Ally or Competitor? Militant Basque Nationalism's Reaction to the New Spanish Left

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Abstract

With the 2011 declaration of permanent ceasefire by the Basque nationalist paramilitaries, the Basque patriotic left (IA), more firmly joined the realm of constitutional politics – despite a lack of formally negotiated agreement. This emerged as part of the strategy of *unilateralidad*, through which the IA seeks to broaden its social, and political support so as to pressure the Spanish state into renegotiating the region's constitutional status. Concurrently, Spain has experienced an upsurge in the popularity of new political parties in the historically two party dominant general elections. The emergence of a political challenger on the left of the political spectrum, such as Podemos, may pose an opportunity or a threat to the IA's unilateral strategy, as the IA and Podemos have numerous points of ideological concurrence. This paper analyses an aspect of how, in the absence of a formally negotiated framework, the IA translated its strategies into mainstream constitutional politics, by exploring how it has responded to the question posed by the introduction of Podemos – ally, competitor, or both?

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The emergence of Podemos as an electoral contender at the state level in Spain in 2014 transformed a political system in which two statewide parties largely alternated control of the government since the country's transition to democracy. This shake up took place in the wake of the Financial Crisis, when 'signs of institutional fatigue' and a rising 'sense of public indignation' (Medina and Correa 2016) resulted in a weakening of the primary statewide political parties (Medina and Correa 2016). Yet, to date, there has been little consideration in the literature of the potential impact of this arrival on the dynamics of sub-state nationalist politics and the ways in which the claims and aspirations of sub-state nationalist movements are handled within the state.

While initially avoiding participation in elections at the level of Spain's autonomous communities (ACs), in the fall of 2016 Podemos contested elections in the AC of the Basque Country. This move had the potential to significantly reshape the electoral landscape of the Basque Country, with particular repercussions for the Basque nationalist left (*izquierda abertzale* – IA), its affiliated political parties, and the dense network of organizations within it under the umbrella organization of the Basque National Liberation Movement (*Movimiento de liberación nacionalista vasco* – MLNV). As Molina (2010) makes clear, the definition and subsequent analytical approach to the study of the conflict in the Basque Country is dependent on the timeframe in question, particularly given the region's history of state, and sub-state paramilitary violence, and the links between clandestine organizations and political parties of the IA. These debates were not new to the IA. Similar debates over the prioritization of alliances with Basque nationalists, or with leftist parties throughout the Spanish state, came to a head alongside the democratization process in the 1970s, which, combined with simultaneous debates on the tactical use of armed violence, led to a major schism within the IA - both politically and militarily. Yet however similar the debate within the IA over how to prioritize its ideologies in present day Spain to that of the 1970s, it is argued here that it is unlikely that this debate will result in the same schism, at least in the short term. This variance in cohesion is the result of the influence of three contextual differences: the current explicit movement strategy of *unilateralidad* and expansion of allies; the current absence of the simultaneous debate on the tactical use of violence; and the more favourable assessment of Podemos as a potential ally than of those potential allies in the 1970s.

As a theoretical framework, an historical institutional approach allows for the consideration of those contextual permissive and productive conditions (Soifer, 2012) that allow for change through critical junctures. Process tracing is employed to highlight these conditions by inductively tracing backwards 'from the outcome of interest to potential antecedent causes' (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 18), treating the fragmentation of the IA around the time of transition, as a critical juncture, and subsequently conducting a comparison with those conditions surrounding the more recent emergence of Podemos.

In order to do so, this paper will probe three issues. First, attention is paid to outlining the shift in movement views on the strategic value of prioritizing nationalist or socio-economically compatible ideological allies in the two periods, the associated fears of *españolización* and the dilution of the nationalist project. Second, the text compares the state of the debate on the tactical use of violence as part of the movement strategy as it existed in the 1970s, as opposed to that at the time of Podemos' emergence. Third, the article turns to the IA's assessments of the viability of potential political allies in relation to the promotion of the movement goals across the two periods. Finally, the likelihood of a repeated schism in the movement is analyzed and areas for further consideration are presented.

