001 | 2005 | 2009 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Galician Identity</i> | 1.52*** (0.11) | 2.48*** (0.12) | 2.45*** (0.15) | 3.52*** (0.14) |
| <i>Left-Right</i> | 0.47*** (0.06) | 0.54*** (0.05) | 0.61*** (0.06) | 0.53*** (0.06) |
| <i>Female</i> | 0.93 (0.20) | 0.87 (0.17) | 0.59*** (0.20) | 0.94 (0.19) |
| <i>Age</i> | 0.93*** (0.20) | 0.97*** (0.01) | 0.97*** (0.01) | 0.99 (0.00) |
| <i>Habitat size</i> | 1.02 (0.05) | 1.21*** (0.07) | 1.00 (0.08) | 1.00 (0.07) |
| Education (ref. primary education) | | | | |
| <i>No studies</i> | 1.37 (0.42) | 0.83 (0.56) | 0.00 (0.72) | 0.00 (0.58) |
| <i>Basic studies</i> | 1.05 (0.24) | 0.71* (0.20) | 0.90 (0.33) | 0.50** (0.30) |
| <i>University studies</i> | 1.00 (0.32) | 0.84 (0.27) | 0.71 (0.25) | 1.46 (0.26) |
| Social Class (ref. middle class) | | | | |
| <i>Working Class</i> | 0.90 (0.26) | 0.63* (0.24) | 1.45 (0.31) | 0.95 (0.27) |
| <i>High Class</i> | 0.57 (0.42) | 1.43 (0.36) | 1.06 (0.34) | 1.26 (0.37) |
| <i>N</i> | 1,056 | 1,335 | 945 | 1,387 |
| <i>AIC</i> | 841.63 | 1,050.31 | 808.04 | 913.80 |

Note: Entries are Odds Ratio (binary logistic regression), with Standard Errors in parentheses.

Controls for occupation were included but not reported for parsimony reasons.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed), at 95% confidence level.

Source: authors' elaboration.

subsumed and fused in the center-periphery dimension. In short, its ethno-regionalist profile, its core dimension of competition, was colored by its left-wing character. This strategy makes even more sense given that the regional branch of the Galician Popular Party¹ also incorporates pro-decentralization demands,

¹ The governing party throughout all the period since the first regional elections after the transition, except a short period governed by a coalition PS-BNG in 2005-2009.

potentially attracting right-wing individuals with a Galician national identity (Ares and Rama, 2019). Thus, that the nationalist discourse of the BNG is strongly linked to left-wing platforms can be historically explained by both structural (the economic backward development of the region in comparative terms) and strategic reasons (the electoral relevance of a state-wide right-wing party in the Galician party system that takes positive stances towards decentralization).

The relevance of the left-nationalist duo clearly appears in the profile of BNG voters (see Table 2).² Galician identity and left-wing positioning are the two main predictors of voting for BNG between 1997 and 2009, the last regional elections before the emergence of AGE (see also Pérez Nievas and Bonet, 2006).³

IV. CENTER-PERIPHERY AND LEFT-RIGHT DIMENSIONS IN NEW CHALLENGER FORMATIONS. A DIFFERENT SUBSUMING STRATEGY (2012-2020)

By the turn of the last decade and coinciding with the economic crisis that hit Europe after 2008, the BNG faced a critical period to rethink its leadership, discourse and project (Quintana, 2010). The 2011 Spanish general elections were characterized by the fall of the governing party, PSOE, and the success of different RPs in Catalonia and the Basque Country. Unlike these RPs, the BNG did not improve its electoral results in the 2011 elections, which some of its leaders interpreted as a warning sign that the political discourse should change towards positions more aligned with the new economic situation (Carretero, 2016). However, no major changes took place. The 2012 BNG electoral program emphasized Galician identity more than any other program since 1981 (Máiz and Ares, 2018). Moreover, shortly before the regional elections the

² Results of a multinomial regression analysis using voters of PP as reference also evidence the consistent importance of Galician identity and positioning more to the left in voting for the BNG.

