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Catalysts of change: Unveiling the nexus between protest movements and party politics in the Mediterranean

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ABSTRACT

The recent surges of protest have emerged as a striking global phenomenon. Several diverse countries, including Egypt, the United States, Spain, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom, have witnessed massive protest movements over the past decade. Numerous recent studies have underscored the pivotal role of the interaction between protest movements and party politics. However, our understanding of why certain movements profoundly impact the political landscape, sometimes triggering the collapse of existing party systems, while others barely alter conventional politics, remains limited. Drawing from case studies of Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Turkey, we conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the impact of protest movements during the 2010s. We aim to elucidate why and how some protests have proven more effective in reshaping party politics, while others have faltered. Our contention is that the dynamics of the party system play a pivotal role in determining the capacity of social movements to instigate transformative changes in party politics.

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KEYWORDS Protest movements; party politics; Southern Europe; party change; party system change

Introduction

The recent global upsurge in protests (e.g., Occupy-style mobilizations) constitutes a remarkable phenomenon that has captured international attention. Scholars have attributed the emergence of these movements to a shared set of factors, including growing disenchantment with mainstream politics, disparities stemming from post-modernization and globalization (see Della Porta & Mattoni, 2015; Fominaya 2016; Gerbaudo 2016). Yet, despite their common origins, these movements have sought to reshape political structures in vastly different ways.

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While numerous studies have highlighted the significance of the interplay between protest movements and party politics (Della Porta et al., 2017; Goldstone, 2003; Hutter & Vliegenthart, 2016; Hutter et al., 2018; Kriesi et al., 2012; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010), our understanding of the factors influencing these interactions and their outcomes remains limited. Specifically, we lack insights into why some movements bring about significant political structural changes – sometimes leading to the collapse of existing party systems – while others struggle to effect even the slightest transformation in conventional politics. In contrast to the extensive research on the motivations behind mobilization (see Aytaç & Stokes, 2019; Gurr, 1970; Tilly, 1973; McAdam, 1999, among others), our focus is on unravelling why and how certain protests prove more effective in reshaping party politics while others falter.

Drawing on case studies from Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Turkey, we systematically compare the impact of protest movements during the 2010s to uncover the factors that influence the potential of contemporary social movements to drive changes in party politics. The choice of these four countries is well-suited for this investigation for several reasons. Firstly, all four protest movements shared a common concern: a dissatisfaction with the functioning of representative democracy and a crisis of representation within mainstream politics (see Della Porta, 2012; Roos & Oikonomakis, 2014). Although Turkey's case differs somewhat due to strong anti-austerity undertones, the core grievance in all instances revolved around the inability of mainstream parties to address the concerns of broader society (see Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Yardimci-Geyikçi, 2014). Thus, the central demand of these movements was political change. Secondly, in each case, what began as localized protests evolved into nationwide expressions of dissent against the political establishment, ultimately becoming the largest social movements in their respective countries. These protests unfolded during the same timeframe (between 2011 and 2013) and were heavily influenced by one another, with similar methods, messages, activities, and mobilization styles. Thirdly, the demographics of these protests were strikingly similar, comprising predominantly of students, young individuals, and well-educated young professionals (see Juris, 2016). These movements targeted dissatisfaction with all major political parties, reflecting a broader crisis of representation. Their ideology primarily emanated from left-wing politics, particularly in Spain, Greece, and Portugal, where the crisis was linked to the failure of mainstream left parties to differentiate their economic programmes from those of mainstream right-wing parties in response to the 2008 financial crisis (Della Porta et al., 2017). In Turkey, the focus was more on challenging right-wing majoritarianism and advocating for pluralism (Gencoglu-Onbasi 2016). Since the call for pluralism has long been a part of left-wing politics in Turkey, these protests also resonated with left-wing political actors and called for a new political approach. Overall, in all cases examined, the pursuit of democratic renewal

was closely tied to left-wing associations, making the protest ideology deeply influenced by the perceived inadequacy of mainstream left parties to address the broader populace.

These shared characteristics, combined with the diverse effects of the protests on party politics, make these Southern European cases ideal for studying how specific attributes of party systems can either enable or impede the impact of protests on party politics. Italy, despite being part of Southern Europe, was excluded for two main reasons. Firstly, while there were several moments of contention in Italy following the 2008 economic crisis, no movement in Italy achieved the level of mass participation, symbolic influence, and transversal recognition seen in the other cases (Zamponi, 2012, p. 418). Secondly, the impact of Italian mobilization on the party system was relatively weak, with little direct effect (Andretta, 2017, p. 201). The protests indirectly influenced Italian politics as radical left parties failed to capitalize on the protests, and the challenger party, the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S), had fewer ties to the political left (Hutter et al., 2018). This differentiation sets Italy apart from the other four cases.

While Spain and Greece have witnessed the emergence of new political parties or 'movement parties', defined as a transition from a movement into a political party (H. Kitschelt, 2006), Portugal and Turkey have primarily experienced individual party changes. Furthermore, the impact of the protests on party systems has varied widely, from the severe collapse of the party system in Greece to party system changes in Spain and Portugal, and nearly no change in Turkey.

Our analysis of protests in Southern Europe leads us to argue that party system dynamics, including fragmentation, polarization, and the nature of political competition (whether centrifugal or centripetal), play a crucial role in determining the capacity of social movements to effect changes in party politics in this region. Protest movements emerge within the context of an existing party system, exerting their initial influence on individual parties. Consequently, in the initial phase, the party system acts as an independent variable, shaping the effects of protests on individual parties – which we classify as the dependent variable. In the subsequent phase, the parties that have undergone changes in response to protests become the independent variables, with the potential to effectuate alterations within the party system – now considered the dependent variable. Thus, our study conceptualizes the party system as both an independent and a dependent variable, recognizing its dual role in the dynamic interplay with protest movements. Our primary goal is to trace the mechanisms underlying political change, whether within individual parties or across the party system, in some cases but not in others. Although there is no single mechanism explaining the outcomes of protests on party politics, we identify several necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, factors contributing to the impact of protests on party systems. As such this

work significantly advances our understanding of the nexus between social movements and party politics by dissecting the complex interplay of party system dynamics – fragmentation, polarization, and the nature of political competition – and their dual role as both catalysts for and responders to the transformative impulses of protest movements in Southern Europe.