On prioritization

The 1970s marked a time of particular organizational fragmentation within the MLNV, both within and amongst its constituent groups, as ideological tensions and strategic goals vied for dominance. In foregrounding resistance to Franco, the movement had long put off determining its precise ideological nature (Zirakzadeh, 2002), and corresponding focus on ethnic nationalism and armed struggle, or on labour activism. The resultant contentious heterogeneity was increasingly a source of fragmentation (Zirakzadeh 1991). In 1972, tensions between cultural nationalists, those focused on worker's issues, and those promoting third world liberation theories, were strong enough to see ETA fragment significantly (Casanova, 2007), with ETA-V and its focus on third world revolutionary struggles and national liberation becoming the dominant organization (Zirakzadeh 1991). Yet these same tensions within ETA-V persisted despite the siphoning off of dissenters, only to be exacerbated by the controversial bombing of a Madrid café in 1974. The bombing was the catalyst for the most significant split within the movement into ETA politico-militar (ETApm) and ETAmilitar (ETAm). ETApm adopted Marxism and sought 'alliances with other Spanish Marxist counterparts… [while] ETAm pursued a nationalist front strategy and sought an alliance of all 'patriotic left' groups… but opposed alliances with 'Spanish left' organizations' (Zirakzadeh 1991: 191). With this division, the political parties Herri Batasuna (HB)[1] and Euskal Iraultzarako Alderdia (Basque Revolutionary Party – EIA, as part of the coalition party Euskadiko Ezkerra - EE) would come to represent ETAm and ETApm respectively (Irvin 1999). The prioritization of statewide leftist organizations as allies over regional nationalists and leftist organizations was now reflected in the organizational structure of the MLNV.

As part of this strategic reprioritization, given their call to attract allies on ideological leftist issues, the EIA and ETApm favoured participation in the democratic process along with continued armed struggle. HB and ETAm opted for a military strategy, seeing the new Spanish institutions as insufficient vehicles for the pursuit of Basque nationalist aspirations (Casanova, 2007). Throughout the *Transición* ETAm made calls, with limited success, for a nationalist block rather than risk *españolización* through association with organizations throughout Spain

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[1] Herri Batasuna and its successor parties (Euskal Herritarok and Batasuna) faced illegalization procedures between 1998 and 2003. Sortu emerged as a successor party to Batasuna, founded in 2011 and legalized in 2012. Euskal Herria Bildu (EH BIldu) took over in 2011 as the electoral coalition for the parties of the IA.

(Zirakzadeh 1991). The debate over whether to co-operate, and to what degree, also occurred within the more centrist and moderate Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco* - PNV). Since democratization, the PNV collaborated with both the Popular Party (*Partido Popular* - PP) and the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español* - PSOE), often to their advantage (Gillespie 2015; Lecours 2007). Yet, to do so the party 'downplayed' its nationalism which 'inevitably worked in favour of accommodative behaviour' (Lecours 2007: 8). It is precisely the risk of such 'accommodative behaviour' that much of the IA feared might dilute the forces in pursuit of the nationalist project.

By the 2010s, the political landscape in the Basque Country had significantly shifted. ETAm, following the dissolution of ETApm in the mid-1980s, found itself the only iteration of ETA, and continued to head the organizations of the MLNV for much of the following decades (De LaCalle and Sánchez Cuenca 2013). However, changes in support for the military strategy, as well as the increasing effectiveness of Spanish and French policing efforts did much to reduce the appeal of the military strategy (De LaCalle and Sánchez Cuenca 2013; Lecours 2007; Whitfield 2014). In this context of reduced effectiveness and viability of a dual military-political strategy, the adoption of the strategy of *uniliateralidad* was the result of debates long percolating within the IA. The failed talks of Lizarra-Garazi in 1998-99 represented an attempt to build a nationalist bloc with the PNV and other Basque allies so as to be better positioned to negotiate change with the Spanish state, echoing the strategy of Northern Irish republicans (Esser and Bridges, 2011; Whitfield 2014).

While the IA and MLNV undertook a number of attempts at building a nationalist bloc of various sorts over the course of the 1980s and 1990s (Lecours 2007), and later attempted to involve international actors in negotiation efforts (Whitfield 2014), it was not until 2009 that the strategy of *unilateralidad* moved decidedly to the fore ground. Following the collapse of the Lizarra-Garazi talks, and the failure of a renewed peace process in the mid 2000s (Esser and Bridges 2011; Whitfield 2014), the strategy of *unilateralidad* was reinforced as the IA sought to expand its base and allies as part of an overall effort to build such support that the 'State was eventually forced to recognize the de facto nature of Basque independence and then sit down to formally renegotiate its constitutional status' (Kerr 2016). With this strategy came the explicit aim of building support beyond traditional strongholds. However, the arrival of Podemos onto the political scene in 2014 in such dramatic fashion, meant that this new arrival needed to be assessed not only as a potential ally, but also as a possible threat to the IA's own electoral success.

