

# Chapter 6: Spain

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## Introduction

Spain joined the European project in the mid-1980s with the signing of the accession agreement (1986) by the European Parliament (EP) in June 1987. Since then, Spain's institutional and political realities have been so closely linked to the EU project, that Spain's two sole constitutional reforms (i.e. to include the right to stand at European elections in 1992, and to incorporate a budget deficit limit in 2011) have been related to European community decisions. In electoral matters, that first call drew Spain into a new—and distinct—competitive arena for the first time.

In the following paragraphs, we address several points regarding Spain's European electoral competition over the last 32 years (Trujillo, 2019; García-Rabadán and Trujillo, 2020). To this end, we first approach the rules of the game—the regulatory framework—to understand the differentiated dynamics of political parties (that is, the electoral offer), as well as their results (i.e., citizen behaviour). The whole process is not without setbacks or complexities. Indeed, the elections of Members of the EP (hereinafter MEPs) have their very own dynamics, as they have been characterised as 'second-order elections' (Reif and Schmitt, 1997), which means that the citizen vote is not strictly circumscribed to a classical utilitarian logic.

To understand the European electoral contest, it is necessary to first address a basic issue, in line with the applicable regulations. A distinctive feature of the EP elections is the institutional framework. Indeed, the countries that have the competence of regulating them present substantial heterogeneity and it has proved impossible to establish a single electoral system for all Member States in the four decades of the EP's history of direct elections.

In the case of Spain, European election legislation is inspired by the system designed for the national Parliament (the 'Congreso de los Diputados'), in force since 1977 (Montero and Fernández-Esquer 2018; Montabes, 1998, 2018; Montero, Llera and Torcal, 1992). However, the elective systems of the Spanish Parliament and the EP are not entirely the same, owing to the 'differential' characteristics of the community call. The main differences between the two elections lie in two specific points: the constituency and the electoral barrier.

In the case of the constituency, Spanish legislation establishes a single electoral district, which implies overlooking any territorial distinction, as in

the case of the Spanish Parliament. The second difference is the minimum threshold of votes required to be included in the distribution of representation. In the Spanish legislature, 3% of valid votes must be exceeded per province, yet no such requirement applies to the EP elections, facilitating the access of a greater number of political parties. This electoral barrier and the single district established for the EP elections reflect the legislator's interest in achieving greater proportionality in the distribution of representation. The downside is that the process undermines political alternatives, limiting their geographical implementation, and favours national parties and even new political actors created expressly for that purpose.

Ultimately, the establishment of one rule or another has a direct impact on the behaviour of both the political parties and the electorate: the 'mechanical and psychological' effects referred to by Duverger (2012). Their importance is such that any rule alteration generates major institutional debates. Nevertheless, this has had little influence on electoral turnout, which, in general terms, has remained between the range of 45% to 55%. There are a few exceptions, such as when the dates of European elections coincide with that of regional and municipal elections (every 20 years since 1999). Figure 6.01 shows Spanish participation rates compared to the EU average.

As can be observed, the evolution of Spanish voter turnout is similar to the EU average for EP elections. The only exception was in 1999 (14% points higher in Spain) and 2019 (10% points higher). In both cases, Spaniards had to vote in municipal elections and for MEPs simultaneously and, in at least 10 regions, also regional elections were held.

In this way, it has been stated that the main political force in these elections is, precisely, abstention (Barreiro, 2004), with a 45% average abstention rate—placing them last in Spanish electoral processes. The result, however, is still far from other European countries where abstention soars above 70%, as in the cases of Portugal (69.25%), Croatia (70.2%) or Czechia (71.3%) in 2019; or in the extreme case of Slovakia with an 80.4% abstention rate in 2009 and 87% in 2014. A more detailed discussion of electoral turnout issues can be found in Pérez-Castaños (2020).

Spain's clear recovery in 2019 may owe to the call having covered multiple polls (municipal, regional, and European) within a cycle of electoral excitement: indeed, two general elections were trig-

gered by the country's first effective censure motion. Nevertheless, the historical sequence shows that the number of people who stop exercising their right to vote in the EP is constantly on the rise. And this trend was especially intense at the turn of the twenty-first century due to strong growth.

The 2004, 2009, and 2014 EP renewals mark a turning point compared to the twentieth century, as participation rates fell below the symbolic figure of 50%. Some territorial differences can be detected, although they are hardly significant since the trend always follows the same downward participatory trend—until the arrival of the eighth European election in Spain.

### Spanish pluralism to be tested

Spanish politics, whatever its level of competition, has been characterised by two major cleavages of rupture (Linz and Montero, 1986): the ideological axis (left/right) and the identitarian or territorial axis (centre/periphery). This confrontation has generated a wide range of political proposals from both, statewide parties and non-statewide parties (Pallarés et al., 1997), giving voice to all realities. Consequently, the Spanish party system has been called 'moderate pluralism' (Oñate and Ortega, 2019), where two statewide parties, the 'Partido Socialista Obre-

ro Español' —literally translated into the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party— (PSOE hereinafter) and the 'Partido Popular' —the Popular Party — (PP hereinafter), have traditionally led the electoral competition. Moderate pluralism is also characterised by a variable number of non-statewide parties, such as the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties, that have supported the former due to their strong presence in their respective regional autonomous communities. The recent irruption of other statewide parties, such as Podemos/Sumar, VOX, or the quasi-disappeared Ciudadanos – literally—Citizens (Cs hereinafter)— has somewhat altered the previous pattern, although it is too early to draw certain conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

For their part, EU citizens generally attach limited importance to the EP elections compared to other elections, precisely because EU parliamentary work is still largely unrecognised. According to the latest Eurobarometer Parlameter (2023), 34% of Spanish citizens have a positive image of the EP, just two points below the EU average (36%) and below the assessment of national legislative chambers. This is one of the reasons why the European elections have been described as 'second order' (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Since the political significance of the EP lacks recognition, the population allows itself to opt for alternative or non-conventional formations,

<sup>1</sup> We say Cs almost disappeared because this party obtained around 13% of the votes in the different elections that took place in Spain between 2016 and the first half of 2019 and has become an extra-parliamentary force since November 2019 and, above all, since 2022. So much so, in fact, that in the July 2023 general elections they decided not to run, contemplating the possibility of doing so in the 2024 European elections.