³ The analysis presented in the table was elaborated with data from the Spanish Centre of Sociological Research (CIS) using post electoral barometers of the Galician elections (Study 2796, 2611, 2434, and 2263). A logistic regression was conducted using voting for BNG as dependent variable. Galician Identity was measured using the Linz-Moreno question (Guinjoan and Rodon, 2015), upon which we coded as 1 the respondents that display more Galician than Spanish identity or only Galician identity. Individuals declaring to feel as Spanish as Galician, more Spanish than Galician, or only Spanish, were coded as 0. Left-right ideology is measured in a scale ranging from extreme left (1) to extreme right (10). Covariates were included after testing possible correlations and collinearity between them.

leadership of the BNG was contested among different currents,⁴ and Beiras, whose candidacy was defeated in the internal elections, decided to leave the BNG, forming a new party (Anova-Irmandade Nacionalista). Beiras' Anova will soon forge AGE, the mix electoral coalition that combined regional branches of radical left and ecology parties to compete with the BNG.

The BNG exhibited a substantial programmatic continuity during the decade. Its manifesto for the 2012 regional elections was built upon its traditional ideological pillars. The program included three axes: sovereignty (deepening self-government), work (public investment and policies) and democracy (participatory democracy). The BNG depicted itself as a nationalist party, "defending sovereignty, the capacity of the people to decide, in particular, the Galician people" (Bloque Nacionalista Galego, 2012), and demanded the recognition of the plurinational character of the state, as well as equality among all the nations that compose it. The party manifesto for the 2016 regional elections maintained a substantial continuity with the previous ones; yet, it emphasized more the issue of sovereignty vis-à-vis Madrid and Brussels to break with the "dependency of Galicia" (Bloque Nacionalista Galego, 2016). Overall, no radical changes can be appreciated in the traditional electoral strategy designed by BNG, which linked center-periphery aspects and left-right ones, subsuming left-right politics into the core pro-periphery demands.

The new challenger AGE aimed to occupy the political space of BNG displaying an ideological platform that also linked Galician self-government with left-wing proposals. However, AGE emphasized social policies, denouncing the austerity programs adopted after the crisis, also incorporating issues of direct democracy. The goals of the coalition were formulated within the tradition of Galician nationalism: "national and social liberation for a nation without a state" (Alternativa Galega de Esquerda, 2012). In its manifesto's introduction, AGE claimed that: "Galician men and women are the only political subject upon national sovereignty resides" (id.). The principles of radical democracy, republicanism, ecology, and political accountability completed the programmatic proposals, demanding a new constituent process to recognize the full sovereignty of Galicia. However, AGE defined itself as an inclusive and plural left-wing formation, endorsing policies of solidarity and development, anti-austerity, employment, work rights, equality, public employment, and auditory of

⁴ In the 2012 XIII BNG Assembly: Guillerme Vázquez was elected with 2123 votes and Francisco Jorquera as candidate for the 2012 regional elections (both members of the Alternativa pola Unidade-UPG). The other candidate, Xosé Manuel Beiras obtained 1823 votes. Encontro Irmandiño, PNG, EN, ESG, Inzar y Colectivo Socialista). The ApU political proposal won for 70% of the votes.

public debt, among others. AGE's core anti-austerity platform and proposal for revisiting the legitimacy of the debt must be understood in connection to the Spanish debt crisis, the destabilization of which threatened the country and fed early rumors of intervention for months.

The subsuming strategy designed by AGE was successful in the 2012 regional elections. The party secured the third position in the Galician party system with more than 200,000 votes, surpassing the BNG. The same parties that formed AGE in 2012 would compete for the 2015 Spanish general elections under the label *En Marea*, forming a new electoral coalition that now included the new statewide *Podemos*. After formalizing their alliance as an electoral coalition (2015), and later a political party (2016), *En Marea* ran for the 2016 regional elections in Galicia, obtaining 16 seats in the regional parliament, becoming the second most voted party after the PP. In 2016 *En Marea's* electoral program maintained the left-wing nationalist ideas outlined by AGE for the 2012 regional elections, with an electoral manifesto that included 20 specific policies grouped in four main sections: social policies, common good, democracy, and constitutional process, the former referring to the role of Galicia as a political subject in its own right (*En Marea*, 2016).