In much the same way the debate unfolded in the 1970s, concerns of dilution, cooptation and *españolización* remain notable within the IA's decision-making considerations. Despite its stated policy of *unilateralidad*, the IA has seen the potential disadvantage of collaboration with statewide parties when it comes to advancing the nationalist agenda. Both the PNV and Catalan *Convergència I Unió* (Convergence and Union – CiU), have a history of collaborating with state parties - having put forward co-sovereignty type proposals for constitutional change, only to

have them defeated by institutions of the central state (Gillespie 2015). Despite frequent collaboration between the PNV and the parties of the central state, decades after the signing of the Statute of Autonomy, there remains competencies awarded to the region that have yet to be devolved (Casanova 2007), and budgetary and financial quotas between the two governments often go unsettled (Gray 2015).

As for Podemos, EH Bildu does perhaps have some cause for caution. Podemos Euskadi has made plain its desire to unseat the governing PNV, stating 'change in Euskadi comes by way of evicting the PNV' (Podemos Euskadi Secretary General Nagua Alba in Albin, April 11, 2016). While the IA is far from uncritical of the PNV – both on its record as a nationalist and on social and economic issues – it might also be wary of too readily attacking, or seeking to dislodge a frequent and potential ally on nationalist issues, particularly one so historically (and presently) representative of moderate and constitutional Basque nationalism.

This may be particularly so as Podemos seeks to appeal to EH Bildu's nationalist base. In 2016 Podemos elicited criticism from the PP and PSE-EE for taking part in the Basque National Day celebrations – Aberri Eguna, historically an exclusively nationalist festival (Albin, 27 March 2016). Further, Podemos Euskadi challenged the existing discourse on Basque nationalism when it demonstrated its support for the right-to-decide by 'challeng[ing] the traditional logics of Basque politics, which include a narrative of traditional nationalism that, in practice, has monopolized the idea of homeland and of the collective imagination of 'basqueness'' (Alba in Albin 23 March 2016). As such, Podemos Euskadi is a potentially valuable ally at the state level, while positioning itself as a both competitor and ally at the community level.

In spite of reservations, the IA has already sought to instrumentalize a partnership with Podemos to help advance both leftist and nationalist ambitions. Despite Podemos' then lack of representatives in the Basque government, EH Bildu and Podemos have worked together on more than 20 initiatives in the 2012-2016 legislature (Alonso, April 4, 2016). In keeping with *unilateralidad,* after meeting with Podemos Euskadi's new leadership, Sortu leader Arraiz has expressed 'It is important to find allies for social transformation', adding that in Podemos Euskadi, EH Bildu has found a potential partner for that journey (*un compañero de viaje*) (in Albin 11 April 2016). As such, adherence to the strategy of *unilateralidad*, may provide a shift in prioritization away from a staunch focus on regional nationalist allies, that was absent for ETAm in the 1970s and 80s.

On violence

Concurrent with the 1970s debate on ideological prioritizations was an associated debate on the tactical use of violence: undoubtedly one of the starkest contextual differences between the two time periods. In the wake of the Civil War and decades spent under the Franco dictatorship, Jauregui noted that 'ETA became the new tool of radical nationalists to 'regenerate' the nation

and forged a new Basque identity discourse' (1981 in Molina, 2010, p. 251). Even in the 1970s, the debate on the tactical use of violence was reflective of the heterogeneity of the movement's ideological currents, given that the decision to emphasise cultural or labour concerns implies different tactical approaches and targets, which in term impacts the type of allies sought (Kerr 2016).

Whereas ETApm increasingly sought to engage with the emergent political process alongside armed struggle, ETAm was much less enthusiastic in its adoption of a political branch (Irvin 1999; Lecours 2007). The explosion of new parties in the emerging *Transición* process was in many ways unwieldy and many of the more 'radical' parties complicated efforts by ETAm to pull together nationalist leftist allies in the Basque Country (Zirakzadeh 1991: 195). Ultimately, the schism within the MLNV continued until the dissolution of ETApm in 1984. Many former *etarras* took advantage of amnesty offers, while many of those who were unsatisfied with the dissolution joined other organisations resulting in an influx of *etarras* to ETAm, now the sole ETA (Zirakzadeh 1991).