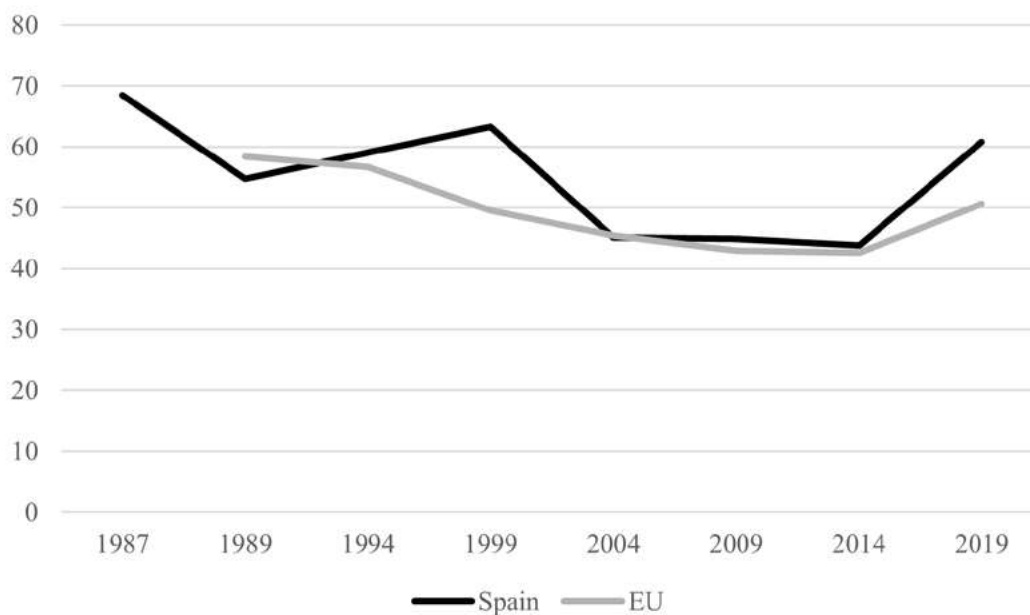


Figure 6.01: Electoral turnout in Spain and the EU (1987-2019). Source: Author's calculation with data from the Ministry of Interior.

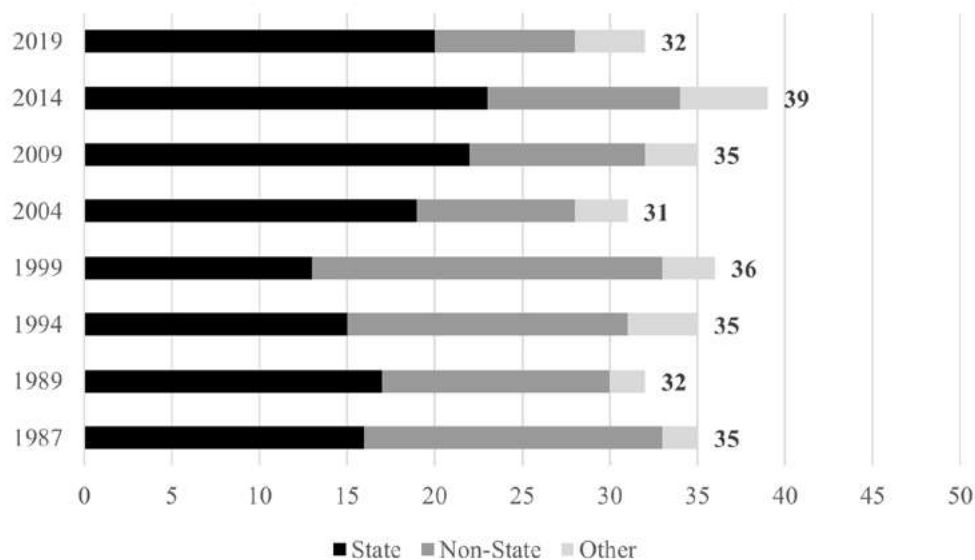


Figure 6.02: Number of parties competing in the elections. Source: Author's calculation.

even non-participation, based on the rationale of expressing protest or boredom (Cazorla et al., 2017; Pérez-Castaños and García-Rabadán, 2022).

It is precisely the exceptional structure of the Spanish electoral system in the EP elections that leads us to pause for a moment before moving on to analyse the evolution of elections over time. In general terms, the history of the EP in Spain includes a long list of solitary candidates, of which a dozen have sometimes obtained representation. A significant number of alliances between different political parties should be added to this exploration. Each call, on the other hand, has had an average of thirty candidacies of different signs, reflecting the particularity of the competition. A quantitative analysis of the partisan market shows that candidacy concentration reached a peak in 2004 with 39, compared to the minimum of 32 in 1989 and 2019.

Upon closer examination, the candidacies' categories fall into statewide parties, non-statewide parties, as well as other, highly diverse, party alternatives. The political literature has proposed different terms to identify these types of political actors which are so far removed from the more traditional ones. The most widespread labels include 'Single-Issue Parties' (Mudde, 1999) or 'Niche Parties' (Megid, 2005; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2011), beyond the traditional placement in the 'others' group or protest vote. According to the most basic definition of the first two parties, their main domain of competition revolves around a few non-economic issues that have not received sufficient attention from mainstream

parties (Meyer and Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2011). The minimal theoretical characteristics given include their position outside the traditional class cleavage, the limited realms of action they address, and the fact that the latter are so transversal, they overcome classic partisan divisions. The literature has thus chosen to place the European green parties or some far-right formations, among others, under this denomination. As we shall see later, most niche parties present in European elections are national in nature and scope of action.<sup>2</sup>

As illustrated in Figure 6.02, in the European partisan 'market' in Spain, statewide parties have predominated quantitatively most of the time, apart from in 1987, 1994 and, especially, in 1999. In these three elections, two of which (1987 and 1999) were held in conjunction with municipal and regional elections, the offer of nationalist or regionalist parties exceeded that of national parties. If we add the 'other' candidacies, however, the latter will only apply to 1999. At the time, political excitement was high: owing to the PSOE and PP power transfer in the central government in 1996, the statutory renewals during those same years (Pérez Castaños and García Rabadán, 2018), as well as the multiple election call. And this effervescence was reflected in both the participation rate—the highest in European elections, surpassed only by that of 1987—as well as the number of non-statewide parties (20).