Political opportunity structure and the relationship between protest movements and party politics

The political opportunity approach, a leading theory in social movement studies, underscores the pivotal role of the political institutional context in understanding the success and impact of social movements (see Amenta et al., 2010; Bosi et al., 2016; Duyvendak, 1995; Giugni, 1998; J. C. Jenkins, 1995; H. P. Kitschelt, 1986; Koopmans, 1999; Kriesi, 1989; McAdam, 1982; McAdam et al., 1996; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Rootes, 1999; Tarrow, 1983, 1996; Tilly, 1978). Imported from political science into the realm of social movements, the concept of a political opportunity structure refers to 'specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements, and historical precedents for social mobilization, which either facilitate or constrain the development of protest movements' (H. P. Kitschelt, 1986, p. 58).

During the 1990s, the interplay between protest movements and electoral politics emerged as a focal point of new social movement studies (see Kriesi et al., 1992, 1995). Building upon the political opportunity structure framework, Kriesi (1995) argued that the electoral system, the informal actions of elites in responding to outsider movements, and the stance of left-wing political actors all played significant roles in shaping the impact of the new social movements (see also C. Jenkins & Klandermans, 1995, p. 10). While the configuration of power within the party system was identified as a key factor influencing the alignment of movements' interests (see Duyvendak, 1995; Kriesi, 1989), much of this research primarily focused on the role of left-wing political parties as natural allies of protest movements (Della Porta & Rucht, 1995). Similarly, the position of left-wing parties in government or opposition emerged as a central factor determining the political outcomes of protest movements (H. P. Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 1995).

More recently, the relationship between protest movements and party politics has garnered considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Della Porta et al., 2017, Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; McAdam & Tarrow, 2010, 2013). A significant driving force behind this interest has been the emergence of movement parties and associated changes in party systems in Southern Europe. While some of this research analysed party system changes in the context of the great recession and the protests it sparked, others focused solely on movement parties. Still, others explored the alliance behaviour of protest movements with unions and its impact on party politics.

For instance, Morlino and Raniolo (2017) examined the repercussions of the economic crisis on party systems in Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Italy, observing substantial changes in the first three cases. Similarly, Hutter and Kriesi (2019) analysed the political consequences of what they termed the concomitant economic and political crisis in Europe. They investigated whether the crises expressed through protests in Southern Europe had politicized new issues and subsequently reshaped the party systems. Their findings indicated that Greece, Portugal, and Spain had experienced politicization of new conflicts encompassing both political and economic issues, while the Italian case diverged in terms of the content of conflict. Della Porta et al. (2017), on the other hand, specifically delved into the origins of movement parties and their interactions with social movements. Drawing from case studies of SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and M5S in Italy, they examined the emergence, organizational differences, and effects of these parties on their respective party systems.

Padoan (2020) compared Bolivia and Argentina with Spain and Italy, linking the success of social movements in influencing their party systems to their relationships with their respective national union movements. Similarly, Portos and Carvalho (2022) compared the alliance behaviour of Spanish and Portuguese protests, exploring how this behaviour influenced their relationship with institutional politics.

Inspired by both the political opportunity approach and this emerging research on the interaction between protest movements and institutional politics, our study examines how protests are influenced by and, in turn, influence party politics. We combine the political opportunity approach with this new line of research, which investigates protests and their effects on party politics. While political opportunity explanations tend to remain static by primarily accounting for how the context allows or constrains the chances of social movements, the new research often concentrates solely on the impact of protests movements/protests during periods of economic recession on parties or party systems.

Our approach transcends both of these limitations. Through a stepwise analysis, we first consider how broader characteristics of the party system determine the impact of protest movements at the party level. Subsequently, we demonstrate how these movements, based on their initial impact at the party level, can reshape the political context that influences their own capacity. We achieve this by analysing their impact on the party system as a whole. Thus, our study explores the influence at both the party and party system levels. Furthermore, our study also advances this theoretical groundwork by considering the nuances of political coalitions and leadership, which have become increasingly pertinent to understanding modern protest movements and their electoral and systemic repercussions. This is in line with the recent literature that underscores the importance of these factors such as examining

the two-bloc logic and polarization in the context of coalition governments and exploring the dynamics of elite polarization and party conflict in Southern Europe (see Aslanidis, 2021; Bosco & Verney, 2022; Jalali et al., 2021).

Moreover, rather than narrowly conceptualizing protests as mere by-products of the great recession, we view them as outcomes of a broader crisis of representation. This expanded perspective allows us to include the case of Turkey in our comparative analysis, a case in which no significant change was experienced, thereby adding diversity to our findings. Additionally, while much of the emerging literature tends to focus on the similarities between cases, our study takes into account both similarities and differences, strengthening the robustness of our argument.

Figure 1 illustrates our overarching argument. It is essential to highlight that expanding our approach necessitates consideration of various factors that are controlled for in this study, including the electoral system, type of political regime, and the specific demands of protests, as these variables may vary in other cases of protest movements.

In the context of the 2010s and the Southern European countries under scrutiny in our study, the initial impact of a protest movement is primarily determined by the structure of the party system. This critical first step hinges on factors such as political polarization, fragmentation, and the nature of political competition. Depending on these elements, protests may either lead to the formation of a new party (referred to as a 'movement party') or induce a transformation within one of the left-wing parties. Here, party change encompasses shifts in policy positions, strategic approaches, and organizational structures (Harmel & Janda, 1994). Conversely, party system change involves a broader transformation in the direction of political competition or the governing formula (Mair, 1997, p. 54).

In the second step, conditional on the response and stance of the mainstream left-wing party, the initial impact of protests (whether through the emergence of a new party or changes within existing parties) can significantly influence the party system. This influence can manifest as either a collapse of the party system or a more moderate transformation through party system change. Alternatively, it may have a limited effect on (re)shaping the party system, particularly when party change is confined to a marginal left-wing party. Our empirical analysis underscores that the first step is conditioned by the inherent structure of the party system and, in this regard, is independent of the positioning of political actors. Conversely, the second step is contingent on various factors, including whether the mainstream left-wing party retains or loses power, and the role of political leadership. The reaction of left-wing parties to the protest movement ultimately determines the outcome in the party system.