That both AGE and *En Marea* embraced left-wing nationalist positions in their discourses seems well explained by Massetti and Schakel's (2015) ideal type of internal colonialism. Even if it is true that no Galician nationalist party competes from the right-side of the ideological spectrum, the Conservative and statewide PP dominated the space of moderate voters with a distinct Galician identity (Maiz, 1996). Thus, occupying an empty space on the left-right dimension was never a real option for AGE. However, despite BNG and AGE-*En Marea's* strong similarities in their framing (its nationalist and left-wing orientations), they also exhibited a differential emphasis in their subsuming strategies of the core center-periphery and second left-right dimensions. The data from the Regional Manifestos Project (Gómez *et al.*, 2018) shows that in 2012 the BNG programmatic profile was more oriented towards center-periphery issues (both in terms of pro-periphery positions and saliency), whereas AGE's agenda, born at the height of the crisis, focused more on leftist and anti-austerity demands (Máiz and Ares, 2018).

The different emphasis on center-periphery and left-right politics can also be seen in their voters (Table 3).⁵ Galician identity and self-positioning more to

⁵ The analysis presented in the table was elaborated with data from the CIS using post electoral barometers of the Galician elections (Study 3155, 2963, 2796, 2611, 2434, and 2263) using having voted for PP as reference. Galician Identity is measured using the Linz-Moreno question, upon which we coded as 1 the respondents that display

the left are significant predictors of voting both for BNG and AGE-En Marea (voters of PP as reference), and the relative importance of left-right positioning is similar attending to odds ratio. However, the effect of having a Galician Identity is much stronger for voters of the BNG. These results fit the idea that new RPs in Galicia, rather than positioning themselves much more to the left, chose a different emphasis that was comparatively less oriented towards pro-peripheral demands. Descriptive results shown in Figures 1 and 2 also evidence these differences in the left-right and nationalist axes as a function of vote choice.

Table 3. *Multinomial logistic regression (PP as reference)*⁶

| | | BNG | AGE (2012) En Marea (2016) | PSdG | EU | Galicia en Común |
|------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 2012 | <i>GI</i> | 2.43*** (0.27) | 2.04*** (0.25) | 0.94 (0.24) | | |
| | <i>LR</i> | 0.11*** (0.15) | 0.12*** (0.15) | 0.14*** (0.14) | | |
| 2016 | <i>GI</i> | 2.72*** (0.23) | 1.64** (0.21) | 1.13 (0.19) | | |
| | <i>LR</i> | 0.09*** (0.17) | 0.08*** (0.16) | 0.13*** (0.15) | | |
| 2020 | <i>GI</i> | 2.79*** (0.17) | | 0.91 (0.15) | | 1.41 (0.22) |
| | <i>LR</i> | 0.21*** (0.10) | | 0.26*** (0.09) | | 0.17*** (0.12) |

Note: Entries are Odds Ratio (multinomial logistic regression), with Standard Errors in parentheses. *Controls* for occupation were included but not reported for parsimony reasons.

GI (Galician Identity); *LR* (self-positioning in the left-right scale).