The formation of coalitions or alliances has precisely been a common dynamic from the very beginning among the non-statewide parties in the

<sup>2</sup> At the European level, agrarian parties have also been characterised in this way, despite being unknown in Spain's political reality. Regarding extreme right-wing formations, the explanation lies in the major importance they give to the migration issue and their proposals regarding the migrant or refugee population.

EP elections. The mechanism is aimed at tackling the competition of a single district and without electoral barriers (Montero and Cordero, 2009; Roig, 2005). As a result, non-statewide parties, especially from sparsely populated territories, clearly perceived the risk that their electoral support would not be sufficient to obtain representation. This is one way—though not the only way—in which regional and nationalist parties with concentrated territorial strength have strived to ensure representation in the Strasbourg Chamber: they integrate their acronyms, which reflect different geographical origins and ideological positions, under the same electoral ‘umbrella’. Their formations are predominantly left/right in nature—not forgetting the members’ historical dimensions. Illustrations include coalitions such as ‘Los Pueblos Deciden’—literally, The People Decide—or ‘Ahora Repúblicas’—Now Republics—on the left of the spectrum, or, on the right, ‘Coalición por una Europa Solidaria’ – Coalition for a Europe of Solidarity.

A clear example of these coalitions of nationalist parties can be seen in Image 6.02, where a party from the Basque Country, another from Catalonia and a third from Galicia present their different bets in a joint electoral list. It is worth noting that the representative of the Basque party had just left his post as head of the regional government.

#### Entering the Union and weighting in (1987-2009)

Since joining the European Economic Community (EEC), the weight of political parties has varied in Spain. Some tendencies, however, remain undaunted, such as the prominence of the two large PSOE and PP statewide parties. In this sense, the aim to strengthen Europe or to strongly represent an idea or party in Europe is a common trend. This can be observed in the PSOE election poster for 1989, as shown in Image 6.01, or in the PP poster for 2004, as shown in Image 6.06. These two parties have always maintained a pro-European stance. It should be noted that, to maximise the technical provisions of the European electoral process in Spain, the non-statewide parties have always tended to form coalitions to optimise their electoral performance. This formula was consolidated, as seen in Figure 6.02, at the turn of the millennium. The shift took place in 2004, when Spain’s main peripheral nationalist political parties rethought their strategies, joining forces to form a left and right grouping, for whom the key factor was differentiation, that is, peripheral nationalism. Consequently, the cycle in which only the main non-statewide parties were present thus came to an end. This was so successful that, in 2009, the largest ideological concentration took place through two coalitions only: one on the left, and one on the right.



Image 1. PSOE poster, ‘With strength in Europe’. 1989 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 2. 1989 non-statewide party coalition poster, ‘To the Europe of the Nations’. 1989 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

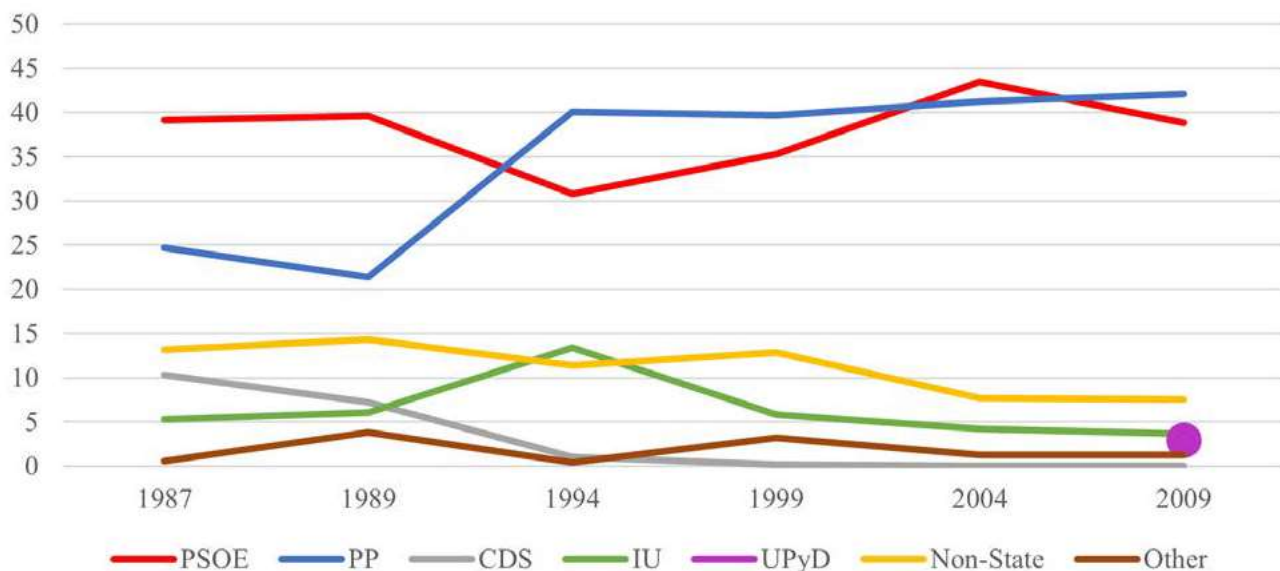


Figure 6.03: Spanish vote share for the European Parliamentary elections 1987-2009. Source: Author's calculation with data from the Ministry of Interior.

In this scenario, however, instead of using coalitions, the statewide parties chose to blur their electoral brands. Yet other actors were integrated in their lists without having their acronyms altered. In the Socialists' case, only a few specific agreements were formed with small parties, so the acronym has never received any additions. The second of Spain's major parties, the PP, follows a tradition of agreeing with certain non-statewide parties on list formations. The greatest exponent of this practice is the Union of the People of Navarre (UPN). Despite its weight in regional politics, this latter conservative regionalist party in Navarre has not presented a list alone in any of the European calls. In addition to these two major statewide political formations, the third in question is the 'Izquierda Unida' coalition—literally, the United Left (IU hereinafter). The latter, unlike the previous two, have opted to form agreements for the European elections, prioritising nevertheless the non-statewide party brands that are references for the left-wing coalition across different Autonomous Communities. A special case that deserves to be detailed is that of the party founded in 1989 by the businessman Ruiz Mateos (hereafter RM, see Image 6.03), which received representation in the same year, and which would fall into the category of a single-issue party, with the aim of obtaining immunity for the businessman from the legal proceedings he was facing.

Having described the party system that characterises this first European electoral period, we must now focus on the electoral results themselves.