By the early 2000s, the debate within the MLNV on the usefulness of ETA's armed campaign, while never absent, had taken on renewed intensity. While a complete overview of ETA's ceasefire declaration is beyond the scope of this paper, in brief, ETA's actions were increasingly seen as damaging to the overall movement goals (Whitfield, 2014). Sociological and political changes cooled tolerance for paramilitary violence both domestically and internationally (Lecours 2007), and while a new type of violence (street fighting or *kale borroka*) supplemented more traditional forms of violence, both had grown less operationally sustainable (Harmon 2012). In the eyes of some activists, ETA's campaign was increasingly seen as useful to the Spanish state as a justification for an avoidance of a meaningful discussion on the Basque nationalist project (Whitfield 2014, Kerr 2016). As Whitfield (2015) notes, the desire of the Spanish state to focus efforts on a policing end to the conflict rather than a political one 'rested on a tacit understanding in some quarters that the continuation of ETA's violence's at a manageably low level was possibly the least bad option available' (p. 11). In January of 2011, ETA announced a permanent ceasefire (Tremlett 2014). In 2014, ETA took the unprecedented step of handing over a portion of its armaments to international observers (Tremlett, 2014), before disarming in the spring of 2017. Thus, the impact of the presence of direct violence alongside social and political activism, was no longer a key debate by the time of Podemos's emergence.

Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez (2013) note that the declaration of ETA's permanent ceasefire could have been expected to significantly shape the context of the 2012 elections. Indeed, throughout the campaign, terrorism remained a key campaign issue. However, it was significantly overshadowed by the importance of the economy in the context of the ongoing financial crisis (Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez 2013). Although the Basque Country remains one of the wealthiest and most developed of the Spanish ACs, unemployment in 2012 reached 15.9 per cent and the dept/GDP ratio had risen to 10.2 per cent. While both figures remain

significantly below the Spanish averages, they were nonetheless cause for concern and the PSE was highly criticized for its management of the economy (Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez 2013, 497).

While broadly speaking voting in the Basque Country tends to crystalize along left-right cleavages rather than over questions of centralization and decentralization, from 1998 onward, questions related to the territorial dimension have dominated the agendas of Basque political parties (De La Calle 2005; Llera et al. 2016), with the PNV having moved away from its traditional position of defending the Statute of Autonomy. In the run up to the 2016 elections, long-time nationalist leader Arnaldo Otegi suggested that drops in support for EH Bildu were likely due to the coalition's belated reaction to the fact that the Basque people were occupied by other priorities (Gorospe, 11 April 2016). In this context, a party that is focused on state-wide concerns, while maintaining a favourable stance on Basque nationalism, may be well positioned to siphon votes otherwise destined for EH Bildu and its allies. The 2016 elections saw a dramatic drop in support for the then first time governing PSE, as the PNV reclaimed the majority, having made the economy the top priority of its campaign (Gómez et al n.d; Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez 2013). In the context of a permanent ceasefire, concerns over the economy significantly trumped concerns of terrorism and violence in the regional elections (Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez, 2013).

However, paramilitary violence still has a divisive role in the current politics of the Basque Country. EH Bildu was arguably well rewarded for ETA's ceasefire in the 2012 elections, becoming the second largest regional party. As part of a bid to have HB's successor party - Sortu - legalized, the political party most closely associated with ETA wrote into its guiding principles a rejection of the future use of violence for the pursuit of movement goals. However, as this only related to the party moving forward, critics called the failure to explicitly denounce past ETA violence insufficient (Whitfield 2015). Rhetorically, as well as legislatively, the PP and PSOE have also made use of the association between organization of the IA and historic ties to ETA (Whitfield 2015).

As a new player, Podemos must situate itself on how to address the legacy, and consequences of violent conflict. In truth, Podemos positioned itself in such a way that, while not condoning violence, it can be seen by sub-state nationalists as possessing a degree of, if not sympathy, then at least a more nuanced understanding of political violence in the Basque Country. In showing support, and discussing partnerships with EH Bildu, Podemos has made itself a target for accusations of 'giving in' to, or being 'soft' on, terrorism from the established parties. The PP's Vice Secretary of Communication denounced the partnership as one in which Podemos is joining with EH Bildu's attempts to 'whitewash' ETA (Alonso 4 April 2016). A PSE-EE Executive Committee member charged that Podemos 'had taken on the language, discourse, and false arguments' of the IA, while the PNV President called the partnership as little more than a vote grab (in Alonso, 4 April 2016). Podemos Euskadi has also adjusted its assessment of the blame for past violence and continued social conflict. Whereas Alba's Podemos Euskadi calls on the

state parties to match the steps taken by nationalists and Basque society (in Albin 23 March 2016), the party's previous leader in the region, largely singled out Sortu as the problem (Gorospe 12 October 2015). In all, Podemos' rhetoric on *etarras* and Basque prisoners is not as critical or accusatory as that of most other statewide parties.

