

ARTICLE

# Changing Nationalist Styles in Galicia: The Politics of Dual Identity

Gabriel G. Bello,<sup>1</sup>  Ramón Máiz<sup>2</sup>  and Roi Pérez-Boquete<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Political Science, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany and <sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science and Sociology, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

**Corresponding author:** Roi Pérez-Boquete; Email: [roi.perezboquete@usc.es](mailto:roi.perezboquete@usc.es)

## Abstract

In the Spanish region of Galicia, immediately north of Portugal, the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* (BNG) has achieved unprecedented electoral success, emerging as a prominent nationalist force within the Spanish political landscape. This study analyzes the discursive and performative repertoires employed by Galician nationalism and explores how the prevalent dual national identity in the region shapes these strategies. Reversing Brubaker's theoretical framework and using framing and visual analysis, we compare the BNG's strategies during two different institutional settings: its time in government (2005–2009) and its role leading the opposition (2020–2023). The findings reveal the failure of Galician nationalism to nationalize identity when in power, as policies aimed at promoting Galician identity generated a backlash and, ultimately, produced frame dealignment between the nationalists and the Galician people. The new BNG presents a social project based on the defense of Galician interests and the moderation of the nationalist discourse. It successfully accomplishes frame alignment by adapting to the non-conflictive, dual national identity shared by most Galicians while proposing an inclusive political style.

**Keywords:** Bloque Nacionalista Galego; framing; Galician nationalism; performativity; political style

## Introduction

Galician nationalism, since its emergence in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has had a much smaller political and electoral presence than Basque and Catalan nationalism. The regional election outcomes, both in 2020 and 2024, prove the consolidation of the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* (BNG) as the main alternative to the dominance of the *Partido Popular de Galicia* (PPdeG), especially after the deep organizational and leadership crisis of its competitors on the left. That is why its last National Assembly advanced a debate apropos of the tactics and strategy to be followed to increase the electoral base in the new political cycle (BNG 2021b) and lead the government in Galicia.

The poor historical electoral performance and the lack of government experiences provoked the inability of the nationalists to control Galician political agenda and the territorial relations with the State, which could be the reasons why the hegemonic political party of Galician nationalism has been understudied in political science. Although it is possible to find literature studying the BNG from organizational approaches (Vilas Nogueira and Fernández Baz 2004; Gómez-Reino 2009), electoral analysis (Ares 2017), in comparative perspective (Van Atta 2003; Elias 2009; Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2022) or relying on political geography studies (Lois 2015), they are uncommon and mostly isolated works. There are some examples of more systematic investigations in political-

ideological terms (Máiz 1996, 2003a; Quintana Garrido 2010; Lagares, Rivera, and Máiz 2012). Yet, there are no exhaustive political studies about the contemporary organization led by Ana Pontón.

The BNG is a nationalist party whose main political goal is the defense of the nation and preserving Galician identity. For this reason, its recent success is remarkable, since Galicia has traditionally been removed from nationalist disputes and the majority of the population understands its national identity in a dual and non-exclusive manner (Máiz and Ares 2018, 184). Therefore, we aim to study the mobilization strategies of Galician nationalism at its peak of electoral support and how these have been influenced by the predominant identity preference in Galicia. To achieve this objective, we will undertake a comparison between the new BNG (2020–2023) and the one that attempted to carry out a process of nationalization as part of the regional executive (2005–2009) in a coalition with the *Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia* (PSdeG-PSOE).

Our investigation on the BNG is a case study guided by the combination of two fundamental notions that we consider essential for understanding nationalism: (1) a constructivist epistemological approach that enables us to perceive ethnonational identities as categories, thus avoiding essentialism or groupism (Brubaker 2004a), and (2) the assumption that nations are always the contingent outcome of a complex, plural, and contested political process intertwined with hegemonic struggle (Máiz 2003b).

This article is divided into six sections: the second provides a historical overview of the trajectory of the BNG; the third offers a theoretical framework for the study of nationalist mobilization and a justification for the comparison; the fourth describes research methods and data collection process; the fifth conducts the empirical analysis of the two periods, and finally, we explain the strategic contradictions faced by the BNG and present the conclusions of the comparison.