As described, the party system changes a little: formations appear and disappear while others do so to sustain themselves between both periods. We shall come back to this later. Beyond the PSOE and PP alternating leadership, with three victories each, the Socialists came out on top in the 1980s as well as in 2004, which were periods of Socialist governments in Spain. Meanwhile, the PP obtained the highest number of votes and representation in the 1990s, in addition to 2009. As was the case with the Socialists, the Conservatives' victories coincided with their own government cycles or, as in 1994—a victory that prophesied the 1996 electoral results—a scenario of socialist weakness that would end with the latter out of government for the first time in 14 years. On the other hand, these two formations' victories have converged since the eighties: the major differences between the two have dropped by 3-5% points, and they have become somewhat equal. In addition, the PP and PSOE clearly dominate in these elections given the high concentration of parliamentary acts, above 70%, reaching an all-time high in 2004 with 91% of MEPs. The 1999 PSOE poster (Image 6.04) demonstrates their electoral strength by featuring only the candidate's name and the words 'Contigo'. Rosa Díez, who became an MEP for the PSOE in 1999 and held the position until 2007, is the candidate depicted in the poster. Image 6.08 shows her later as the leader of a different political party.

In the cases of greatest two-party system weakness, they coincide with consolidated third statewide parties. This position has also been influ-

enced by the country's own social and political reality. Initially, the CDS — 'Centro Democrático y Social', literally, the Democratic and Social Centre—held that position and achieved the second-best result of the third formations with 10% of the votes. Figure 6.05 shows that CDS included former ministers of Spain's pro-democratic governments on its lists, as well as some individuals who played a significant role in the newly adopted democracy, such as Eduardo Punset, whose daughter would later join the ranks of the new centrist party Ciudadanos. In its early days, the CDS supported Spain's integration into the EU and the common market due to its liberal character. Prior to its merger with the PP in 2005, it opposed the European Constitution.

The next actor to reach the podium was IU. The left-wing coalition was able to hold the position from 1994 to 1999. It wasn't until 2009 that other statewide parties other than IU came on the scene. The only party that entered in this period, straddling the two, is UPyD — 'Unión Progreso y Democracia', literally Union, Progress and Democracy—who won an MEP with 3% of the votes.

During the 2004-2009 cycle, specifically, the third position went to coalitions of non-statewide parties. At both points in time, these coalitions were led by right-wing nationalist parties. In the case of 2004, it was the majority nationalist party in Catalonia at the time (CiU) that led the candidacy and that would obtain 5.2% of the votes. In 2009, the party leading the coalition was the majority nationalist party in the Basque Country (PNV), the coalition obtaining very similar results to that of the previous five-year period (5.1% of the valid vote). This was a singular result since regionalist and nationalist alternatives have rarely exceeded 15% of the votes.

In addition to these non-statewide political parties, other nationalist and even pro-independence forces competed first alone, and then forming coalitions in different European elections. The Basque separatists of the radical left ran alone in 1987, 1989, and 1999. For their part, the Andalusian regionalists did so in 1989, and the Galician nationalists in 1999. The rest of the representation has rested on different coalitions, but the results achieved have varied widely. Despite the broad range of regional elections, they have won no seats, not even under coalitions. As Image 6.07 shows, coalitions of different nationalist formations, with a pro-European tendency to unite nationals, have been a constant since 1989. In this case, they do not seek to leave the EU, but to reject outright the failed attempt at a European constitution, which for them sought to eliminate these identity markers.

For their part, the results of non-conventional formations have fluctuated more than that of the

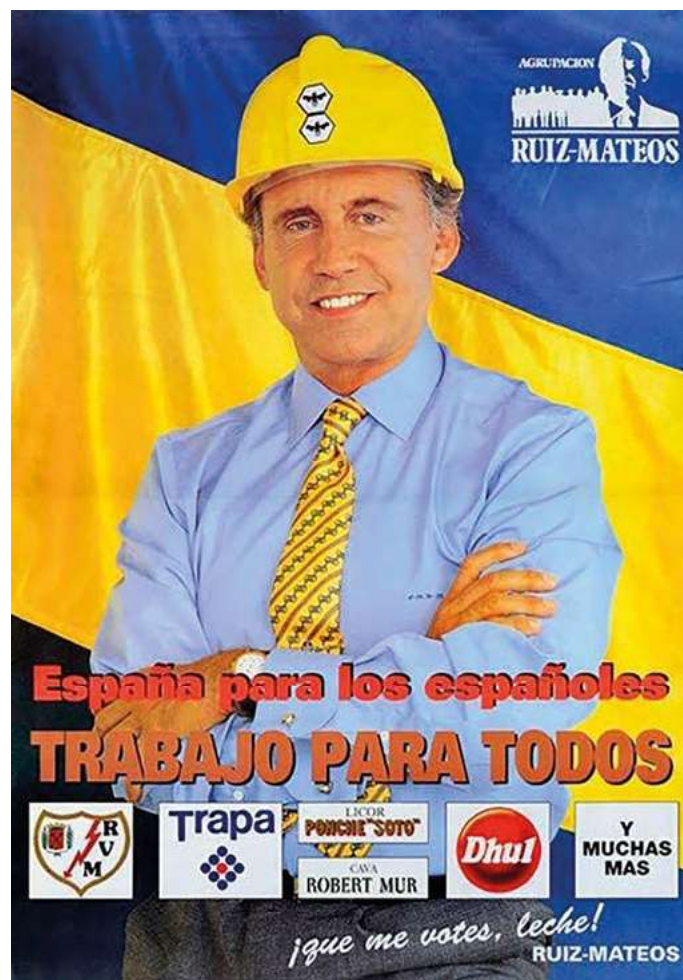


Image 6.03: 1994 RM party poster, showing himself and all the companies that he owned, 'Spain for Spaniards. Work for everyone. Vote for me, dammit!'. 1994 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

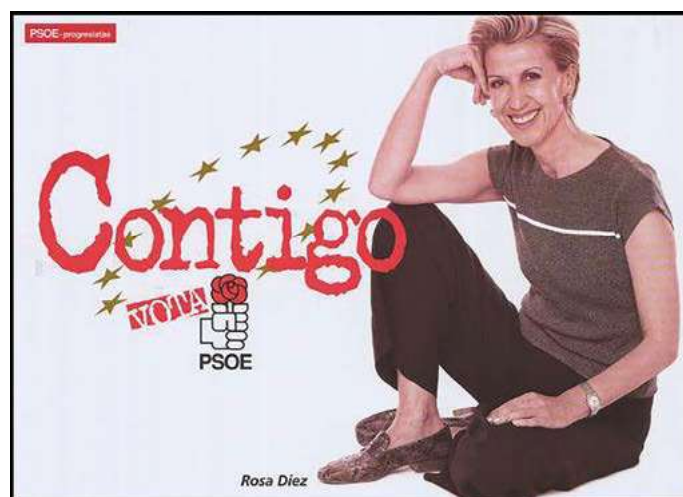


Image 6.04: PSOE party poster showing leader Rosa Díez, 'With you'. 1999 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

main political formations. The discrete numbers of this conglomerate of actors stood out in 1989. In all other cases, the sum of the different forces did not exceed 5% of the valid votes.