However, while Podemos' national leader has publicly criticized the PSOE for using the memory of ETA victims to attack political rivals (Manetto and De Blas, 2 March 2016), he also spiked IA ire with his calls for the complete disarmament and dissolution of ETA (DeBlas and Ormazabal, 24 March 2016). For much of the IA, such emphasis on ETA is seen as an effort to distract from remaining nationalist concerns, as well as an effort to delegitimize the political organizations. Thus, while violence remains a consideration for the strategic planning of the IA and its potential allies, at this time, the debate is more focused on the consequences of past violence rather than on more immediate debates on the perpetration, and instrumentalization of direct violence. While still a divisive debate, it lacks the immediacy, and thus potential for fragmentation of the debate of the 1970s.

On potential allies

The IA's strategy of *unilateralidad* involves the expansion of its base and allies to attract both those who consider themselves of the left, but not Basque nationalists, and those who consider themselves Basque nationalists but not of the political left. Podemos, a statewide party, while not favouring independence, expressed support for notions of self-determination in the sub-state nationalist regions of Spain, and is itself a party to the left of the political spectrum. Thus, Podemos represented a potential ally to the IA, as well as a potential electoral competitor. The concern facing the IA, in both the 1970s and 2010s strategic debates, relates to which aspects of the movement's ideology to prioritize and how those options were and are reflected in the potential allies. This choice is particularly poignant as typically, left wing ideologies are at odds with nationalism (Howell 1986; Schwartzmantel 2012; Kastprezak 2012; Goodhand 2006; Hobsbawm 1996; in Jiménez et al. 2015: 486), a sentiment reinforced in Spain after decades under Franco's far right nationalism (Jiménez et. al 2015). Thus, the IA, in seeking allies, was, and is, unlikely to find allies that could be partners in both of its nationalist, and social revolutionary aspirations. Despite a proliferation of small parties in the beginning of the *Transición* process, the IA's list of potential allies was few: on the left, the Communist Party of Spain (*Partido Comunista de España* PCE) and PSOE, and on issues of nationalist concern, the PNV and the EE.

The appeal of the PCE as a potential ally to the IA was twofold: first, it was a statewide party and second, it fell far to the left of the political spectrum. While the PCE is and was representative of a brand of left wing ideology more in keeping with that espoused by much of the IA, two factors served to diminish its viability as a potential ally. In the first post Franco general elections, the PCE received 9 per cent of the 1977 general vote, before dropping to just

over 4 per cent in 1982 (Miniterio del Interior, 2016). In 1986 it joined with a number of small left oriented parties to form *Izquierda Unida* (United Left IU), which continues to garner electoral support. Yet, even an electorally minor ally at the state level would arguably be preferable to none. However, it is the second factor, the PCE's unfavourable views on nationalism, which excluded it as a potential ally. Similar assessments would have applied to parties such as the *Partido Socialista Popular (Unidad Socialista,*PSP-US), the Popular Socialist Party – Socialist Unity. Even if the IA had sought to reach out to the PCE, it would have been unlikely to have been met with open arms.

Of the larger statewide parties *Únion de Centro Democrático* (Union of the Democratic Center UCD), and *Alianza Popular* (AP), would have been largely unacceptable as allies for the IA based on their ideological affiliations. The AP (which would become the PP in 1989), was highly centralist in nature as the successor party for much of Franco's political cohort. The IA found itself on the opposite end of the spectrum from the AP both on left-right ideological spectrum, as well as on regionalism vs centralization. This stance was reinforced throughout the 1980s and 1990s, particularly under PP Prime Minister Aznar's government which had a proclivity to 'demonize all forms of sub state nationalism and to promote a Castilian-flavoured Spanish nation with a continual stress on unity [which] contributed to a hardening of Basque nationalism' (Lecours 2007: 153). The UCD for its part was the centralist party which would largely usher in the *Transición* before removing itself from electoral competition in the early 1980s. As a coalition party largely made up of regional parties, social democrats and liberals, it was centrist enough to be unappealing ideologically, despite its role of shepherding in the fledgling democracy. While the cause of Basque nationalism made great strides institutionally with the establishment of the Statute of Autonomy in 1979 (Lecours 2007) under the UCD, for many within the IA, the Statute, along with the new Constitution, put too significant a series of limitations on the exercise of regional autonomy to be truly legitimate (Zirakzadeh 2002: 70).

The final statewide party that may have been considered was the PSOE. The PSOE was more centrist than the PCE having moved decisively toward the center early on so as to cast a wider net for votes (Mateo, 2016). While more sympathetic to nationalist concerns than the AP/PP, the PSOE was nonetheless ideologically opposed to maximalist nationalist aspirations. Thus, at the level of statewide allies, those forces available, if compatible on leftist ideological principles, were unlikely to demonstrate sympathy toward regional nationalist self-governance concerns and allying at the state level would mean downplaying their nationalist character and aspirations.