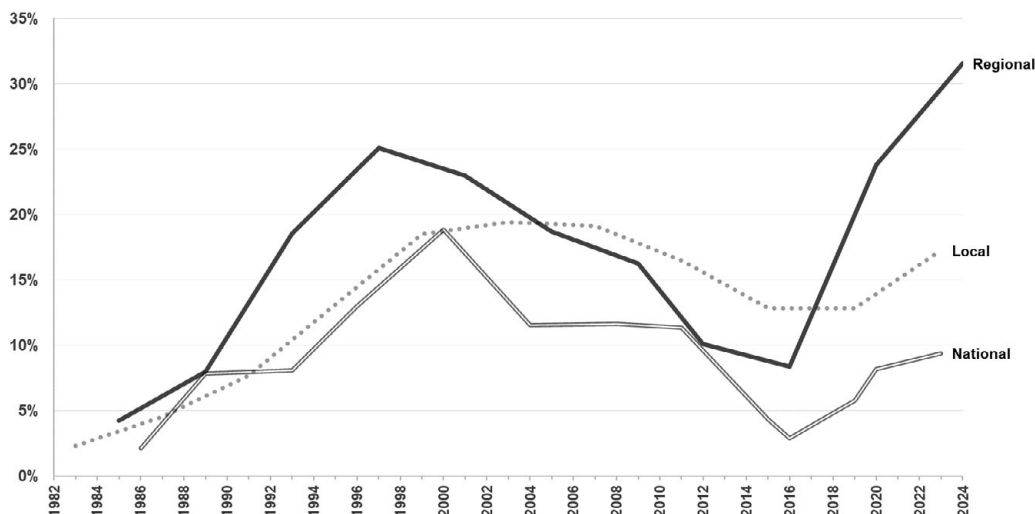
## Case Study Background

The BNG is an organization born under the current Spanish State of Autonomies, and it has just recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, suggesting the deep roots within Galician society. By studying its evolution, we can better acknowledge the political dimension of current Galician nationalism. The historical reading of its trajectory, using previous literature and party documents, will focus primarily on the electoral evolution and the later changes in the organizational structure of the nationalist party<sup>1</sup>.

### The Process of Institutionalization

Founded in 1982, the BNG acts as a political front that brings together different organizations, including —to this day— the communist party *Unión do Povo Galego* (UPG). BNG's foundation also meant adopting a new political strategy within the nationalist camp, away from the rupturist path of late Francoism and the transition years. This was clearly appreciated in 1985, when the historic and charismatic leader Xosé Manuel Beiras, newly elected to the Galician parliament, formally accepted the existing legal constitutional framework and therefore the Autonomic State as a political field<sup>2</sup> (Quintana Garrido 2010, 96). Yet, the BNG's political presence has not been limited to the institutional arena. The nationalists in Galicia have had an active role in civil society since its foundation, most notably within the labor movement with a powerful trade union, *Confederación Intersindical Galega* (CIG). This ongoing activity is also combined with the work of other satellite organizations that bridge the political party with society in multiple domains (media, education, culture and language associations, environmental movements, and other grassroots organizations), creating an effective multi-organizational field (Klandermans 1997) for political mobilization.

In the early years, the party was still anchored and inspired by anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles, and actively employed exclusionary discursive strategies characterized by Máiz and Ares (2018) as a 'niche frame'. However, in the 1990s, discursive moderation took place in both dimensions: ideological and territorial. This strategic move allowed the BNG to incorporate



**Figure 1.** Electoral evolution of the BNG (1983-2024).

Source: *Ministerio del Interior*.

available votes through a renewed leftist discourse defending the welfare state, which positioned the party in direct competition with the traditional social-democratic party in Galicia, PSdeG-PSOE (Rivera Otero 2003).

After two decades, Beiras' leadership came to an end and was replaced by Anxo Quintana. To the variation in political strategies, we must also add an organic adaptation with characteristics of a catch-all party that consolidated an 'organization of individual ascription' (Barreiro Rivas 2008, 97), even if the UPG maintained the organization's control. In 2005, the BNG entered the regional government in a coalition with the PSdeG-PSOE, despite confirming already a negative electoral trend (see Figure 1). Once in government (2005-2009), Quintana encountered critical voices that questioned his leadership within the party due to the appointment of external technical figures for positions of confidence as well as for the political practices and policies adopted by the left-wing coalition (Quintana Garrido 2010, 214; 238). The low coalition culture in Galicia and the government's political ineffectiveness perceived by the citizenry, including their own voters, facilitated the return to power of the PPdeG since the coalition government's action was not enough to entail any future electoral profitability nor significantly alter Galician dominant party system.

After the government experience, the BNG faced an important crisis. Quintana and the rest of the National Executive members resigned right after the 2009 regional election producing far-reaching changes in the nationalist organization. The Extraordinary Assembly (2009) gave a glimpse of the internal divisions during a moment of extreme fragmentation. The organic fragility ultimately led to the split in 2012 of different factions that were not fully aligned with the UPG and resulted in the birth of two new political parties: *Anova Irmandade Nacionalista* and *Compromiso por Galicia*. The internal disputes were not only about controlling the organization but also motivated by the interpretation of the political moment and the direction the party should follow in the future. The BNG advocated ideological continuity, priming center-periphery competition as new nationalist actors threatened the viability of the organization (Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2022). This identitarian episode symbolized the reaffirmation of the 'reactive' orientation that feels comfortable in 'residentialist, leftist, essentialist, and ethno-cultural cognitive frames' (Quintana Garrido 2010, 113). For the first time, the BNG included the need for a republic in its political theses (BNG 2012, 13).

Meanwhile, *Anova* and *Esquerda Unida* formed an electoral coalition led by the former nationalist leader, Beiras, that sought to capitalize on the effects of the economic and political crisis through left-wing social policies and a populist narrative by appealing to latent demands such

as anti-austerity and democratic regeneration. This coalition, named *Alternativa Galega de Esquerdas* (AGE), was able to displace the BNG to the fourth position in the 2012 regional election and challenge the long-undisputed dominant position of Galician nationalism held by the BNG.

At the national level, in 2015, the BNG joined other minoritarian nationalist parties under a fully Galician coalition (*NÓS-Candidatura Galega*) that prioritized even more the national question. However, the poor results translated into the loss of representation in the Spanish Congress for the first time since 1996. Overall, the BNG's presence in the lower chamber has been unstable as the party receives lower support than in regional elections because of multi-level voting strategies embedded in 'no second-order effects transitions' (Cabeza and Scantamburlo 2021) —that is, by citizens who vote for non-statewide parties in regional elections and statewide parties in national elections. This did not prevent the BNG from acquiring the status of 'relevant party' (Barrio et al. 2010) in Spanish party politics in specific moments, contributing —alongside with other non-statewide parties— to the governability of Spain and expecting to receive in return compromises that favor the interests of the territory they represent (Delgado Sotillos 2020).