If we now focus on representation, based on the legal system established for the transfer of votes to seats, we find that, in electoral terms, the two strongest parties dominate entirely. Thus, the PSOE and PP accounted together for between 42 and 51 MEPs of those distributed throughout Spain in this period. This figure is meaningless on its own but in terms of percentages, these two parties won the fewest MEPs—1989—accounting for 70% of the total number of elected representatives. This figure has been gradually increasing ever since, reaching 90% of MEPs elected by Spain in 2004.

It should also be noted that the total number of seats has varied because of the European Chamber's various enlargements and legislative reforms. In 1987 and 1989, Spain had 60 MEPS. This quota increased by an extra 4 MEPs in the 1994 and 1999 elections. Subsequently, from 2004 onwards, the number of Spanish MEPs fell to 54, a figure that remained the same until 2019. It is worth mentioning that the number of Spanish MEPs increased by five when Brexit became effective and that in the 2024 elections, the number of MEPs to be elected by Spain is 61.

As one can see in Figure 6.04, the other statewide parties are consolidating themselves in the European electoral panorama, creating a stable environment where around 50 MEPs are con-

trolled by the country's two major formations. The remaining 10 or 14 are distributed across the third statewide party in contention—between 2 and 9 MEPs—and the nationalist and regionalist formations—between 2 and 4 MEPs. This relative electoral stability underwent a change with the entry of the centrist UPyD party in 2009, wanting to be the heirs of the now defunct CDS. The party draws on centrist militants from other long-established parties such as the PSOE (their leader, Rosa Díez, as previously depicted in Image 6.04) and the PP, as well as writers and members of Spain's intellectual elite. This latter party would achieve two MEPs in what would be the precedent of the party system change in Spain owing to the Great Recession.

### Changing the party system: here come the radicals (2014-2019)

As mentioned earlier, the Spanish party system has undergone a stable and lasting change since the 2014 European elections. The emergence of UPyD in 2009 (see Image 6.08)—which would also obtain representation in the national parliament—was followed by that of Podemos—meaning 'We can'—a radical left-wing party (see Image 6.09), which emerged because of the 'Indignados' movement that occupied squares throughout Spain in 2011. This movement was a series of protests, demonstrations, and occupations against austerity policies in Spain that began around the local and regional elections of 2011 and 2012. Beginning on 15 May 2011, many of the subsequent

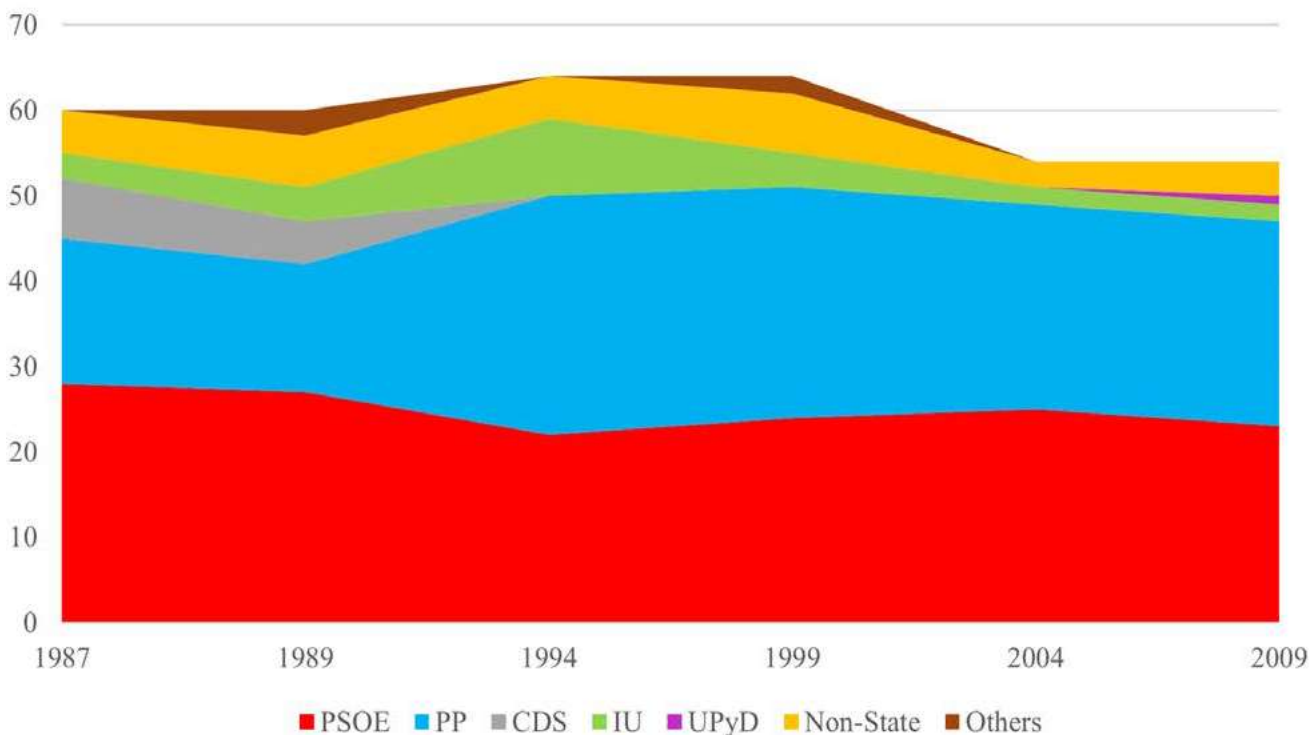
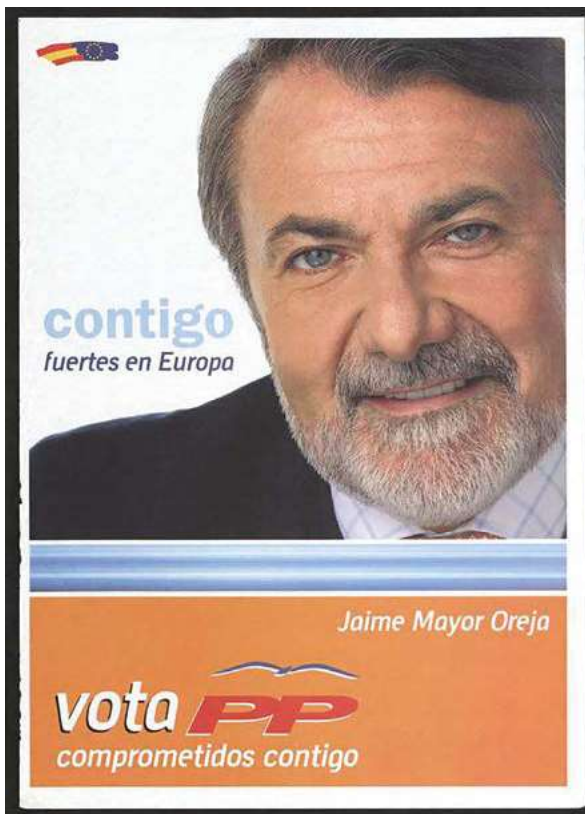