To substantiate our argument, we employ a stepwise approach that elucidates the factors influencing the outcomes of protest movements. In

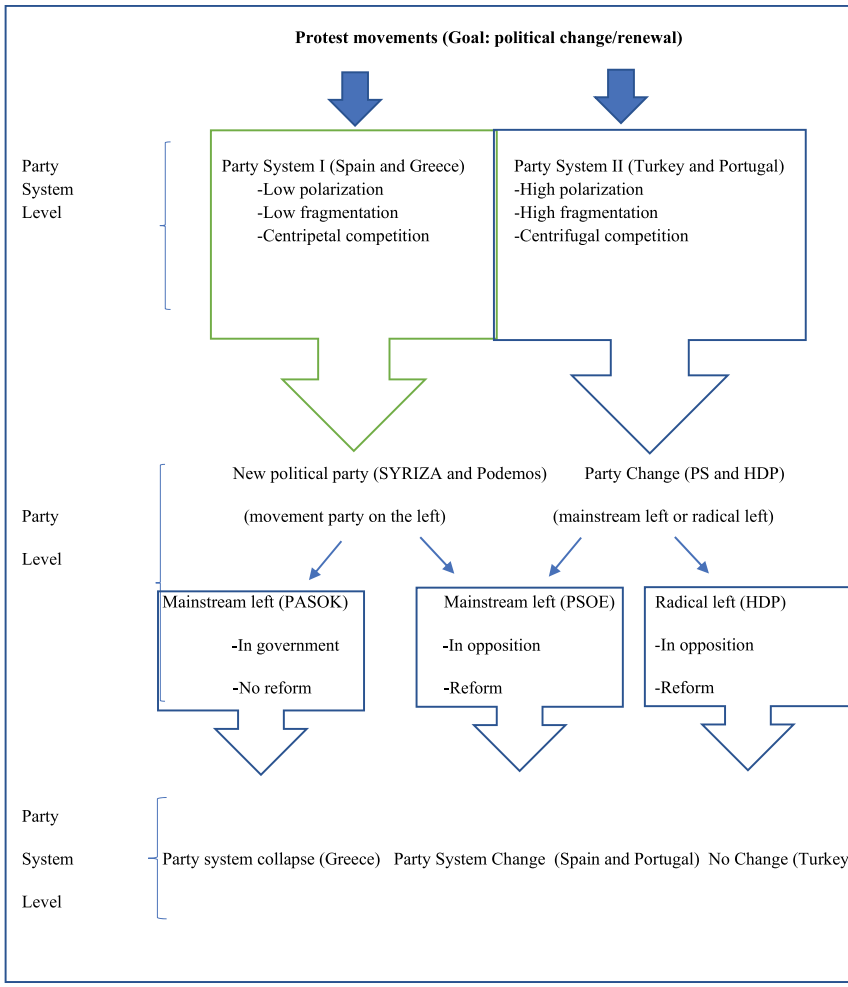

Figure 1. Party politics mechanisms behind the impact of protest movements in the 2010s in Southern Europe.

the first step, using the comparative method of similarity, we identify commonalities within two groups of countries. One group comprises Spain and Greece, where we observe the emergence or ascent of new parties following the protests. The other group consists of Turkey and Portugal, where we observe party change in response to the protests.

In the second step, in explaining the divergent outcomes within these groups, we identify dissimilarities between Turkey and Portugal, as well as between Spain and Greece, that account for the absence of political change in Turkey, the occurrence of party system changes in Portugal and Spain, and the collapse of the party system in Greece. Subsequently, we delve into an

exploration of why protests in Portugal and Spain yielded similar party system effects, despite variations in their initial impacts.

After the protest movements

The wave of global protests at the end of the 2000s had a profound impact on Europe (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2014; Flesher Fominaya, 2015). Subsequently, in each case, party politics began to exhibit signs of transformation. Following the Aganaktismenoi movement in Greece, the first elections witnessed the flourishing of challenger parties from both the left and right, with the left-wing Coalition of Radical Left (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς, Syriza) making the most significant challenge (see Spourdalakis, 2013; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). This surge in challenger parties effectively eroded one of the key players in Greece's existing two-party system, resulting in a party system collapse (see Altiparmakis, 2019; Chatzipadelis, 2017; Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2018; Kazamias, 2018; Pappas, 2014). Syriza, founded in 2004, had previously been a marginal opposition party during the 2000s. However, the emergence of popular protests aligned perfectly with the party's position as an outsider in mainstream politics. Syriza reinvented itself by embracing the movement's messages and demands, co-opting some protest leaders, and harnessing a potent populist appeal, ultimately becoming the primary representative of the Aganaktismenoi movement (Hutter et al., 2018).

Similarly, in Spain, the protests brought about significant changes in party politics (see Orriols & Cordero, 2016). The Indignados movement led to the establishment of a new left-wing political party, Podemos, from scratch in 2014. In contrast to Syriza, Podemos emerged as a direct product of the 15 M Movement, thus categorizing it as a 'movement party' (see Chironi & Fittipaldi, 2017; Della Porta et al., 2017). Additionally, Spanish politics faced challenges from the right, with the centre-right party Citizens (Ciudadanos, Cs) gaining appeal after 2011 (Ramiro & Gomez, 2017; see also Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio, 2016). The rise of these two parties contributed to the decline of Spain's two mainstream parties, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE) and the Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP), which had dominated the country since the 1990s. Between 2015 and onward, the new parties managed to attract 35–40 per cent of voters in elections, while the combined vote share of PSOE and PP dropped from 80–82 per cent in the pre-2005 era to 45–50 per cent. Consequently, Spain underwent more of a party system change in which new parties integrated into the system without entirely displacing mainstream forces (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; see also Morlino & Raniolo, 2017).

Conversely, political change in Portugal remained relatively limited. Despite being severely affected by the economic crisis, characterized by rising

unemployment and shrinking growth, the Portuguese populace expressed their discontent through protests (Accornero & Ramos Pinto, 2015). However, existing parties successfully contained this discontent. Between 2009 and 2019, although smaller left-wing parties like the Left Block (Bloco de Esquerda, BE) and the communist party, in alliance with the ecologists, Unitary Democratic Coalition (Coligação Democrática Unitária, CDU), increased their appeal within the party system, the three mainstream parties – the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista, PS), the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata, PSD), and the People's Party (Partido Popular, CDS-PP) – continued to command a significant vote share. Following the political protests, the social democratic party, PS, redefined its political stance concerning the bailout and its relations with other leftist parties. This recalibration aimed to reposition the party within Portugal's ideological spectrum, resulting in a party change (see Royo, 2018).