### *Rising from Ashes*

In 2016, under a self-proclaimed 're-foundation' of the party (BNG 2016), Ana Pontón was elected as national spokesperson, a position to be held for the first time by a woman and member of the UPG. The XV National Assembly was a turning point in the organization's recent history for three different reasons: (1) the historic appointment of a female leader could be related to the glass cliff theory, which argues that women are 'more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions in problematic organizational circumstances' (Ryan, Haslam, and Kulich 2010, 57); (2) it consolidated the previous strategy of not conflating with Spanish statewide political parties (Ares 2017); and (3) there was an organizational flexibilization that strengthened the figure of Pontón by reducing the polycephaly established in Amio (XIII National Assembly). This opened the possibility for the leader to become the presidential candidate while keeping her organizational role in the party.

Having a socially attractive leader facilitates the participation of the BNG from the new forms of politics that are inclined towards the presidentialization of politics, even at regional levels (Mata López and Ortega Ruiz 2013). Indeed, in the 2016 regional election, the candidate was key during the campaign helping to mobilize late deciders in a crucial moment where the BNG faced successful competition. In the same way the BNG lost ground to AGE in 2012, so it did in 2016 with *En Marea*, which incorporated AGE and *Podemos*, among other forces, and stressed left-wing policies rather than focusing on territorial demands (Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2022).

At the national scene, the BNG regained representation in November 2019, and it was also maintained in the next election in 2023. Although the party mattered for government formation on both occasions, the stability of the government rested on Catalan and Basque nationalist parties. The two-bloc logic imposed in the Spanish party system after the corruption scandals and the events in Catalonia under Mariano Rajoy's government catalyzed the end of the territorial consensus: *Partido Popular* became gradually isolated due to its strategy of criminalization of nationalist parties and PSOE was able to build cross-party alliances when moving forward the territorial debate, the acknowledgement of the multinational character of the Spanish polity, and devolution. As it had happened before, 'PSOE found support from non-statewide parties who wanted to avoid the alignment with PP' (Barrio et al. 2010).

In the meantime, in Galicia, after the 2020 regional election, the nationalists took advantage of their left-wing competitors' weaknesses, and they exercised the symbolic representation of the opposition with Pontón as the main alternative to the PPdeG. The debacle, and subsequent disappearance, of *En Marea* proves that the realignment process of the 2012–2020 electoral cycle in the nationalist camp was 'incomplete' (Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2022), with vote transfers up to 48% from *En Marea* to the BNG (CIS study 3294). If the electoral strength in 2020 was already remarkable (23.79%, 19 seats), the 2024 regional election represented a

historical milestone for the nationalist party, breaking the organization's electoral ceiling and achieving the best results ever (31.57%, 25 seats) —which position the BNG among the most voted regionalist parties in Europe.

### Brubaker on Reverse

For years, nationalism studies have been dominated by a constructivist perspective. This approach is suitable for our study, although it is not enough by itself. We must move towards investigating which variables are involved in the national construction and whether and how these manage to associate properties with specific identities (Chandra 2012).

Due to its interest in renewing the constructivist field, Brubaker's work (1996; 2004a; et al. 2006) is a fundamental reference point for explaining the theoretical bases and objectives that guide our research on Galician nationalism. For the American scholar, constructivism, despite its recognition of nations and ethnicities as political productions, failed in its 'groupism'. That is, in accepting the idea that ethnicities and nations constitute substantial groups, internally homogeneous and externally differentiated, giving rise to collectivities with common interests and objectives (2004a, 8). Instead, he proposes to understand them as categories with the potential for group-formation that, as a contingent event, may lead to varying degrees of groupness (2004a; 2006, 12).

These Brubakerian notions, based on 'perpetual negotiation and renegotiation of identities' (Brubaker et al. 2006, 9), allow us to understand nationalism as a 'dual phenomenon' in which (1) political entrepreneurs articulate, propagate, or impose categories, while (2) ordinary people interpret, subvert, or assume them (Brubaker 2004a, 6). In order to prove this reasoning and empirically test it, Brubaker et al. (2006) conducted research in Cluj, Romania, to study 'how ethnicity works' and focusing on the relationship between politics and everyday life. The authors concluded that the population was indifferent about the intense ethnonational disputes perpetuated by nationalist organizations' rhetoric and policies. In other words, the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs failed in their efforts of group-making.

In a similar vein, we approach the study of the BNG following Brubaker's work. However, we reverse its reasoning to study nationalist mobilization strategies and how these have been influenced by the existence of a dual national identity in Galicia. Unlike Brubaker, our interest lies not in discovering in what ways the nation/ethnicity crystallizes as an 'interpretative prism' from below, but in how this (no) crystallization is interpreted from above by the new and successful Galician nationalism when deciding its group-making strategies. Therefore, we decided to compare the BNG led by Pontón with the period when the organization was part of the government, and whose unique institutional position as policy maker opened up the possibility for the nationalist party to carry out a process of nationalization and shape the identity of Galicians through public policies. It is precisely the institutional distinction (government/opposition) that will allow us to observe whether and how the identity conditioned nationalist practice.

To study what Brubaker calls 'nationalist politics from above' and 'nationalist claims', the concept of interpretative frame, as a set of collective beliefs that give meaning to participation in collective action, seems extremely useful when the nation is understood as a category and nationalism as a 'political idiom' (2004b).