At the level of the Basque Country, there existed more feasible potential allies, yet they too did not fully match the scope of ideological commitments of the IA. Chief among the potential allies was the PNV, the historic party of Basque nationalism, which had weathered the storm of the Franco dictatorship in exile (Lecours 2007). However, for many in the IA the PNV had been complacent in the face of the Franco regime, and its ideological base as a Christian Democratic party, was at odds with the many left leaning and social revolutionary strands of the IA (Casanova, 2007). With the transition to democracy, the PNV sought to keep its stance on

sovereignty sufficiently vague as to attract a broader cross section of votes (Lecours 2007: 85-86) favouring attempts to maximize regional autonomy within the existing Statute of Autonomy (Lecours 2007). For the IA, the PNV's nationalism was too restrained, and combined with its left-right ideological divide, made the PNV a loose ally on certain issues pertaining to Basque nationalism rather than a broad or reliable one.

Lastly, within the IA, while HB was closely affiliated with ETAm, EE was the close affiliate of ETApm, (Irvin 1999). The EE was the product of the split in the movement rather than an option to be considered during the debate. The EE would continue to contest elections, earning between 7 and 11 per cent of the vote in Basque Parliamentary elections (EA-GV, 2016), until 1993 when much of the party merged with the PSOE in the Basque Country to form the PSE-EE. Accordingly, in the years leading up to the contestation of elections in Spain, as the IA considered whether to seek alliances with statewide parties with leftist affiliations, or to focus inwardly on nationalist organizations within the Basque Country, the options available to the IA were few.

In the 2010s, the IA's assessments of the existing parties was similar to that of the 1970s. The PSOE lost further viability as an ally for the IA on both the sovereigntist and social-economic ideological fronts in the wake of the financial crisis. In July of the 2011, the PP and PSOE teamed up to alter the Constitution so as to introduce deficit limits, clawing back regional autonomy and attempting to recentralize much of Spain (Muro 2015; Pino and Pavolini 2015, in Rodon and Hierro 2016: 3). Such recentralization cut into regional autonomy on social spending (Lago Peñas and Fernandez Leiceaga 2012, in Rodon and Hierro, 2016: 3), frustrating both the 'patriotic' and 'leftist' ambitions of the IA.

While they disagreed on social and economic issues, as well as the pace and path toward sovereignty, the PNV and EH Bildu nonetheless have overlap in their long-term goals – as was the case in the 1970s. The PNV, having a history of pragmatism, had spent the better part of the mid-1990s onwards vacillating between sovereigntist politics and realpolitik attempts at greater control of its territory (Mees 2015). These adjustments, Mees (2015) argues, were not based on shifts in ideology, but rather shifts in strategy. Thus, while the ideological left-right divide remained between the parties of the IA and the PNV, the strategic pragmatism of the PNV made it a potentially useful ally should the IA be able to find tactical points of agreement with the more centrist party. Recently, the PNV, a long-time supporter of the Statute of Autonomy, called for a second transition to better accommodate regional concerns. While the PNV has said it would work with EH Bildu on issues of self-governance, it has argued that the IA needs to decide which of the two descriptors – 'left' or 'patriotic' – is more important (Albin, 27 March 2016). Thus, while the PNV is not ideologically on the same page as the IA, there is sufficient overlap to make them a credible partner under particular circumstances.

The changes in context due to the Financial Crisis also influenced the support for territorial governance, with a shift in public and party support for various territorial institutional arrangements (Jiménez Sánchez and Navarro Ardoy 2015). There has been an increased polarization of preferences for decentralization. Even amongst those holding or promoting dual identities, there has been a notable decrease in support for more moderate positions (Jiménez Sánchez and Navarro Ardoy 2015). Parties such as the PP, wherein a significant proportion of supporters identify as only, or mostly Spanish, have a more demonstrated tendency to promote policies favouring centralization (Jiménez Sánchez and Navarro Ardoy 2015). Indeed, along with the PSE (whose voter base tends to hold more dual identities), the PP in the 2012 regional elections in the Basque Country made clear an association of economic danger with greater autonomy (Gómez Fortes & Cabeza Pérez 2013).