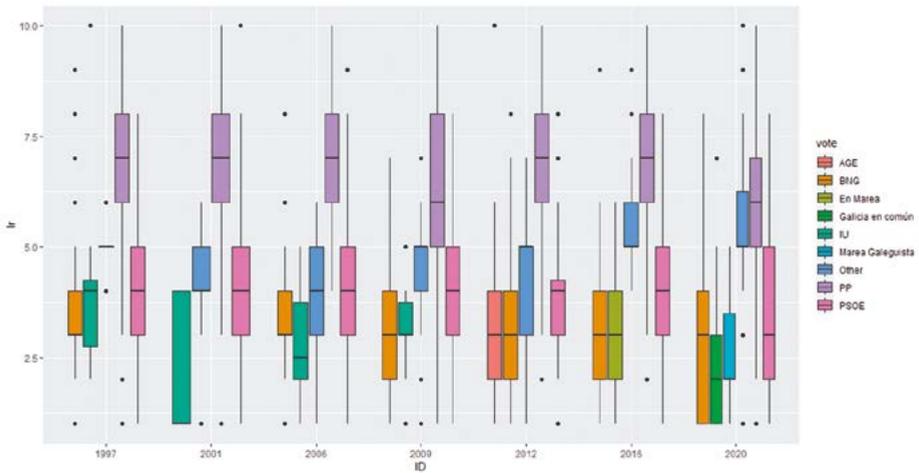
* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed), at 95% confidence level.

Source: authors' elaboration.

more Galician than Spanish identity or only Galician identity. Individuals declaring to feel as Spanish as Galician, more Spanish than Galician, or only Spanish, were coded as 0. Left-right ideology is measured in a scale ranging from extreme left (1) to extreme right (10). All covariates considered in Table 2 were also included after testing possible correlations and collinearity between them, but only Galician Identity and Left-Right ideology are reported to facilitate reading.

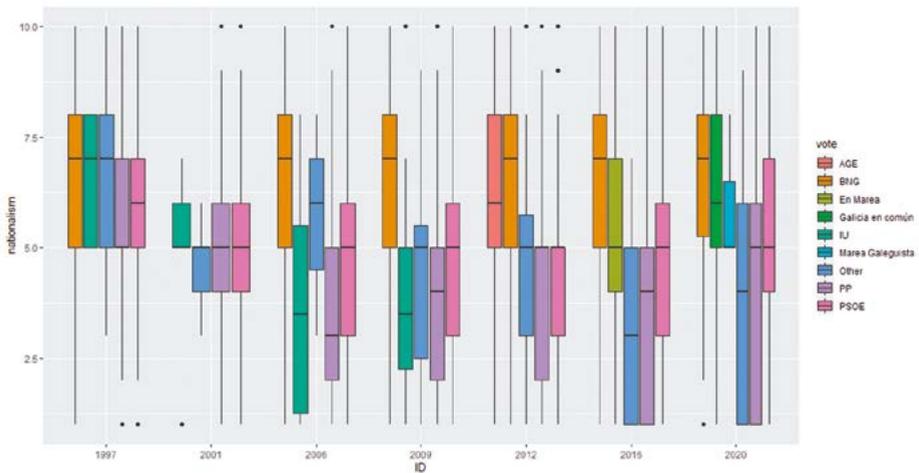
⁶ Predictors of vote for Marea Galeguista have not been included in the table because the very low number of respondents considered in the sample ($n=12$) is likely to make results unreliable.

Figure 1. *Self-location in the left-right scale considering vote choice in the past regional elections*



Source: authors' elaboration.

Figure 2. *Self-location in the Galician nationalism scale considering vote choice in the past regional elections*



Source: authors' elaboration.

The electoral strategies adopted by AGE and later En Marea for the Galician regional elections evidenced the historical strength of the link between Galician nationalism and the left-wing dimension. While incorporating a

new emphasis on the left-wing dimension of politics, the strategy of AGE and En Marea was far from abandoning a space that was well known to nationalist voters in Galicia. However, although Massetti and Schakel's (2015) theory predicts that radicalizing the positions held by consolidated RPs is also a logical strategy for new ones, the question at stake is why did AGE-En Marea not choose to distinguish itself from BNG in the core dimension of competition of ERPs, adopting more pro-peripheral stances?⁷