Nationalist discourse is composed of frames that, rather than expressing a preexisting or pre-political national reality, function as rhetorical strategies that select some political objectives and discard others, construct ethnonational differences by highlighting some 'national traits' and diluting others, produce antagonistic narratives, etc. Brubaker himself acknowledges that events interpreted as ethnic or national do not originate from pre-existing differences, but are the result of framing work to constitute them as such (2004a, 16–17).

Frames are dynamic and cannot be interpreted as detached from the evolution of political competition and its events, as they take shape in the process of interaction between opportunities and counterframing (Huszka 2014, 13–12). However, simultaneously, they respond to the strategic

decisions of actors, who establish a continuous dialogue between tradition and creation to link them with the general cultural structure (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 81). To study this connection in our case study, we employ the concept of frame alignment. This refers to the link, necessarily congruent and complementary, between the cognitive interpretations of individuals and those of actors (Snow et al. 1986, 464), which is indispensable for mobilization to occur.

Applying this theoretical framework to nationalism, we may argue that the capacity of nationalist discourse to mobilize increases when it is emotionally dense and able to draw identity frontiers, but, at the same time, it also presents greater integration difficulties due to its radicalism and consequent difficulty in appealing to majorities (frame dealignment). The challenge for nationalist leaders is to find the right balance between using a polarizing and emotionally-charged strategy and keeping a certain level of moderation necessary to increase support (frame alignment)<sup>3</sup>.

## Methods and Data

Our methodological approach to study Galician nationalism is grounded in our theoretical framework. To this end, we have developed a research design that inverts the logic of Brubaker's theory in its application to the Galician case. Before addressing the discursive elements, it is important and necessary to evaluate the national identification trend, which, in the last decades, has been shaped by the different regional executive cabinets' management and conditioned throughout time by the ever-increasing decentralization of territorial administration ('State of Autonomies'). This political production, as we shall see further in the investigation, creates the conditions that set the political field and Galician national conflict. By studying the different national identities in Galicia, we aim to steer clear of the reification of the nation, explaining its heterogeneity, and the blurred boundary that exists between the categories 'Spanish' and 'Galician'.

For the study of the national identification of the people, we draw on post-election representative survey data available (see [Appendix A](#)) at the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS), which is analyzed by using statistical descriptive techniques. Additionally, to complement our data on identity in Galicia at the micro level, we have sought to include a qualitative perspective through ethnographic observation and interviews (see [Appendix B](#)).

To conduct our frame analysis, we will follow the model proposed by Snow and Benford (1988), which has been empirically applied previously in the exploration of nationalist movements (Pérez-Boquete and Bello 2023). The framing processes developed by nationalists consist of three fundamental types of interpretative frames in mobilization and national construction: (Principio del formulario) diagnostic: definition of the national problem, its causes, and identification of the agents who are responsible of such situation; (2) prognostic: naming the solutions to the national problem and the protagonist capable of carrying out national liberation; (3) action: rhetorical, moral, and emotional elements aimed at promoting social mobilization to foster collective action.

In order to empirically approach discourse, we analyzed forty different documents (see [Appendix B](#)) covering both time periods. Of those, eight full speeches —similar in nature— were coded by using a specialized qualitative text analysis software (MaxQDA) that also provides our study with quantitative measures that strengthen the argument.

In addition, to avoid falling into the hyperrationalist historical tendency of political science (Demertzis 2006), and of political communication to focus only on content (Sorensen 2020), our proposal builds upon the discursive-performative analysis of political style (Moffit and Tormey 2014) that exceeds the traditional function of the action frame. Discourse cannot be reduced to mere rhetoric as this would obviate the gestures, the manners, the clothing, the stage... that help discourses to act as producers of affective bonds (Venizelos 2023). In the era of social media and extreme mediatization, where politicians seek to differentiate themselves from others and establish political relations with increasingly volatile and polarized electoral bases (Morales and Béjar 2022), performativity represents a substantial part in the constitution of political power (Alexander 2011). Contemporary political analysis must simultaneously account for both rhetorical and aesthetic

elements (Moffit 2016), therefore, it is appropriate to also apply visual analysis (Joffe 2008) to media files in our dataset.

## Empirical Analysis

### Setting the Terrain: The Dual National Identity

Nested national identities challenge the classical interpretation of nationalist about the existence of a homogeneous community built upon ascriptive criteria (language, race, culture, history, traditions...) that facilitate the differentiation with other nations. Even though differential ethnic and social preconditions continue to be remarkable in Galicia, characterized by a relative ethno-cultural homogeneity, today it is not possible to affirm the national identity from an approach that ignores the complexity, the conflict, and the internal plurality of the nation.

In multinational societies, it is common to see a compound nationality. Galicia is no exception (see Figure 2). This particularity, stable over time, reduces the possibility of explaining the booming results of the BNG based on nationalist sentiment, as the identity expression of Galicians has remained almost unaltered in the last decades. In addition, the position held by most of Galician society offers a sketch of how the people deal with the national question. The majoritarian position ('equally Spanish as Galician') represents the absence of national conflict, as this response balances both national identities, integrating them in a non-conflictual state.

In this section we will explore the national self-identification of Galicians as well as considering the present politicization of national identity and its relevance. In Galicia, exclusive national identities (only Spanish, only Galician) are uncommon and the expression of a mononational Galician identity is extremely lower than in other societies such as Catalonia or the Basque Country (see Figure 3).