In the case of Turkey, the Gezi Park protests exerted multiple effects on the political system (see Gürcan & Peker, 2015; Özen, 2020). Upon closer scrutiny of post-Gezi election results, one might prematurely infer that the protests did not significantly shift the electoral landscape (see Çarkoglu, 2014). However, this surface-level observation belies the nuanced impacts on opposition parties. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), experienced minimal influence, maintaining its traditional stance with occasional allusions to the protests' secularist themes (Draege et al., 2017). In contrast, the political discourse fostered by the Gezi movement found fertile ground within the Kurdish political movement, particularly with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Formed in the period following Gezi, the HDP wove the protest's demands – environmental rights, democratization, human rights, feminism, and economic left issues – into the fabric of its political identity, doing so in 73 per cent of their interventions, a stark difference from the CHP's less than half (Draege, 2023). Selahattin Demirtaş, the HDP leader, embraced this new politics during his presidential campaign, resonating with a broad spectrum of disaffected voters beyond the Kurdish base, including leftists and liberals. The Gezi movement's emblem, slogans, and campaign methods became synonymous with the HDP in the June 2015 general elections, signalling the party's transformation and ambition to become a national party. This strategic adaptation even led to notable Gezi figures being included on the HDP's candidate lists. In essence, Turkey experienced a party change in the first step, characterized by HDP's transformation as it sought to become a national party by adopting the discourse and methods of the protest movement. However, the second step saw almost no change in the functioning of the party system following the protest movements. While this conclusion may be linked to the acceleration of democratic backsliding in the country since the Gezi Park protests, it's essential to note that the protests occurred in 2013 when the country was still classified as an electoral

democracy, and the shift towards competitive authoritarianism began with the 2015 general elections (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016, Ozbudun, 2015). Thus, the protests took place in a flawed democracy and had an impact on how politics functioned, rendering it comparable to other cases. However, it's worth acknowledging that an analysis of the lack of party system change in Turkey in the second step should also consider the process of democratic backsliding and the HDP's radical position within the party system.

Accounting for the initial impact: New party versus party change

Why, initially, have new parties emerged since the protests, successfully translating the movements' demands into mainstream politics in Greece and Spain, while only inciting relatively limited party change in Portugal and Turkey? To address this question, we employ a most different systems design, which seeks to uncover commonalities in party system characteristics prior to the protest movements between Spain and Greece on one hand, and Turkey and Portugal on the other, ultimately leading to the emergence of new parties in the former group and party change in the latter.

It is important to recognize that the protest movements generated opportunities for new political actors. Consequently, several new parties emerged in all cases, representing both the left and the right. However, our focus here is on parties either established by the protest movements themselves or those that reinvented their platforms to align with the movements' goals. Therefore, our primary interest lies in parties that engaged with the movements and reshaped the left, rather than delving into the emergence of new radical right-wing parties.

This focus is closely related to the fact that the protest ideologies predominantly aligned with left-wing politics. In Spain, Greece, and Portugal, the crisis stemmed from the failure of mainstream left parties to differentiate their economic agendas from those of mainstream right-wing parties in response to the 2008 financial crisis (Della Porta et al., 2017). Conversely, in Turkey, the protests primarily targeted majoritarianism, bolstered by right-wing actors, while advocating for pluralism (Gencoglu-Onbasi 2016). As the call for pluralism has long been intertwined with left-wing politics in Turkey since 1983, these protests also resonated with left-wing political actors, fostering a demand for new political approaches in all cases.

Paired comparison cases of Greece and Spain in the 2000s

The structure of political competition in Greece and Spain is rather alike, due to their longstanding two-party systems in which two main parties, one from the centre-right and the other from the centre-left, enjoyed the control of government. Particularly during the 1990s and 2000s, the ideological distance

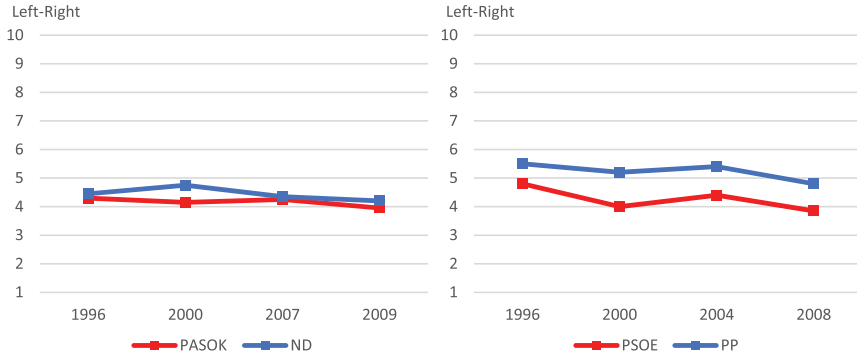

Figure 2. Left-right ideological placement in Greece and Spain. Source: Authors' calculation based on the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) data, Volkens, Andrea/Krause, Werner/Lehmann, Pola/Matthieß, Theres/Merz, Nicolas/Regel, Sven/Weßels, Bernhard (2019): The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR). Version 2019b. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). https://doi.org/10.25522/manifesto.mpds.2019b.

between these two main parties was rather narrow due to the mostly centripetal political competition in both countries (see Figures 2). Furthermore, although polarization had already increased in both countries before the protest movements towards the end of 2000s, low polarization was still a defining characteristic of their party systems (Figure 4).

Until the protests, Greece had a stable two-party system since the 1980s, with political competition dominated by the social democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (*Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα*, PASOK) and the liberal conservative New Democracy (*Νέα Δημοκρατία*, ND). These two mainstream parties had adopted catchall strategies converging on policy and sharing the major objective of "modernization of the country' (Gunther, 2005; Moschonas, 2001). Their combined vote share had been around 70–80 per cent throughout the 2000s, representing almost a perfect two-party system. Although KKE managed to enter parliament, it remained a marginal force that was kept out of any government formulation process. It is also argued that there had been a noticeable trend towards centrism in Greece: both major parties and their supporters have shifted towards the political centre, with this shift being more marked in the case of PASOK, a phenomenon that may echo the worldwide pattern observed among social-democratic parties (Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2019). Similarly, Spain also had a stabilized and consolidated two-party system with mostly centripetal political competition (Gunther, 2005). What differentiates Spain is the position of regionalist-nationalist parties, whose vote share was 10–12 per cent, concentrated in regional strongholds. Although during the 2000s the two main parties dominated the political system with 75–80 per cent of the votes

(Magone, 2011), they sometimes needed regional party support to form a government.

The dominance of two parties in Greece and Spain constrained the political space by excluding alternative voices from their parliaments. This can be partly explained by limited proportionality in Spain and Greece. While proportionality of Spain's system was decreased by using a low district magnitude (closed list, d'Hondt), high over-representation of rural provinces, and a 3 per cent threshold for each magnitude (Chari, 2013: 378), Greece had a semi-proportional system due to the 50-seat majority bonus given to the biggest party in the elections. In both cases, this limited or controlled proportionality, designed to prevent fragmentation, reduced the impact of third parties for most of their democratic histories.

The limited political space can also be observed from the effective number of parties, indicating the degree of fragmentation in party systems. As Figure 3 shows, the number of effective parties was less than three in both countries throughout the 2000s, in contrast to Portugal and Turkey. Additionally, two mainstream parties controlled the government in both countries for many years. Although low fragmentation and a familiar governmental formula are considered positive traits for a stable party system (see Casal Bértoa, 2017), in times of crisis this tends to generate political unresponsiveness to the demands of protesting citizens.