Although party leaders indeed have great influence to decide what core elements should be included in electoral manifestos (Dolezal *et al.*, 2012), this decision is directly connected to one of the main elements highlighted by Tavits (2008), the probability of getting support.⁸ After the economic crisis started, new challenger parties emerged across Europe that separated themselves from the traditional mainstream parties, adopting both radical left and right-wing positions, as a means of appealing to the electorates (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). In spite of the general existence of a two-side polarization trend, Ramiro and Gomez (2016) found that, immediately after the crisis, electoral movements only favored radical left-wing forces in Spain.⁹ In their argument, individuals most affected by the consequences of the crisis would support new radical (and populist) left-wing parties. Therefore, the early decision made by AGE in 2012, emphasizing left-wing policies before the creation of the statewide Podemos later started to capitalize the effects of the crisis electorally, seemed directed to maximize its appeal amid economic turmoil.

Confronted with the dilemma of distinguishing from the BNG by being more leftist or more pro-periphery, the leaders of AGE chose the former. This can be seen in that they claimed that the creation of AGE was deeply influenced by growing concerns about the austerity measures and cuts implemented in social policies (Carbajo, 2012), and that the new coalition had come to defend the interests of the “unemployed, retired, and young people condemned to immigration” (Rodríguez, 2012). Some of the members of AGE even stated clearly the preeminence of the socio-economic debate over the territorial one (Calvo, 2012).

⁷ Although AGE is more radical than BNG on Galician identity aspects, this is not the case for the centre-periphery dimension and the protection of Galician language (Máiz and Ares, 2018).

⁸ In general, manifestos are not designed to be read by citizens, but it does not mean that manifestos are unimportant, as individuals often receive information about them through the media (Dolezal *et al.*, 2012).

⁹ The success of the radical-right VOX, which crystallized in the general elections held in 2019, seems better explained by a different type of crisis more related to the territorial organization of the state (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019).

However, not only economic concerns were key to the electoral strategy designed by AGE and later adapted by En Marea. In this regard, recent studies have highlighted the importance of political variables in voting for new parties after the crisis (Hutter *et al.*, 2018; Marcos-Marne *et al.*, 2020; Vidal, 2018), offering complementary explanations for the electoral switch that benefited new RPs. As Hutter *et al.* (2018) pointed out, most of the socio-political reactions to the Great Recession in Southern Europe combined anti-austerity and anti-old politics elements, and AGE-En Marea do not seem exceptional in this regard (González Quinzán, 2019). Thus, its multidimensional strategy also included the new politics dimensions. Besides a frontal opposition to economic orthodoxy, AGE electoral platform referred frequently to democratic regeneration, and its “newness” is an aspect could contribute to making their claims for regeneration more credible (see Sikk, 2011).¹⁰ Therefore, the electoral positioning of AGE and En Marea can be best understood as closer to a left-libertarian one that combines concerns for equality with individual autonomy and social participation (Kitschelt, 1988). Thus, deemphasizing competition in the center-periphery dimensions also implied giving priority not only to economic issues, but also to democratic regeneration ones.

Despite the success of the new challengers in Galicia in two consecutive regional elections, 2012 and 2016, their electoral trajectory was short-lived. En Marea did not obtain representation in the regional Parliament in July 2020 after two years of internal turmoil and conflict. Therefore, while the first element for an electoral realignment could be seen between 2012 and 2016 (an abrupt electoral change in terms of votes), the movement did not last in time (endurance is lacking) (Nardulli, 1995). In a nutshell, and according to data from the CIS, almost half of the voters of the BNG in 2009 chose to support AGE in 2012 (42.3%) (study 2960). In 2016, En Marea was able to maintain more than 80% of its voters and attract another 40% of the voters of BNG in 2012 (study 3140). However, in the 2020 regional elections, the electoral coalition Galicia en Común-ANOVA-Mareas retained less than 22% of its voters, losing 57% of them to the BNG (study 3294). Therefore, the BNG recovered the first position within the Galician nationalist space under the new leadership of Ana Pontón. In less than 8 years, the BNG had recovered pre-crisis levels of support (in fact, the number of votes for the BNG was virtually the same in 2005 and 2020: 311,954 and 311,340, respectively). What is more relevant for our argument of an incomplete realignment, is that by September

¹⁰ The profile of the voters of AGE and En Marea identified by Rama Caamaño *et al.* (2018), showing the positive effect of political dissatisfaction on the likelihood to vote for the new RPs, gives support to this idea. See also González Quinzán (2019).