The dominant dual identity is not altered even if we take into account the generational cohorts<sup>4</sup>, which still reveal certain patterns that respond to the *esprit de l'époque*. For instance, in older generations —Silent generation (1914–1928), Francoist generation (1929–1943), Baby boomers (1944–1958), and Generation X (1959–1973)—, born under Franco's dictatorial regime, we notice a higher proportion of people who feel 'only Spanish' in comparison to feeling 'only Galician'. In the same way that older generations are influenced by the socio-historical context of the era in which they were born, the same occurs with the younger generational cohorts: Generation Y (1974–1988) and Generation Z (1989–2003) consider themselves 'only Galician' to a greater extent than the rest of the generations analyzed (see Appendix A). They were socialized under a democratic system in which Galicia was already a consolidated political-administrative entity endowed with considerable political autonomy, and whose material realization could be observed in almost all elements of the everyday life: from going to school or the doctor to watching television. This, somehow, enhances identity differentiation and contributes to the hypothesis developed by Losada (1999, 57): the

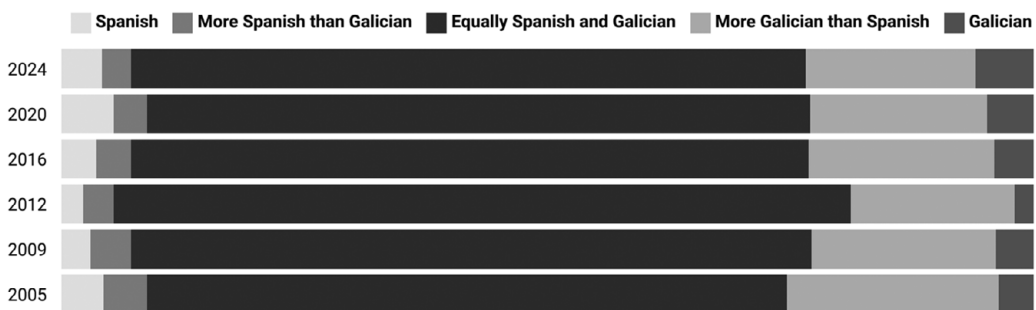


Figure 2. National identity of Galicians by year. Source: CIS.

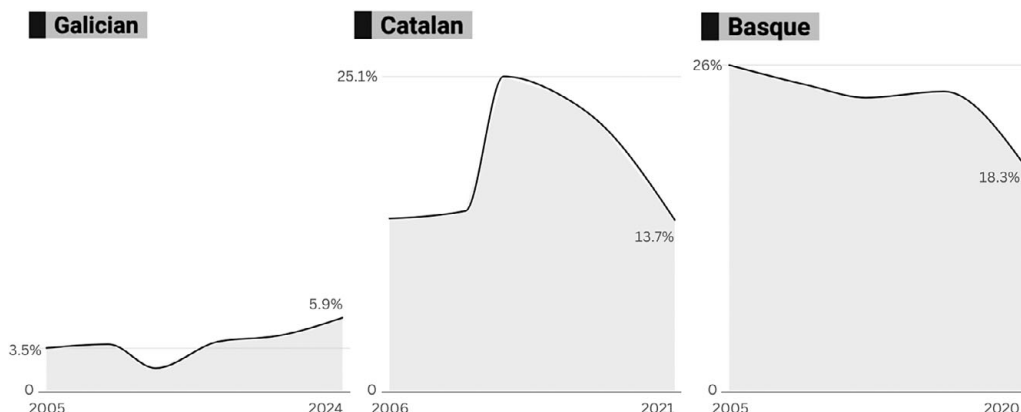


Figure 3. Exclusive national identity (2005–2024). Source: CIS.

autonomic process constitutes a favorable opportunity structure for the consolidation of the ‘social preconditions for nationalism in Galicia’.

It is evident that the existence of the necessary conditions for a differentiated ethnicity does not mechanically translate into nationalist politics. Moreover, in the case of Galicia, even support for a nationalist party does not imply the politicization of identity, since, at present, the ethnonational conflict is restricted to intra-elite disputes. Proof of this can be seen in the gap between representatives and citizens in terms of identity (see Herrera and Miley 2018, 211), as nationalist political elites, contrary to the majority, tend to adopt exclusive national identities.

This is also true for the BNG, whose ethos may prioritize the national question, but its voters do not. According to the 2024 pre-election data (CIS study 3437), among those with intention to vote for the BNG, only 3.9% declared ‘autonomy, identity and Galician sentiment’ to be the main problem in the region. And following this argument, we observe how the variable ‘only Galician’, although significant, has a lower explanatory weight in the electoral behavior of BNG voters compared to other nationalist parties in Spain (Corujo, Fernández-Esquer, and Rama 2019).

### The Political Idiom of the BNG

To better understand the chain of signification of the BNG discourse, our analysis should start with an examination of the nationalist distinction drawn between the signifiers ‘Galicia’ and ‘Galiza’. While both toponyms are recognized and correct, Galician nationalism chooses to employ ‘Galiza’. They consider this option, as there is evidence of its use in the Middle Ages, to be the most accurate due to its historical origin, conferring greater legitimacy to the nationalist project. Although it is true that this semantic debate can be raised between the historians and the philologists, researchers on nationalism must not fall into the trap set by nationalists (Hobsbawm 1992, 12). That is why our focus should be on what is truly relevant: the political consequences produced by this differentiation.