These shared party system qualities in Spain and Greece together – centripetal political competition, low polarization, and low fragmentation – created an unresponsive yet open political structure that allowed new political forces to emerge and fill the ideological gap in the party system. That is, these

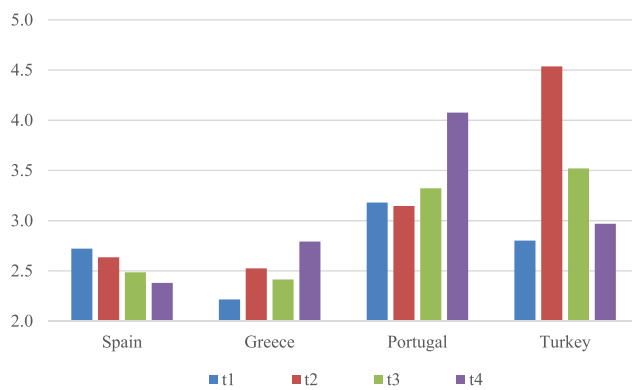

Figure 3. Effective number of parties in Southern Europe. Source: Authors' calculation based on Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Data from: Parties and Elections Database. Years: Spain (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008), Greece (1996, 2000, 2007, 2009), Portugal (1999, 2002, 2005, 2009), Turkey (2002, 2004, 2007, 2011).

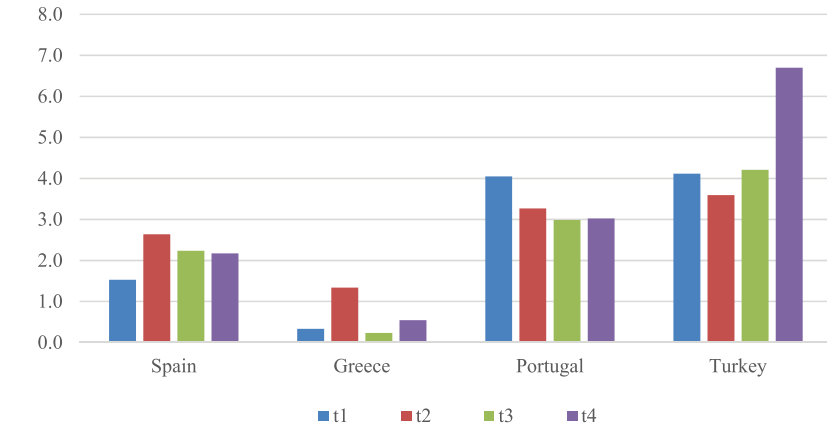

Figure 4. Polarization in Southern Europe. Source: Author's calculation based on Dalton (2008). Years: Spain (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008), Greece (1996, 2000, 2007,2009), Portugal (1999, 2002, 2005, 2009), Turkey (2002, 2004, 2007, 2011) The data on parties' left-right scores is taken from the Comparative Manifestos Project for Spain and Greece, for Turkey from Kalaycioglu (2012), and for Portugal from Freira (2005) and Lisi (2016).

Figure 5. Left-right ideological placement in Portugal and Turkey. Source: Portugal (Freira 2005 and Lisi, 2016); Turkey (Kalaycioglu, 2012).

party system characteristics account for the initial change that social movements could trigger within the party systems of Spain and Greece.

Paired comparison cases of Portugal and Turkey in the 2000s

Why new political forces have *not* emerged in either Portugal or Turkey can again be traced back to party system characteristics. Although government composition was the same in Portugal and Turkey in the 2000s, in contrast to Greece and Spain, both party systems had higher fragmentation, as indicated by a higher number of effective parties (see Figure 3). Throughout its

democratic history, PS or PSD led Portugal alternately, either alone or in coalition with a smaller right-wing force, CDS-PP (Lisi, 2016). As such, Portugal had a two and a half party system in which two major parties enjoyed around 75 per cent of the votes but needed a smaller party to form the government. The position of CDS-PP has been critical in government formation from democratic transition onwards. More importantly, other smaller parties have also enjoyed considerable vote shares. The PCP, for instance, has won 8–10 per cent of votes in most elections in the post-transition period, entering parliament as an opposition party. The BE has also managed to enter parliament since the 1990s. Thus, the effective number of parties is above three and so higher in Portugal than in Spain and Greece. This can also be related to the electoral law in Portugal, which permits higher party system fragmentation (Gunther, 2005). Similarly, the AKP has ruled Turkey since 2002 under a single party government. So, the party system remained the same before and during the protests with the same government formulation. However, three other effective parties have managed to enter parliament as opposition forces since 2007. Thus, both Portugal and Turkey have relatively high fragmentation, which has limited the need for new political forces.

Political competition in Portugal and Turkey also has centrifugal patterns with higher polarization. Although polarization levels between mainstream parties in Portugal has remained similar to Greece and Spain with only a marginal difference: the Portuguese party system has been one of the most polarized when the Communists are included (Freire, 2006, p. 385). What differentiates the case of Portugal from that of Greece which also has an active communist party, the KKE, is that in the 2000s the average vote share of KKE remained 5.7 per cent while the CDU in Portugal on average garnered 7.8 per cent of votes. More importantly, due to the electoral rule of 50-seat majority bonus given to the biggest party in Greece, smaller parties have less of a chance to be effective. As such, the CDU in Portugal has been much more effective than the KKE in Greece, shaping the degree of polarization in the country. Polarization in Turkey, on the other hand, has been very high, making it hard for new parties to attract voters from the polarized camps. As extreme polarization increases party identification, it becomes very unlikely for voters to change their party preferences, particularly for new parties.

The ideological placement of parties also shows that the political systems in Turkey and Portugal have been more fragmented than in Spain and Greece, with mostly centrifugal patterns of political competition (see Figure 5). In Turkey, this pattern is caused by political cleavages based on ethnicity and religiosity (Kalaycioğlu, 2008). In Portugal, conversely, bipartisanship has dominated the political system since the end of the 1980s, with mostly centripetal political competition between PS and PSD. However, what differentiates the Portuguese party system is the position of radical left parties,

which have been the polar opposite of mainstream forces (Freire, 2006). Portugal thus has two different party systems within one political system (Freire, 2006). The divide between the radical left and the rest of the political spectrum has been so severe that the socialists have preferred to rely on the centre-right than the radical left when necessary (da Silva & Mendes, 2019, p. 140). Accordingly, the distance between mainstream forces and radical left parties has been significantly high, indicating a remarkable polarization in the party system, to the extent that the radical left has always been kept out of any government formation.