2020 En Marea officially dissolved as a political party, ending a trajectory that had put under threat the leadership of BNG in the Galician nationalist space.¹¹

V. PARTY FORMATIVE PATHS AND (LACK OF) INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The electoral success of new challenger parties of the radical left in Southern Europe was, for many analysts, too sudden. Their political organization was an institutional challenge that required organizational rules, stability, and innovations. Parties such as Syriza (with an ample coalition-based) and Podemos (with a reduced one), with very different organizational origins, could not escape internal conflicts and factions during the decade (Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 2018; Ramiro and Gomez, 2016). In that regard, issues surrounding the organizational structure of new RPs in Galicia were not an exception.

In Galicia, new challenger formations initially took the form of weak electoral coalitions. The creation of AGE in 2012 took place shortly before the regional elections, a first political experiment that joined a new RP (Anova) with regional branches of statewide parties (EU and Equo), and other enlarged electoral coalitions followed (see Table 4). In 2015, a new coalition was put forward for the 2015 Spanish general elections. The new trademark of the electoral coalition was Podemos-En Marea-ANOVA-EU. This coalition led to the transformation of En Marea into a so-called instrumental political party in 2016, a process mainly propelled by Anova, the municipal Mareas (citizens' platforms that competed in the 2015 local elections winning the three municipalities of Santiago, Coruña and Ferrol), and EU. Podemos initially did not integrate into the unified party. Instead, Podemos decided to join En Marea only after an internal consultation in August 2016.¹²

The creation of En Marea as a formal political party was characterized by its assembly model (a classic feature of many Galician left organizations including the BNG), yet also by the importance of the initial promoters, parties, and leaders that joined the political process since its inception. The organizational evolution of the party was further influenced by tensions and

¹¹ Other dissolutions followed shortly, such as Anova.

¹² This process of integration was very complex given the initial reluctance of the leaders of Podemos (at the time, Errejón and Iglesias), to fully join the new organization, thus the formal requirement to celebrate a consultation with Podemos members over their participation in En Marea.

Table 4. *Organizational evolution of new challenger parties in Galicia*

| AGE 2012 | En Marea 2015 | En Marea 2016 | En Marea 2019 | Galicia en Común 2019 | Marea Galeguista 2020 | Galicia en Común 2020 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Anova | Podemos | En Marea | En Marea | Podemos | Compromiso | Podemos |
| Esquerda | Anova | Podemos | | EU | por Galicia | Anova |
| Unida | EU | | | Equo | Partido | EU |
| Equo | Equo | | | Mareas en | Galeguista | Mareas en |
| Espazo ecosocialista | Espazo ecosocialista | | | Común | Demócrata | Común |
| | Mareas municipales | | | | En Marea | |

Source: authors' elaboration.

conflicts regarding the political representation of the founding parties within En Marea vis-à-vis individual membership. Moreover, these tensions had spill-over effects at the institutional level. En Marea suffered, alike AGE, of ongoing tensions among their representatives in political institutions at the local level and in the Galician parliament.

The political party En Marea created in 2016 was organized with a political executive, the Consello das Mareas, formed by 25 members directly elected from individual members participating in party assemblies. Decision-making and the politics of confluence were in the hands of the coordinator of En Marea, elected by the Consello das Mareas. No representatives of the party promoters of En Marea participated in the Consello das Mareas. Following Panebianco's (1990) typology, En Marea was a party with a territorial model of diffusion, which implied the presence of a heterogenous dominant coalition. On the one hand, En Marea inherited the actors of the previous mobilization period from AGE and the municipal Mareas in 2015. On the other hand, the objective was to gain electoral traction with a different organizational model, a party of individual membership. These contrasting organizational logics provoked intense organizational tensions. The autonomy of En Marea with regard the original members of the electoral coalitions (represented by an independent new leader Luis Villares) faced the opposition of promoters and leaders which did not accept to subordinate their action, acronyms, etc... to the new party.