The signifier ‘Galicia’ is reduced to its name; it has an imprecise political meaning that opens the possibility for a successful rearticulation of the term through frame alignment processes by a very diverse set of ideological actors. ‘Galiza’, on the other hand, is a univocal and strongly charged concept that refers to a nation, and its nomination evokes a wide range of meanings associated with Galician nationalist frames, such as the official Galician flag featuring a red star, known as the *Estreleira*. Its conceptual content implies rejecting the integration within the Spanish constitutional design (State of Autonomies) and the subordination to the Spanish State.

In this way, the problems enumerated by the BNG stress Galiza as a differentiated nation subjected to a process of impoverishment and marginalization. This narrative, typically used by nationalist movements, results in the articulation of the nation as an ethnic-national community



with economic-social interests inherent to the group (Máiz 2018, 156). Not surprisingly, the interaction between cultural and economic factors is a central element in explaining the levels of support for regionalist parties (Álvarez Pereira, Portos, and Vourdas 2018).

The BNG presents Galiza as a country rich in possibilities, due to its cultural, natural, and human resources, but whose potential cannot be fulfilled under a centralist system. The state of dependence on Madrid, symbol of Spanish centralism, would be the main reason why the true interests of Galiza are not followed to determine the political decisions. Indeed, the capital of Spain is seen as ‘the other’ and acts (1) as a division that orders the political field by making the rest of issues subordinate to it and (2) as an empty signifier capable of condensing most of the grievances suffered by the oppressed nation.

We have a project that values the enormous potential this country has, that develops the capacities of Galiza, that stops the centralism that impoverishes us<sup>5</sup>.

Galiza, as a national particularity —defined by Galician language—, would be subjected to historical injustices by the Spanish state resulting in an impoverished, second-class nation that the BNG represents through a synecdoche device: the party speaks for the entire nation.

## Discursive Analysis of the BNG in Government (2005–2009)

### *In the Name of Democracy*

As could not be otherwise, the BNG holding power and the BNG leader of the opposition share many interpretative frames that shape their narrative through a nationalist discursive structure. We will try to point out some of these similarities and, above all, the differences in their framing and performative strategies.

The diagnosis of the BNG led by Quintana rests, as it is under Pontón’s leadership, on the otherness of Madrid and several similar problems such as the economic underdevelopment of Galiza or the historical financial mistreatment by the Spanish state. Nonetheless, when ruling, the BNG highlighted two elements as particularly worrying regarding ‘democracy’.

At the internal level, lower quality of democracy limited the nation’s potential. This situation would be the result of a strong culture of clientelistic relationships built in a multilevel perspective, and promoted by the head of the regional executive, Fraga (Lagares 1999). This long-established network of patrons, brokers, and clients erodes the universal relationship of politics and public policies by priming private interests through clientelistic linkages (Pantín and Máiz 2019). The BNG saw these practices as the main producers of political, media, and business power structures that weakened social mobility in Galiza.

At the external level, the lack of recognition of Spain as a plurinational state created a democratic anomaly: ‘Galiza’ as a mere ‘appendix of Spain’. The origin of this situation goes back to the Spanish Constitution, establishing the exclusion of peripheral nationalism through the State of Autonomies, a limited uniformizing system priming majoritarian nationalism.

This interpretation led to a dichotomy in which Galician nationalism represents the values associated with democracy (popular sovereignty, recognition of plurality, etc.), and the Spanish system only would work against it. This struggle over the floating signifier ‘democracy’ (majoritarian democracy versus constitutional democracy) plays a central role in the process of construction of the people made by the nationalist movements (Ruiz Casado 2022).

These days we hear some talking about Spain, Spain, Spain; and others again using the Constitution like a hammer talking about Constitution, Constitution, Constitution. Well, we say neither Spain nor the Constitution. We say democracy, democracy, democracy.

The PPdeG, in its usual role of antagonist to the BNG, is characterized not simply as an actor imprisoned by a centralist mindset, but also as anti-democratic and responsible for the very low

level of democracy. We are facing a confrontational discourse with political actors and less with other social groups, as it will be explained in the prognostic. The relationship with the PSdeG-PSOE is ambivalent and complicated, insofar as it is a necessary ally (coalition partner). However, the BNG needs to differentiate itself from the other left-wing party and try to attract part of its electorate. Depending on the interests of the nationalists, the socialists can be part of the 'state-wide forces' responsible for 'Galiza's underdevelopment', with PPdeG and PSdeG-PSOE being different sides of the same coin, or allies who recognize 'Galiza's national status' and with whom agreements can be reached at the institutions.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that among the antagonistic actors we should include the hegemonic media outlets, presented as 'big media groups', who are pointed for interfering with government action because of their strong criticism. As we mentioned before, the BNG considered them part of the clientelist structure and, therefore, part of the problems the country suffered from.

### *Identity and Welfare*

The proposals are the core of the BNG's discourse with Quintana (see Table 1), as the party became fully institutionalized. Their most important proposition, due to its symbolic and material significance, was to reform the Statute of Autonomy<sup>6</sup>, that is to say, the basic norm that regulates Galicia's relationship with the State. For the BNG, this was a matter of (1) claiming organizational and financial resources to protect and defend Galiza's interests and, continuing with the typical behavior of minority nationalists in multinational states, (2) seeking to change 'the common state from one that is an expression of a single political community into one that acknowledges and accepts its national diversity' (Basta 2021, 9).