Figure 6.04: Number of elected members per party or group of parties in European Parliamentary Elections 1987-2009. Source: Author's calculation with data from the Ministry of Interior.



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Image 6.06: PP poster showing number 1 in their MEP list, 'With you, strong in Europe'. 2004 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.05: CDS Poster asking for the vote and saying, 'The Center moves forward'. 1987 European Parliament Election in Spain. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



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Image 6.07: Non-statewide parties' coalition poster, 'The independentist left to Europe. No to the European Constitution'. 2004 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



demonstrations spread through various social networks. According to the Spanish public broadcasting company, between 6.5 and 8 million Spaniards participated in these events (Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio, 2016). Recognising that they competed for the same electorate and in the same space as IU, both brands converged in a coalition in the 2019 elections.

Along with Podemos, the second statewide party with a new constitution is Cs (see Image 6.10). The party presents itself as centrist, upholding Spanish values in a Catalonia that is increasingly leaning towards pro-independence. It maintains a steadfastly pro-European stance, despite its rightward shift over time. This party originated as a regional party in Catalonia and leapt into the national arena in 2011. It ran in the 2014 European elections where it obtained its first national representatives on the political scene. This party has chosen a different path as it has always presented a solo candidacy since its formation in 2006. The exception was in 2009, when, despite being a Catalan party, it formed a coalition with the pan-European party Libertas, obtaining poor results (0.14% of the valid votes and no representatives).

The last statewide party to have entered with some force in the European Parliament is VOX. Much has been written in recent years about this party and its classification as a far-right, populist radical right or national-populist formation. The reason is its spectacular electoral advance and its ability to attain power in regional institutions throughout Spain from 2019 onwards (Antón-Merino, Pérez-Castaños and

Méndez-Juez, 2023). In five years, this far-right party has gone from discrete results, although it was the first extra-parliamentary actor in 2014, to the fifth force, increasing its votes fivefold, as can be seen in Figure 6.05.

Extreme right-wing or radical right-wing formations (Norris, 2009) are worth a brief comment. At different historical and geographical moments, EP elections have represented a privileged platform for this type of political party, France being the clearest illustration of this. In Spain, however, over the last 32 years, and excluding the emergence of VOX (see Image 6.11), 14 different candidates have opted for representation, unsuccessfully. VOX maintains a Eurosceptic stance towards the European Union, arguing that Spain should not make any concessions to the EU regarding sovereignty. This is because, according to the Spanish Constitution, national sovereignty is vested in the Spanish people, from whom the powers of the State emanate. The party's leadership opposes the EU becoming a federal superstate and instead argues for a Europe of strong and sovereign states that defend their borders and Christian roots and oppose multiculturalism and mass immigration (Rama et al, 2021).

The data in Figure 6.05 now shows a greater number of forces generally fighting for representation. The fact that there were at least six statewide formations in the 2014 elections (to which regionalist, nationalist, and other different formations can be added) means that the vote percentage distribution dif-

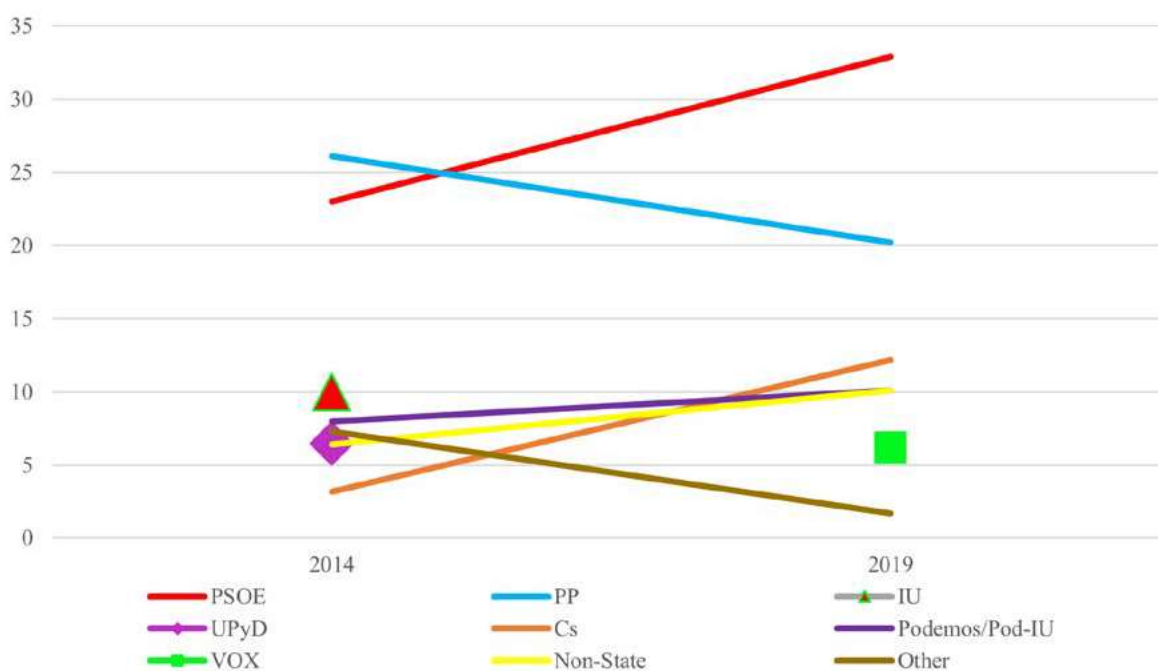


Figure 6.05. Spanish vote share in the European Parliamentary elections 2014-2019. Source: Author's calculation with data from the Ministry of the Interior.