The arrival of Podemos drastically reshaped the party landscape, both for Spain as a whole, and in terms of potential allies for the IA. In 2011 the 15-M *Indignados* movement spread across Spain protesting austerity measures and bank bailouts. Although it failed to achieve institutional changes, Kioupkiolis (2016) argued it had an impact on the political culture by creating the conditions for the emergence of a party such as Podemos. While not formally affiliated with the *Indignados* movement, Podemos has drawn from the movement's support base and demands for a political renovation, increased transparency, greater accountability, greater autonomy from financial and business elites, and electoral reform (Kioupkiolis 2016). However, unlike the *Indignados*, Podemos seeks to use electoral pathways for systemic change (Kioupkiolis 2016). The dissatisfaction and institutional fatigue present both in the Basque Country (Gómez Fortes and Cabeza Pérez 2013) and Spain (Medina and Correa 2016), provided a pool of support for the message Podemos espoused. This dissatisfaction with both the territorial status quo, and the handling of the Financial Crisis in the Basque Country both allowed for Podemos' message to be well received, and made it a potential ally for EH Bildu, which had long held similar positions.

The IA's ability to assess the potential of Podemos is perhaps made more difficult by the pragmatism of the other's politics. Following the European parliamentary elections, Podemos underwent a process of moderating its platform so as to appeal to a broader voter base (Rodon and Hierro 2016: 5). Mateo (2016) holds that Podemos' ideology is one 'based on electoral pragmatism' wherein it has kept its policies and opinions vague on 'potentially disruptive issues in light of the supreme objective of increasing votes' (p. 170).

Initially, Podemos chose not to contest local or regional elections claiming it 'too early', however, as Rodon and Hierro (2016) note 'it was clear the Podemos was also trying to avoid situations in which the party would be forced to take decisions that could damage its prospects at the national level' (p. 8). Engagement with sub-state regional nationalisms is a double-edged sword for Podemos. Rather than participate in local elections, Podemos initially chose to back regional and local candidates (Rodriguez-Teruel et. Al. 2016). In regional elections in 2015 Podemos frequently sought multi-party alliances with regional forces (*confluencias*), and while they did help their allies defeat PSOE candidates in competitive races such as in Catalunya, they

often served to benefit the local actors rather than Podemos (Rodríguez-Teruel et.al 2016). The support expressed by regional Podemos MPs, such as those in Catalunya or the Basque Country, for issues of self-determination and referenda, may aggravate tensions in Podemos at the statewide level (Rodríguez-Teruel et.al 2016). While Podemos has ideologically sought to steer clear from positioning itself explicitly to the left- or right, instead choosing to foreground questions of elite vs. *la gente*, more in keeping with populist discourses, it nonetheless shares ideological positions with the traditional left (Rodríguez-Teruel et.al 2016, Kioupkiolis 2016). In the 2015 local and regional elections, 33 per cent of all votes cast for Podemos were those of former PSOE supporters, with former IU supporters accounting for more than 20 percent (Rodon and Hierro, 2016: 2). The presence of new parties dividing the vote in the 2015 general elections in this new multi-party system (Rodon and Hierro 2016;2) led to an inability to form an agreed upon government and the eventual calling of a second election in June of 2016. In the second round of the general elections in June of 2016, Podemos allied with IU, though ultimately, it failed to boost their vote share (Rodríguez-Teruel et.al 2016). Yet this more flexible position on regional autonomy and clear ideological overlap, offered some common ground for Podemos and the IA. Though this round saw gains for the PP, it also failed to produce a clear-cut winner, eventually leading to the formation of a PP government.

While there appears to have been a drop in support for independence following the Catalan and Scottish referenda, support for sovereigntist projects in Euskadi remains significant with 49 per cent in favour - 19 per cent of favouring outright independence, and a further 30 percent expressing conditional support (*El Público*, 11 March 2016). While expressing support for the Right-to- Decide, Podemos supports a "pact" relationship between the Basque Country and the rest of Spain. In practice this is closer to ideas put forth by the PNV than those of EH Bildu, and follows a unilateral model similar to that of the Catalans (Gorospe, 11 April 2016).

Thus, while the IA was faced with similar options while debating the direction of their strategy in both the 1970s and 2010s, the arrival of Podemos to the political scene is representative of an option that was not previously available: that of a statewide ideologically left leaning party that was at the very least sympathetic to the right to self-determination. The presence of a party that is compatible with both the 'izquierda' and the 'abertzale' aspects of the movement removes a degree of fractious pressure from the process of selecting allies.

On repeated schisms

The goals of social movements - and constituent organizations of nationalist movements which see themselves as embedded in social movements -, change over time with different ideological priorities and changing contexts (Giugni, 1998). Further, such movements adapt and shift their organizational structures in response to internal factors and their support base (Comas et.al., 2015). Both the political and paramilitary branches of the IA and MLNV have undergone significant restructuring and reprioritization of goals and thus strategies. In the 1970s the IA and MLNV perceived few allies at the political party level who were both supportive of the

nationalist aspirations and ideologically sufficiently leftward leaning to be social and economic allies. Thus, with no allies that could potentially help bridge these gaps, there was little in the way of middle ground.