Thus, Turkey and Portugal have similar party systems characteristics of higher fragmentation, higher polarization, and centrifugal patterns of political competition. This has hindered the emergence of new political forces. Because alternative forces already occupied their space in the political system, the movements could only raise their demands by influencing the agendas of existing opposition parties. For instance, in the wake of the Gezi protests, political responses from the opposition parties in Turkey highlighted a nuanced engagement with the movement's ideals. The pro-Kurdish party, formerly known as the BDP, reinvented itself with a new name and adopted a discourse inclusive of the Gezi movement's demands, advocating for radical democracy, pluralism, and post-materialist rights in line with the Gezi protesters' aspirations (HDP Manifesto, 2015, see also Draege, 2021, 2023). In contrast, the CHP, Turkey's main opposition party, exhibited a more selective approach in their response. While the party moved to democratize its candidate selection process, allowing a broader base of party members to participate in primaries for the first time in over three decades, it strategically emphasized the identity attributes of the young activists involved in the protests, conspicuously sidestepping the substantive issues they raised (Draege et al., 2017). Supporting this argument, recent research has uncovered a strategic dichotomy in the responses of the CHP and the rebranded HDP to the Gezi movement, suggesting a calculated political strategy (Draege, 2023). In Portugal, conversely, losing power after the first elections following the 12 March Movements, the PS changed its policy position from being mostly supportive of the government contributing to the approval of austerity measures and rejecting the motions of censure presented by the PCP and the BE (Giorgi and Santana-Perreira, 2018). However, things have started to change after 2012 and the PS began to side with the PCP and the BE voting against critical and politicized bills. Under the leadership of Costa, the PS not only repositioned itself closer to the left but also redefined the terms of politics by allying with the smaller left parties against the centre-right political forces.

To sum up, although protest movements with similar agendas, methods, and demands emerged in four Southern European countries, the initial changes they could trigger in party politics diverged enormously according

to three party system characteristics, namely fragmentation, polarization, and the type of political competition. While in Spain and Greece lack of fragmentation and polarization as well as centripetal character of political system opened space for the emergence of movement parties, due to the higher fragmentation and polarization together with the centrifugal competition in Turkey and Portugal no new party could agitate the party system as existing political actors absorbed the demands of protests.

Explaining party system impact: Collapse, change, or no change

The impact of protest movements on political parties can lead to a variety of outcomes within party systems. Here we examine how these initial changes – whether the emergence of new political entities or the reconfiguration of existing ones – translate into systemic transformations. Our analysis between 2012 and 2017 indicates a spectrum of effects: Greece experienced a fragmentation of its long-standing party system with the entry of new parties, while Spain saw substantial transformation without complete system breakdown. Conversely, Portugal underwent a significant reconfiguration within its existing party framework, and Turkey displayed remarkable resilience with minimal systemic change.

To understand these varying effects, it is essential to distill the factors that contribute to party system change, which we define following Mair (1997) as a transformation that alters the direction of political competition or the formula of governance within a country's political system. This transformation is manifested in two primary ways: a shift in government composition that indicates changes at the systemic level, and a variation in the vote share of traditional mainstream parties, which serves as an indicator of new political actors gaining traction within the parliamentary system. This includes scenarios where new parties emerge to challenge the status quo, existing parties adopt radically different policy positions, or when shifts in voter alliances lead to a redefined political landscape. As such, two primary indicators are considered: changes in government composition and fluctuations in the vote share of traditional parties (Mair, 1997; see also Enyedi & Bértoa, 2023). Shifts in government composition reflect access to political power and indicate changes at the system level. Meanwhile, vote share trends help us measure the entry of new political forces into the parliamentary arena, which affects both legislative representation and government formation.

We look at the broad patterns of party system change across these countries. Spain and Portugal, despite their differences, both illustrate how new political dynamics can evolve within an existing system to result in a transformation, rather than a collapse. This contrasts with Greece's experience, where the introduction of new parties led to a more profound systemic rupture. Turkey's case stands out for its lack of significant systemic change

despite similar pressures. As follows, we will delve into the nuances of these changes and the resilience of party systems in the face of burgeoning social movements.

During the time of the protest movements, both Spain and Greece were under centre-left governments. In Greece, the economic crisis erupted in 2009, and the first bailout was negotiated and approved under the single-party rule of PASOK. However, during negotiations for the second bailout, protests erupted nationwide, and PASOK's leader and prime minister, Papandreou, was compelled to resign. This led to the establishment of a new grand coalition comprising ND, PASOK, and LAOS. This technocratic government endorsed a second bailout and subsequently called for new elections.

In the May 2012 elections, both PASOK and ND suffered significant losses, with their combined vote share plummeting from 77 per cent in 2009 to 32 per cent. When attempts to form a new government proved futile, Greece held another round of elections in June 2012, dealing another blow to the mainstream parties. Syriza, as the sole anti-establishment force on the left, saw its position strengthened. Meanwhile, ND, PASOK, and DIMAR formed a coalition government to keep Greece in the Eurozone, acknowledging the absence of viable alternatives to the EU memoranda.

Up until the 2015 elections, PASOK had consistently held positions within the government, either as a single party or in coalition with ND and/or smaller parties. In stark contrast to Spain, Greece's mainstream centre-left-wing party remained in power throughout the entire crisis period. In these tumultuous times, PASOK found itself unable to redefine its stance in relation to the mainstream right and instead gravitated towards ND, aligning itself with the goal of preserving Eurozone membership and embracing the liberalizing economic reforms mandated by the bailout (Altiparmakis, 2019). Consequently, the party positioned itself alongside ND as part of the traditional establishment, thereby failing to undergo the necessary reforms and incorporate the central concern of Greece's protest movements – political renewal – into its agenda (Hutter et al., 2018).

We refer to what transpired in Greece as a party system collapse for two fundamental reasons. First, during the early stages, the alternation in government was only partial, with new actors like LAOS and DIMAR managing to secure a place in the government. However, this scenario changed dramatically in 2015, resulting in a complete alternation of power with both ND and PASOK losing their central positions (Table 1). This wholesale alternation significantly diverges from what Mair proposed as a potential outcome in closed party systems (Mair, 1996). Rather than one of the established political actors gaining control, entirely new entities entered the government. This signals a substantial transformation in the party system, approaching what we describe as a party system collapse (Kazamias, 2018; Verney, 2014).

Table 1. Government composition in Greece in the 2000s and 2010s.