The realization of the first demand was closely related to a new regional financing model. In fact, the last two of the seven points of the proposed Statute plan presented by the coalition government were about the creation of a Galician treasury with the capacity to manage the taxes collected in Galiza and a new financing arrangement with the State, committing 8% of the national investment for the territories for a period of 10 years.

The current system is unsupportive and ruinous for Galiza. It is necessary to negotiate a new more balanced system, which takes into account the needs of Galiza's reality: historical deficit.

The national question in the Statute was a hot issue and eventually caused the failure of the reform. The nationalist document presented in the negotiation with the PSdeG-PSOE defined 'Galiza' as a nation stating the following: 'AFFIRMING our existence as a nation, made explicit in a deeply rooted and unique historical, linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and political fact, AWARE that it was during the Middle Ages when those traits were defined until they emerged in the Galician

**Table 1.** Codes in Quintana's speeches by frequency

BNG	Protagonist	34
New National Statute	Alternative	19
Self-government	Alternative	14
Galician Nation	Alternative	12
Galicians	Protagonist	9
Democratic regeneration	Alternative	9
Defense of the language	Alternative	8
PPdeG governments	Cause	8

Nation. (...) In Galiza, specific traits preserved allow us to identify, since the late Middle Ages, the current Galician Nation facing centralist attempts by Castile in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries' (BNG 2005a). In this definition, it remains clear that the BNG understands the Galician nation as a different ethnicity rooted in diverse elements and interests historically opposed to those of Castile/Spain.

In addition to national recognition, the seven points of the agreement also included setting bilateral relations with the State and the establishment of Galician as the official language and Spanish as the co-official one. Linguistic policies, especially those linked to education, were a central element in the BNG agenda within the bipartite government. Based on the premise that Galician deserves positive discrimination, a decree on the 'use and promotion of Galician in the educational system' was approved in 2007. This meant, for example, establishing a minimum of 50% of teaching in Galician at all non-university education levels. They also established a new network of public nursery schools entirely in Galician, which were named *Galescolas*<sup>7</sup> (a combination of '*Galego*' — Galician— and '*Escolas*' —schools—).

We are Galicians because of the language. What we need to do now is to put the government at the service of the language and not to use the language for petrified liturgies.

These nationalizing endeavors<sup>8</sup> led to a backlash from pro-Spanish sectors. Led by the association *Galicia Bilingüe* (Bilingual Galicia), currently integrated in another association called *Hablamos español* (We speak Spanish), altogether with the support of the PPdeG, they complemented each other to produce intra- and extra-parliamentary mobilization 'against linguistic imposition' (Bianculli, Jordana, and Ferrín Pereira 2021, 102). The contention resulted in frames of 'totalitarianism' (them) and 'free choice' (us) as the basis to attack BNG's project (Losada 2022, 8).

In addition to this attempt carried out by political entrepreneurs to emotionally mobilize ethnic conflict at the macro level, there is also a micro level component linked to how Galicians understand their own identity. Nationalization policies were not effective because the politicization of identities is regarded as an artificial or self-interested production of a problem where previously there was none. It represents a dealignment with an everyday ethnicity normality in which conflicts related to national or identity issues are not perceived to be of significant concern. In fact, the failure also became evident in the national attachment of Galicians, as the number of people who identified 'equally Spanish as Galician' increased (see Figure 2), while those who considered Galicia a nation decreased (Máiz and Ares 2018, 193) after the experience of nationalists in government.

The consequence of this conflict at macro level, absent at micro level, is that the nationalist party, once in government, pushed to achieve national recognition and increase the presence of Galician identity, while the opposition took advantage of the fact that the policies —identified as conflicting with the prevailing dual national sentiment— were not received enthusiastically by the majority of the population. In doing so, the PPdeG chose the path of identity polarization as an electoral strategy, forcing the contradiction between nationalization and dual identity.

After the reform of the Statute was blocked by the PPdeG, the BNG focused on consolidating what they called the 'Galician welfare state'. In a clear adaptation of social democratic ideology to the Galician context, the signifier grouped policies of equality, daycare, education, healthcare, etc. whose consolidation required increasing competencies.

The more self-government we have, the more possibilities of well-being Galician citizens will have (...) Nationalism is equality among peoples.

In government, besides prioritizing more on providing solutions, the BNG pragmatism relied on understanding Galician people as an interclass bloc where everyone could benefit from a nationalist social-democratic administration centered exclusively in the needs of Galiza and its people. Quintana himself used rhetoric that incorporated expressions commonly used in the business world.

Galician entrepreneurs must be freed from the paperwork, bureaucracy, incompetence, and clientelism that have been drowning the creative forces of the Galician economy for so long.

In short, the discursive strategy of Quintana's BNG consisted of defending nationalism as the articulation of social democratic welfare that can be achieved through greater self-government and the defense of Galician identity, especially through culture and language. The disagreement of the UPG with this social democratic turn became more and more evident.

### **Nationalist Exaggeration**

When the BNG holds power, the repertoire of stimuli for action is aligned with its institutional position. Demonstrations decreased, and militant mobilization was limited to party events and nationalist tributes. Quintana stood out for using more references to historical Galicianism as the basis for the symbolic packaging of his narrative. In the nationalist process of 'choosing our ancestors' (Yack 2012, 88), Quintana focuses on Galician language writers and poets, emphasizing the long history of Galician as an aesthetic and affective bond of the community. In his speeches, he commonly recited verses that evoked the unity of the Galicians or their status as an oppressed nation. However, the conception of culture as a marker of ethnonational identity goes beyond discourse. The BNG attempted to make it the basis of a network of corporations and associations with language as the core element. Also, the employment of a poetic register was complemented by exaggerated rhetoric regarding the Galician community or the possibilities of national development rooted in the language.

