

Polarization and the Uses of the Past in Spain in Comparative Perspective

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The phenomenon of polarization has received increased attention in recent years and, especially so, in the United States (see for example Iyengar et al., 2019). Spain has been pointed out lately as one of the countries with very high levels of increasing polarization (Gidron et al., 2020; Simón, 2020).

In 2015, the party system suffered a very important change. Until then two parties (the Socialist and the Popular Party) concentrated around 80% of the vote. Events such as the financial crisis, the situation in Catalonia, and the successful no-confidence vote to the PP government in 2018, have led to an increased fragmentation in the four elections celebrated since then. The competition nowadays takes place between five parties, of which three are new: one on the left and two on the right (Podemos, Ciudadanos and Vox), and to increased polarization, both in ideological and territorial aspects, although not so much in issues such as the economy or public policies (Penadés and Jurado, 2019; Simón, 2020; Miller, 2020).

Our study aims at analyzing the polarization around the political use of Spain's troubled past in the context just described. Are the levels of polarization around the troubled past in Spain greater than in other European countries that have suffered recent conflicts? Is society as polarized around this issue as party elites?

For this purpose, we will analyze the comparative survey data collected in early 2020 as part of the H2020 RePast Project “Strengthening European integration through the analysis of conflict discourses: revisiting the past, anticipating the future”, which has received funding from the EU’s Horizon 2020 program (grant agreement No. 769252). For our second objective, we will compare these data with the study on memory carried out by the Centre for Sociological Research in 2008.

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