The fact that En Marea involved parties but also individuals made that En Marea had a legitimacy of external character. That was especially important in a period characterized by the wearing of traditional parties in Galicia and the existing political cycle. However, external legitimacy also represented

organizational weaknesses that complicated the consolidation of the unified party. From its beginning, the organization of En Marea had weak leadership that facilitated the emergence of factions and conflicts within the parliamentary group in the Galician parliament. Those conflicts resulted in the exit of Luis Villares, spokesperson of the party, from the parliamentary group. Therefore, while the new challengers of statewide radical left populism in Southern Europe had well defined leaders, as Syriza and Podemos illustrate, in Galicia the leadership of AGE and En Marea was poorly defined. The role of charismatic leader was initially performed by Xosé Manuel Beiras, the most relevant political figure of Galician nationalism. However, Beiras increasingly played a secondary yet still influential role in the formation of En Marea. He was the leader of Anova and manufactured the 2012 AGE coalition, but he increasingly faced the different views of other promoters of the different organizations joining the project of a single political party. Ultimately, he resigned from his position in Anova and only supported externally Anova candidates to the 2020 elections. In turn, En Marea's leader since the creation of the party in 2016 was Luis Villares, an independent outsider to politics who was elected spokesperson of En Marea. Villares was not a popular figure and faced the opposition of most of the members within En Marea's leaders. He left the parliamentary group of En Marea in 2019, and ultimately abandoned politics after the disastrous electoral results in 2020.

Following both analysts and politicians (Beramendi 2020; Luaña 2020), we believe that organizational issues and constant internal quarrelling among the different members explain a large portion of the interrupted electoral realignment in Galicia. Basically, even if the programmatic offer of the new challenger RPs did not vary substantially regarding left-right and center-periphery issues over the decade, they lost appeal due to internal disputes, some of them framed as lacking mechanisms of internal democracy (Luaña, 2020), key for the new-old politics dimensions of competition.¹³

In this vein, the transformation of the coalition En Marea into a political party in 2016 did not put solid basis to the new formation, rather it contributed to organizational turmoil. While relevant discussions took place on the relative importance of left-right and center-periphery demands and the inclusion of the right of self-determination in the electoral manifestos (Riande, 2018), main tensions emerged due to the different understandings of En Marea as a traditional political party with a clear leadership or, alternatively, as a plural

¹³ There is in fact abundant evidence pointing out to the importance of party cohesion in electoral performance (Greene and Haber, 2015; Maravall, 2007; Skjæveland, 2001; Sykes, 1988).

actor closer to a loose electoral coalition. Such internal conflict escalated in 2019 and provoked the split up of En Marea parliamentary group in two. The members of Podemos, EU, and Anova remained together, while the spokesperson Luis Villares and three more MPs, supportive of a more flexible and decentralized organization, left the party and joined the mixed group in the Galician Parliament. The rupture between the former allies became evident in the 2019 Spanish general elections. Podemos, EU, Anova and Equo concurred to the general elections under the name En Común, gaining two seats. En Marea got no representation in the April general elections and decided not to run for the following November elections. Overall, the message of democratic regeneration seemed particularly endangered by the disputes within En Marea, often reported in the media, containing accusations of fraud, stealing information, and an overall misuse of the party bodies (Huete, 2018). While internal disputes often take place within political parties, the intensity and publicity of internal disagreements amid the members of En Marea in a political context prone to value organizational formulas also related to new politics, contributed to the disappearance of new challengers in Galicia by September 2020.