2000	Single Party Majority PASOK
2004	Single Party Majority ND
2007	Single Party Majority ND
2009	Single Party Majority PASOK
2011	Coalition ND, PASOK, LAOS
2012	Coalition ND, PASOK, DIMAR, SNE
2015-I	Coalition SYRIZA, ANEL, Ecologist Greeks
2015- II	Coalition SYRIZA, ANEL
2019	Single Party Majority ND

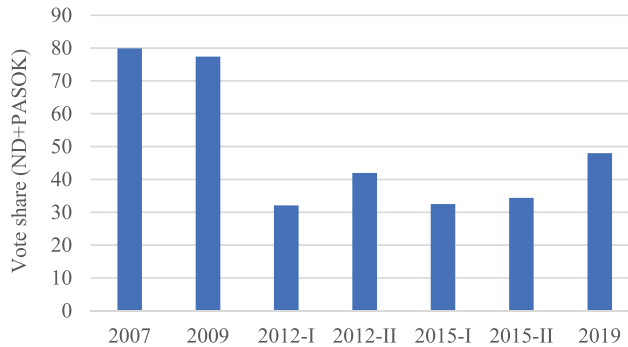

Figure 6. Vote concentration in Greece (2007–2019). Source: Elections data is taken from http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/.

Furthermore, this shift is evident in the concentration of the vote share in Greece (see Figure 6), which measures the combined vote share of ND and PASOK. It dwindled from approximately 80 per cent to 35 per cent in 2015 and 2019. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, one of the principal players in Greece's political landscape since its democratic transition, PASOK, experienced a significant decline in both its appeal and vote share. From an average of 40 per cent in the 2000s, PASOK's vote share plummeted to 6.3 per cent in the 2015 elections and then slightly rebounded to 8.1 per cent in the 2019 elections. The wholesale shift in government formation and the loss of one of the major political actors, we argue, exemplifies a party system collapse (Kazamias, 2018; Verney, 2014). Nevertheless, with the 2019 elections, the other major political actor, ND, staged a resurgence, suggesting that the initial disruption to the party system had somewhat subsided.

Conversely, in Spain, although the PSOE held government when the economic crisis and protests emerged, early elections called in 2011 by then-Prime Minister Zapatero ushered in the PP's ascent to power. This gave the PSOE an opportunity to regroup in opposition, embrace political reform and

renewal, and ultimately renew itself (Vidal & Sánchez-Vítores, 2019). Unlike PASOK, the PSOE not only changed its leadership, installing a younger political figure, but also consistently aligned itself with the demands of Spain's 15 M movement, focusing on political renewal, systemic reform, and direct democracy (Hutter et al., 2018). This shift allowed the party to maintain its central position within Spain's political system.

While PASOK was nearly eradicated from the Greek political landscape, securing only 4.3 per cent of the votes in the 2015 elections, the PSOE continued to attract roughly a quarter of the votes since 2011. The party even staged a remarkable comeback in the April 2019 elections, emerging as the largest party in parliament, a feat it repeated in the November 2019 elections after failing to secure a coalition partner to form a government. Following the second election, the PSOE returned to government by forging a coalition with Unidas Podemos (UP), an alliance comprising Podemos, United Left, and other smaller left-wing parties. Spain's party system underwent a party system change, exemplified initially by the dwindling concentration of vote share in the two mainstream parties, PP and PSOE, from around 80 per cent to approximately 45 per cent (see Figure 7). Secondly, the composition of the government also shifted, marked by the formation of a minority coalition for the first time since Spain's transition to democracy (see Table 2).

Much like the PSOE, Portugal's centre-left PS managed to revamp itself following the protest movements, albeit over a more extended period. In 2011, with support from the centre-right PSD, the PS, though still in government, approved the austerity measures requested by the EU in the wake of the financial crisis. Subsequently, when parliament rejected the second package, the three major parties – PS, PSD, and CDS-PP – signed the bailout agreement and memorandum of understanding with the Troika (de Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2018).

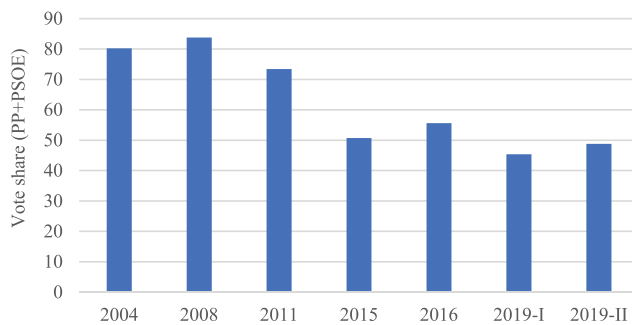

Figure 7. Vote concentration in Spain (2004–2019). Source: Elections data is taken from http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/.

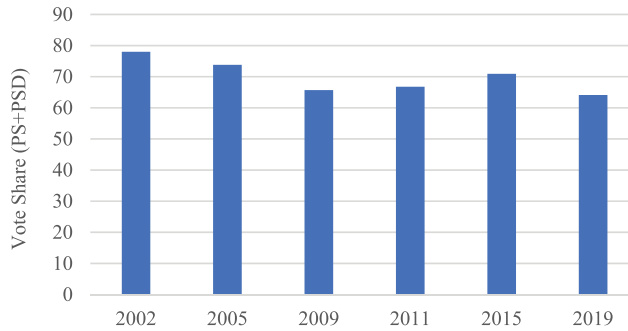

Figure 8. Vote concentration in Portugal (2002–2019). Source: Elections data is taken from http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/.

Table 2. Government composition in Spain in the 2000s and 2010s.

2000	Single Party Majority PP
2004	Single Party Minority PSOE
2008	Single Party Minority PSOE
2011	Single Party Majority PP
2016	Single Party Minority PP
2018	Single Party Minority PSOE
2020	Minority Coalition PSOE, Unidas PODEMOS

After winning the 2011 elections, the PSD established a coalition government with CDS-PP, implementing austerity measures. Similar to the PSOE, the PS lost control of the government, finding itself in the opposition. However, despite having supported the new government after the elections – given its role in signing the bailout agreement with the PSD and CDS-PP – the PS shifted its stance after 2012, aligning more with the PCP and BE, particularly following a change in leadership after the 2014 European elections. Antonio Costa, the former mayor of Lisbon, took over from Antonio Jose Seguro, who faced criticism for failing to provide effective opposition and distinguish the party from its right-wing rivals. Under Costa's leadership, the PS not only positioned itself closer to the left but also redefined the terms of politics by forming alliances with smaller left-wing parties against Portugal's centre-right political forces (Hutter et al., 2018).