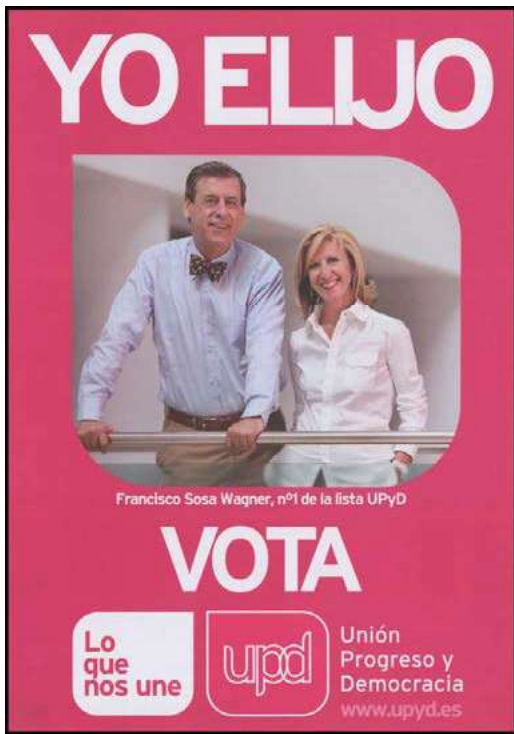


Image 6.08: UPyD poster showing number 1 in their MEP list and, also, leader of the party and former socialist candidate, Rosa Díez, 'I choose'. 2009 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.09: Podemos poster 'When was the last time you look forward to voting?', and then stating, 'Of course we can!'. 2014 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.10: Cs poster 'The strength of the Union'. Note that one of the candidates is the daughter of the former CDS candidate seen in Image 6.06. 2014 European Parliamentary Elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.



Image 6.11: VOX poster, 'Vote VOX for Spain'. 2019 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.

ferred considerably from that experienced until then.

In this sense, the two major statewide parties continue to amass the highest vote percentage. However, these percentages tend to fall as more parties enter the electoral contest and have more chances of obtaining representation. What have not been reduced are the differences between these formations and the rest, since in 2014, the distances increased again, reaching the levels of the first calls (+10 points). Their weight in terms of votes, in those same two elections, is just below 50% (49% and 53%, respectively), when the previous lowest figure was in 1989 with 61%.

The third statewide party, IU, returned in 2014 to regain its traditional third vote percentage place, adding 10% of the votes. It maintained its position in 2019, although on this occasion it ran with Podemos, the new force created in 2014 and with which a coalition was formed for practically all of Spain's 2019 elections. In the European elections, they obtained 10% of the valid vote. Thanks to this coalition, Podemos went from 8% of the vote to 10%. However, the coalition with IU failed to sustain the electoral strength held by both parties in 2014, as they lost more than eight points by the wayside. It is worth noting that in both 2014 and 2019, left-wing parties maintained the active presence of the word Europe in their campaign materials (see Images 6.12 and 6.13). This element is even more important given that in 2019 the European elections in Spain coincided with local and regional elections, which may have diluted the role of Europe. However, the PSOE (Image 6.12) and Podemos (Image 6.13) differ in what they want for Europe, with the former being the guarantors of the Europe they want, while the latter are openly committed to changing what exists.

The fifth statewide party in terms of strength in the 2014 elections was Cs, although it was behind nationalist and regionalist parties. This party won its first representatives at the statewide level in the 2014 elections, with 3.2% of the vote. In 2019, the party was well-established and could even foresee becoming the second political force in the country at the national level. They achieved an astonishing 12.2% of the vote, the second-best electoral figure for a statewide party other than the PSOE or the PP in Spain's entire history of European elections. In fact, Cs has been known for its pro-European stance, which has been a significant aspect of the party's identity -as portrayed in Image 6.14-. Its representatives have played a crucial role in the European Parliament within the Liberals' political group. However, at the national level, Cs' positions have been aligned with those of the traditional right.

The shortest-running statewide party is VOX. Its 2019 election results were lower than expected in

the European elections, as it achieved barely more than 10% support in the national April elections that same year and lost around four points within a month (6.2% of the vote). Despite it all, VOX obtained greater electoral support than the various non-statewide parties, becoming the fifth political force in the 2019 elections. However, the sum of the five statewide forces barely accounted for more than 80% of the votes, far from the 89% of votes reached in 2004 or 88% in 2009. Based on the above, the reason is the lesser weight of the PSOE and PP rather than the rise of nationalist and regionalist formations.

To draw conclusions upon the electoral weight percentage illustrated in Figure 6.05, we must now examine the weight of non-statewide parties. The latter were presented in 2014 in different coalitions that did not exceed 10% of the valid vote. The coalition trend described at the beginning of this chapter took a different turn in 2019, with the pro-Catalan pro-independence party JUNTS—meaning Together in Catalan—running alone (Image 6.15). This list obtained 4.5% of the vote at the national level and was led by former regional president Carles Puigdemont, a Spanish justice fugitive after having declared Catalonia's independence unilaterally in 2017. Together, non-statewide parties accounted for almost 12% of the valid vote in 2019.

As can be observed in Figure 6.06, if there is one feature that characterises Spain's representation at the EP over this period it is fragmentation. The emergence of new formations led to up to 10 candidacies represented in the hemicycle in 2014, which would fall to 8 in 2019 owing to the different electoral coalitions between both statewide parties (IU and Podemos) and non-statewide parties (from four candidacies to three). In addition, UPyD—which obtained 4 MEPs in 2014 but did not compete in 2019—disappeared, while VOX emerged, entering Parliament with 3 MEPs. The latter were distributed into five different EP parliamentary groups in 2014. An extra payroll was added in 2019, as well as four non-attached ones (García-Rabadán and Trujillo, 2020).