VI. FINAL REMARKS

This paper has examined the rise and evolution of new challenger formations after the Great Recession in a European peripheral region, Galicia. Our case-study approach highlighted the resilience of the link between pro-periphery and left-wing aspects, but also its malleability in terms of their hierarchical position in a two-dimensional space, as new challengers subsumed pro-periphery demands into the left-right dimension. Accordingly, our main conclusions are twofold. First, we asserted the long-lasting importance of the old dimensions of competition, such as territorial identity, which can be politically connected to structural explanations of RPs positioning on the left-right scale in different ways (Masseti and Schakel, 2015). Second, we argued that, although a successful strategy in the beginning, prioritizing an alternative left-right dimension of competition over the center-periphery proved to be hard to maintain for new RPs formations. Organizational dilemmas and conflicts, publicly displayed, put under pressure the very existence of these new challengers due to electoral punishment associated with party's lack of cohesion. This eventually led to their disappearance, which happened in parallel with the renewed electoral success of the BNG. Conversely, the institutionalization of the BNG and the leadership of Pontón are likely to have contributed to its survival, making it once again the only representative of Galician nationalism in the Parliament of Galicia.

The main contribution of our study lies in providing a theoretically oriented narrative for the succession of events that altered the balance of forces in the Galician nationalist space between 2012 and 2020, focusing on new PRs. Integrating findings from recent research on the emergence of AGE (González Quinzán, 2019; Máiz and Ares, 2018; Rama Caamaño *et al.*, 2018), our study aims to provide readers with a «full storyline of the events within its context» (Blatter and Blume, 2008: 319). While we think our study contributes to understanding the political choices available to new challenger RPs in the context of the Great Recession, and sheds light on the course of political change, two main shortcomings of our research must be acknowledged.

First, we suggest that the strategy of AGE-En Marea prioritizing left-wing politics over center-periphery prevented lasting electoral realignment in the Galician party system (mostly due to electoral punishment after major organizational tensions were conceived as opposed to the new politics ideal). However, it could be that organizational challenges had affected the party in any case because of internal dynamics unrelated to the dimensions of competition at stake (i.e., they may have appeared even if AGE-En Marea had chosen the more traditional subsuming strategy that starts with pro-peripheral demands). While our methodological approach allows considering multi-causal explanations, this is a counterfactual situation for which we have no empirical data, and only opinion surveys with tailored questions will help to respond to it.

Second, we verify the importance of traditional dimensions of competition to explain the strategic decisions available to new RPs. We must nevertheless acknowledge that the case under study exemplifies a particularly strong link between nationalist and left-wing policies. Further comparative studies will be necessary to ascertain the extent to which this could happen in other European regions. In this vein, the trajectory of early challengers in the Galician periphery vividly contrasts with other regions during the decade, such as that of the Celtic Fringe. The left-leaning populist turn of Plaid Cymru and the SNP illustrates that leftist regionalist parties could adapt their strategies during the Recession without facing the formation of new challenger parties (Massetti, 2018). Thus, the open political opportunity structure during the Great Recession in the peripheries seemed to incentivize an overall turn towards radical left (sometimes populist too) but new challengers' formation and success was only one of other possible political outcomes. The malleability of the territorial dimension of competition in Galicia linking center-periphery and left-right dimensions in different ways during the Great Recession was necessary for the creation of new challengers, but our study also shows the rapid reversal of ongoing electoral realignments.

Last, we believe, a final reflection on the generalizability of main findings from this paper belongs here. Here, we must acknowledge that a direct extrapolation of results can be challenging because these build upon case-connected mechanisms that will not be easily replicated step by step in other contexts. For example, the lack of similar shocks in other regions of Spain with their own party-system can be explained by their comparatively higher levels of development and/or the more complex pattern of competition that includes more than one RP. We believe our results can be of interest for other peripheral regions (i.e., characterized by lower levels of development as compared to the average of the state) where a strong link between left-and pro-peripheral positions exists, but even in these territories results can be different, as the Plaid Cymru example mentioned above illustrates. In this sense, we see our paper as a case-oriented one (rather than variable oriented), whose main aim is to find an explanation for a specific event (Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

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