More than 30 years later, the MLNV and the IA have found themselves relatively united, but facing a similar critical juncture. The arrival of Podemos in Spanish politics has significantly opened up what has long been an essentially two party system alternating between the PSOE and PP. As in the 1970s, there are new players on the board and the IA has to decide how to adjust and interact. While a wariness against the dilution of the nationalist aspirations of the IA through too great a commitment to Spanish wide politics remains, the nature and the context of these three factors have changed is such a way as to make it unlikely that this new juncture will see a similarly significant division within the leading organizations of the IA.

Whereas in the 1970s the IA was facing a strategic decision on the participation in a new political system and thus over how to prioritize its competing interests, in 2014 the IA was committed the strategy of *unilateralidad* which explicitly calls for an expansion of allies and supporters. While this aspect of the strategy speaks primarily to attempts to broaden its electoral appeal within the Basque Country itself, the IA has concurrently broadened attempts to involve players from beyond its home region in the pursuit of aspects of the movement goals. That does not suggest that the IA does not remain relatively insular, or that it does not prioritize IA allies, only that it has deliberately broadened its scope in the search for potential allies. Furthermore, with the declaration of ETA's permanent ceasefire in 2011, the prioritization ranking of the tactical use of violence as opposed to participation in the electoral process is no longer a debate within the movement. This served to lower the intensity of the strategic debate.

Thus, being in a situation in which there is an agreed strategy to use only political and social means of pursuing IA goals to the exclusion of violence, and within the confines of a strategy that recognizes the usefulness both of internal allies and of allies further afield (both ideologically and territorially), the IA was in a less precarious position to make decisions about the types of allies it would seek when Podemos entered the political arena. The likelihood of the decision over how to reposition in the face of this new player to cause a similar schism in the IA is significantly reduced by virtue of Podemos' relatively favourable stance on Basque nationalist aspirations, as well as the strong commonalities between the social and economic platforms of Podemos and the parties of EH Bildu. As such, the IA does not have to make so stark an ideological prioritization in order to select a potential ally.

It must be noted that although Podemos and EH Bildu have worked together and are likely to continue to do so, it is not necessarily a partnership without cost for the IA. In the fall of 2016 Podemos chose to contest the AC elections in the Basque Country, and received a strong showing. While they failed to displace either the PNV or EH Bildu from the top spots, they managed to take 14.86 per cent of the votes, winning 11 of the 75 seats. The PNV managed to

gain a seat ending up with 28 and 37.6 per cent of the vote – up nearly 3 per cent from 2012. EH Bildu saw its vote share drop to 21.26 per cent from 25 per cent, losing 3 seats to land with 18 (EA-GV 2016). While EH Bildu may have seen some of their support siphoned off toward Podemos, PSE-EE/PSOE saw the largest drop in vote share, from 19.4 per cent and 19 seats in 2012 to 11.94 per cent and 9 seats – the same number of seats as the PP with 10.18 per cent (EA-GV 2016). Thus, while Podemos may have had an impact on the EH Bildu vote share, it appears, at least to date, not to have been so dramatic. This may be related in part to the affective and expressive nature of voting for EH Bildu. Looking at the support received by EH Bildu predecessors before, during, and after the ban on Batasuna, Arenas (2016) determined that roughly three quarters of the vote given to Batasuna was expressive, rather than instrumentally motivated. Accordingly, it appears that although there is the potential for overlap in interests and even voter pools between EH Bildu and Podemos, this overlap may be instrumentalized as a partnership, rather than posing an immediate existential threat to EH Bildu.

Podemos represents a strong challenger to the IA electoral coalition in that those same stances that make it an appealing partner, also make it a potential destination for the votes that EH Bildu has collected in the past, and those it seeks to collect in the future. Simultaneously, Podemos, by virtue of the fact that it is a statewide party, offers something that EH Bildu, as a regional party, does not, an avenue through which the party can give voters a more direct voice on the politics at the state level. Therefore, while the arrival of Podemos is unlikely to cause a schism in the IA in line with that of the 1970s, it is not a partnership that comes without risk to the IA. A potentially informative avenue for future consideration would be an ongoing comparison as to the nature and function of relationships and competitions between Podemos and nationalist left parties of the Basque Country, with those of other regions with strong support for increased autonomy, such as that of Catalunya, as Podemos aims to balance success in particular regions with more nationalized support, and regional nationalists seek to maintain and build support within their strongholds.

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