Thus, the PP was the first force in 2014, with 16 of the 54 MEPs to be distributed, followed by the PSOE which obtained 14. The IU was left with six, and Podemos, running for its first elections, would obtain a resounding success, achieving 5 MEPs. These figures changed in 2019, as the two main traditional parties won more votes. The PSOE thus obtained 20 European representatives, the PP coming second with 12. Cs, which had already obtained 2 MEPs in 2014, reached 7, its success in the EU election mirroring its national and regional Spanish electoral success. We can observe how over this period, with the appearance of new statewide parties, the PSOE and PP saw their representative weight

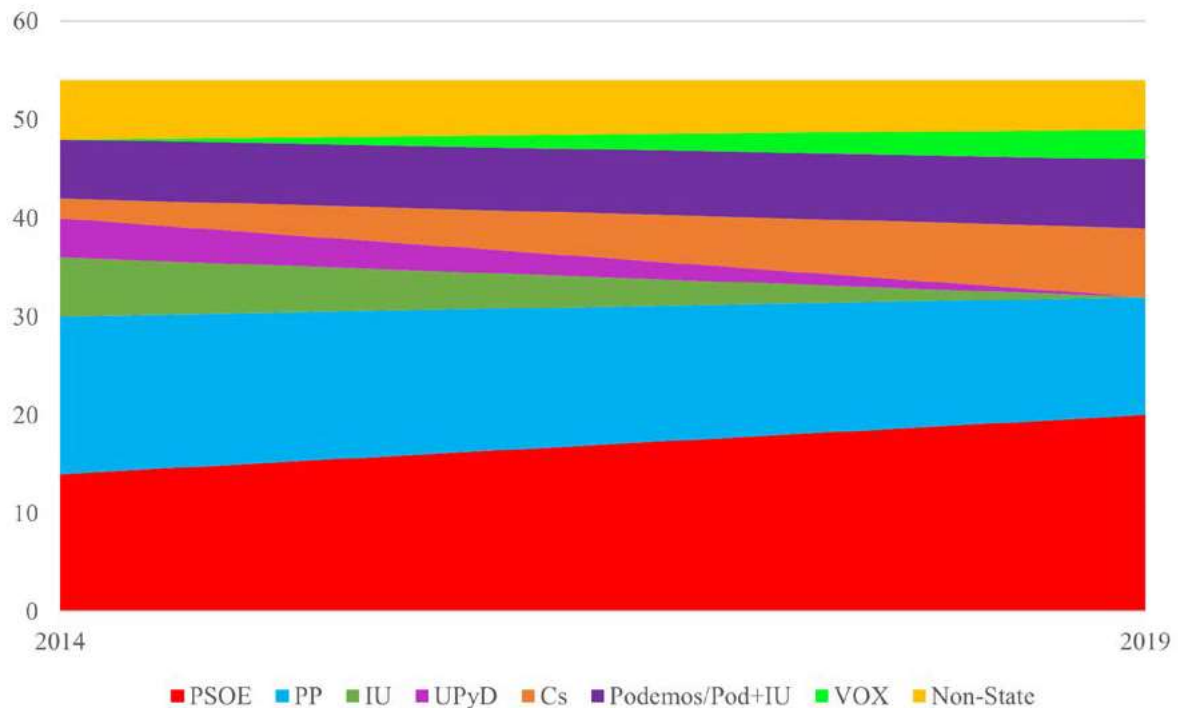


Figure 6.06: Number of members elected in European Parliamentary Elections per party or group of parties 2014-2019. Source: Author's elaboration with data from the Ministry of the Interior.

fall below 60% (56% in 2014 and 59% in 2019), with Spanish MEPs distributed across a greater number of formations. This loss of voters, in the case of the PP, is due to the strength of Cs in the centre of the political space and the emergence of VOX to its right, which is taking away part of its electorate. This is why, as Image 6.16 shows, it is appealing to the centre in its slogan for the 2019 European elections. For their part, the non-statewide parties maintained the same aggregate stability that characterises Spain's entire European electoral period.

### Conclusion

Three decades of EP elections is a long enough period to be able to draw some conclusions regarding Spain's European Union journey. The changes that have unfolded over eight elections are as numerous as those experienced across all spheres of Spanish society. The initial enthusiasm of adhering to the Community project seems to have given way to a certain indifference, as in the rest of the Member States. The European elections have reflected this shift.

One pattern identifiable is the distinct nature of the EP elections. European elections are different from the rest, whether due to the interest they arouse in the media, citizens, or political parties, or because of the regulations applied. Nevertheless, Spanish national results and European ones are highly interdependent, and several periods can be distinguished. First, there is a general historical trend of concen-

tration in a few forces, in line with the supply and increase of coalitions. From 1989 to 2009, the number of actors with seats almost halved, from 11 to 6. This dynamic was broken in 2014 with the emergence of Spain's new political parties, which led to a shift in the statewide parties' scenario. The 3 traditional actors (the PSOE, PP, and IU) increased to 6 in 2014 (PSOE, PP, IU, UPyD, Podemos and Cs) and 5 in 2019 (UPyD, IU and Podemos formed a coalition, and VOX managed to gain a seat). The representative concentration of statewide parties thus failed to succeed at recovering the position they enjoyed at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Despite this, none of the traditional political actors, whether statewide or non-state parties, have stopped competing to obtain the best possible result. None of the numerous alternatives created with the aim of replicating RM's -portrayed in Image 6.04- great success have managed to do so. Spanish political parties are aware that the European Parliament constitutes an arena in which they can disseminate and defend their national interests. And as in the case of Spanish society, they consider that it weighs considerably in citizens' daily decisions.



Image 6.12: PSOE's poster, 'The Europe that you want'. 2019 European Elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.15: JUNTS poster, 'Free around Europe'. 2019 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.



Image 6.13: UP coalition integrating Podemos and IU, 'United we can change Europe'. 2019 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.16: PP Poster portraying is number 1 candidate Dolors Montserrat, 'Focused on your future'. 2019 European Parliamentary Elections. This makes a word connection, as the word meaning 'focused' and the centre in the ideological spectrum are the same in Spanish. Source: European Elections Monitoring Center.



Image 6.14: Cs poster, portraying most of their leaders and candidates, 'Let's go! Europe'. 2019 European Parliamentary elections. Source: European Election Monitoring Center.

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