In 2015, as support for the governing PSD and CDS-PP dwindled, the two parties entered the legislative elections as part of an electoral coalition named Portugal Ahead (Portugal a Frente, PAF). Although this coalition allowed them to secure the largest share of seats, their combined vote share significantly declined, dropping from 50 per cent to 38 per cent. However, it was not the PS that benefited the most from waning support for Portugal's mainstream right-wing parties. Instead, it was the smaller left-wing parties. The BE's vote share increased by 5 per cent, while the Unitary

Democratic Coalition (Coligação Democrática Unitária, CDU) – a coalition comprising the PCP and PEV – received 8 per cent, compared to a 4 per cent increase for the PS. Consequently, left-wing parties saw their combined share rise to 54 per cent of the seats. Following a strategic coalition between these parties that opposed the PAF coalition government, the PS, for the first time in Portugal's democratic history, managed to form a socialist minority government with the parliamentary support of BE, PCP, and PEV. Portugal experienced a mild party system change in that the concentration of the vote share between the PS and the PSD remained around 70 per cent (see Figure 8). Additionally, the composition of the government did not change significantly, with one of the two major actors retaining power (see Table 3).

On the other hand, Turkey's party system remained unaltered, as indicated by both the data on government composition (Table 4) and the concentration of the vote share (Figure 9). However, it is essential to recognize that Turkey has undergone democratic backsliding since the Gezi protests, distinguishing it from the other three cases. In this competitive authoritarian environment, the AKP has solidified its dominance, limiting the prospects for political change. Particularly after the 2015 elections, democratic backsliding accelerated, further explaining the AKP's dominance in the system.

An important distinction in the party system dynamics between Portugal and Turkey lies in the nature of the parties most significantly affected by the protest movements. In Portugal, the PS is a principal political force, whereas in Turkey, the HDP has been a peripheral, albeit radical, player. The HDP capitalized on the momentum of the protests to transition from a regional party to one with national aspirations. Despite this strategic repositioning, the HDP's transformation did not precipitate a broader systemic change within

Table 3. Government composition in Portugal.

2002	Majority Coalition PSD-CDS
2004	Majority Coalition PSD-CDS
2005	Single Party Majority PS
2009	Single Party Minority PS
2011	Majority Coalition PSD-CDS
2015- I	Minority Coalition PSD-CDS
2015- II	Single Party Minority PS supported by BE, PCP and PEV
2019	Single Party Minority PS
2022	Single Party Majority PS

Table 4. Government composition in Turkey.

2002	Single Party Majority AKP
2007	Single Party Majority AKP
2011	Single Party Majority AKP
2015	Single Party Majority AKP
2018	Single Party Majority AKP

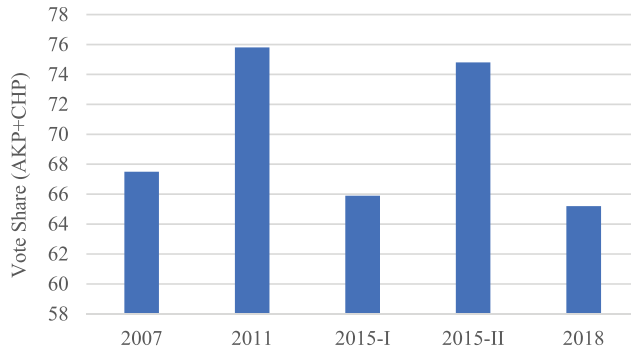

Figure 9. Vote concentration in Turkey (2007–2018). Source: Elections data is taken from http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/.

the Turkish party system, largely due to its limited sphere of influence compared to that of more established parties. Moreover, the HDP's roots in the Kurdish political movement inherently tie its platform to specific regional interests, which may restrict its potential to instigate widespread structural changes at the national level. Additionally, the context of democratic backsliding in Turkey (see Arslantaş & Arslantaş, 2023) provided a challenging environment for any opposition party to effect systemic change. The consolidation of power by the ruling party and the subsequent constriction of democratic spaces limited the HDP's, and indeed any emergent movement's, ability to impact the party system fundamentally.

Overall, while the mainstream left-wing party's retention of power throughout the crisis and its inability to adapt led to a party system collapse in Greece, Spain, and Portugal, mainstream left-wing parties in Spain and Portugal managed to avert such a collapse by embracing political renewal while in opposition. Conversely, Turkey's party system remained unchanged, despite the initial impact of the Gezi movement on a marginal force, the HDP. HDP's political positioning, as well as the significant factor of democratic backsliding since the Gezi protests (see Esen & Gumuscu, 2016), limited its capacity to transform the entire system.

Conclusion

The explanation we provide for the impact of protest movements presents a nuanced combination of factors, encompassing both structural and contingent elements. While it is important to acknowledge that these factors may not always comprehensively account for the variations in a movement's impact, our findings shed light on intriguing patterns. So, we make a significant contribution by elucidating the intricate balance between structural and contingent factors in

determining the influence of protest movements on party politics, highlighting the nuanced ways in which the architecture of a nation's party system can either facilitate or constrain the potential for political transformation.

Our central contention revolves around the premise that these factors, whether structural or contingent, warrant consideration when evaluating a movement's influence. What emerges from our analysis is a clear indication that the characteristics of a nation's party system play a pivotal role in accommodating protest movements and shaping their outcomes.

In particular, we observe that fragmented and polarized party systems tend to be more receptive to protest movements. This is because these systems already offer a diverse range of political voices that can readily embrace an emerging opposition front. In essence, the presence of alternative voices within such systems provides a natural conduit for the channelling of protest-driven change. Conversely, in less polarized and less fragmented systems, notably the rigid two-party systems, there exists a vacuum of political alternatives. In such cases, new parties are more likely to emerge, filling this void and capitalizing on the discontent voiced by the protest movements. This dichotomy underscores how the structural characteristics of political systems significantly influence a protest movement's capacity to catalyse change at the party level.

However, it is equally crucial to recognize that beyond these structural attributes, the extent of change within the party system is contingent on various factors. These include the political positioning of left-wing parties, particularly whether they are in government or opposition, and their ability to respond effectively to the concerns raised by protestors. These contingent factors act as catalysts, determining whether a protest movement's initial impact evolves into more substantial structural changes within the party system.

In essence, our research underscores the intricate interplay between structural and contingent elements in shaping the outcomes of protest movements within different political landscapes. While no single formula can predict with absolute certainty how these movements will unfold, our findings provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics that underlie the relationship between protest, party systems, and political change. Future research could further explore the thresholds at which structural and contingent factors become determinants of substantial political change, particularly in varied cultural and institutional contexts. It would also be beneficial to examine how these dynamics play out over longer periods, assessing the sustained impacts of protest movements on party systems and the broader political discourse.

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