Galiza is the most lively and creative society in Europe (...) the goal is to turn Galiza into a world cultural powerhouse.

The style of his leadership, seen by many sectors as too extravagant, had three well-differentiated aspects: the first, characterized by elements closely linked to traditional politics, including the daily use of a suit in all his public interventions, which generated rejection from part of the nationalist militancy that favors more relaxed and alternative styles like Beiras; the second, adopting a masculine style of communication (Grebelsky-Lichtman and Bdolach 2017), with a deep, serious, and strong voice tone, often shouting; and the third, his determination to present himself as a natural person (see Figure 4) and close to the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially the elderly. One of his favorite places to appear in public were the parties and meals dedicated to the elderly, where it was common for him to be very expressive and effusive (see Figure 5). In fact, the BNG intended to exploit this representation of its candidate as a *man of the people* during election campaigns. In 2009, the BNG released a reggaeton video<sup>9</sup> about Quintana, the first time ever a political party in Spain used such resource and style in electoral marketing.

Lastly, as a counterpart to reformism, the level of institutionalization reached, and the contradictions derived from it, Quintana tried to legitimize himself by inscribing the new project within a much broader process aimed at self-determination. For this reason, it was common for him to use references to this goal, particularly in speeches intended for internal consumption —discourses whose main audience are the party members—.

### **Analysis of the BNG in Opposition (2020–2023)**

#### **New Old Problems**

The BNG, leading the opposition, faces a renewed hegemonic PPdeG which, with the exception of the bipartite period, has governed since 1990. The conservatives are accused of using the regional government to push for privatization and a centralist agenda, functioning as a transmission chain for interests external to those of the country. Here begins a game of differences, aimed at creating a



**Figure 4.** Quintana dancing during the BNG rally.  
*Source: Lavandeira Jr.*

rhetorical strategy based on antagonistic frames (us/them), whereby a subordinate Galiza is ‘small’ while a free Galiza is ‘big’, or the BNG is ‘the party of Yes’ while the PPdeG is ‘the party of No’.

We are going to leave behind the small Galiza of the PP to build the big Galiza the BNG has in mind.



**Figure 5.** Quintana in the company of elderly people.  
Source: *Lavandeira Jr.*

**Table 2.** Codes in Pontón's speeches by frequency

BNG	Protagonist	37
Multinationals	Antagonist	20
PPdeG	Antagonist	17
Crisis/great swindle	Problem	16
Feijóo/Rueda	Antagonist	13
Galicians	Protagonist	13
Centralism/Madrid	Cause	11
Electric companies	Antagonist	10

The problem of centralism is exacerbated in a context of economic and social crisis. This is presented as a 'great swindle' in which a minority is multiplying the economic profits while the many see their living conditions worsened. The division of the social field (see [Table 2](#)) between the Galician people and the economic elite implies a strategy of nomination where the minority takes multiple general forms ('multimillionaires', 'multinationals', 'economic lobbies'...) as well as more specific labels ('Repsol', 'Naturgy', 'Endesa'...).

A crisis where the majority [of people] loses and a minority wins, and they are winning a lot. We only must see the scandalous profits of the electric companies (...) and then we have the oil companies; while the majority struggles to fill up the tank, they are tripling the profit margins. And as if this wasn't enough, the IBEX is getting richer and richer, with profits that

are every time bigger and bigger. This is a swindle to the social majority that must be denounced and must be stopped.

This could be easily understood as an adaptation of the strategy that guided the Spanish left in the previous political cycle (Cancela and Rey-Araújo 2022). However, we do not appreciate any trait to characterize the BNG as a populist party because (1) the elite/minority is not blamed to be the main responsible of economic underdevelopment, but a direct consequence of Galiza's dependence, and (2) the Galician people, as a collective subject, is the national community. As we shall see, the solution lies in more national sovereignty, instead of popular. This is clearly reflected in the nominal act of claiming the existence of the Galician nation, in which the degree of differential consciousness is high.

We have to trust Galiza. Galiza is a nation with a huge sense of identity. And the great challenge we have ahead is to translate that deep-rooted feeling of our country into conscious political nationalism.

The impoverishment and the crisis, heightened by centralism, are illustrated in what is known as the latest challenge of nationalism (Conversi 2020): the relationship between nationalism and climate change, and in particular with energy issues. Galician nationalists have evolved their positions from a 'sustainable Galiza' (BNG 2005b), focused on the preservation of the territory, to a 'green Galiza' (BNG 2021a), which includes the fight against climate change. This continuity is far from being exclusive to the BNG. In fact, it constitutes the basis of a 'green nationalism' that Conversi and Hau (2021) identify as the successful result of frame bridging between self-determination and environmentalism. And it is precisely this strategy that allows the reclaiming of nationalism as a force historically concerned with environmental issues<sup>10</sup>. It is not so much that there has been an ideological evolution, but rather an adaptation of previous ideas and proposals to fit the current cultural struggle of how to define 'green'. All sorts of parties, even those on the far right (Forchtner 2019), fight for providing a particular meaning to the concept 'green' to make it favorable to their interests. The BNG also participates in this contest and now describes its policies as 'ecological' and 'pro-climate action' when in the past they were labeled as 'sustainable' or 'environmentally friendly'.

In this *new* ecological conception, energy resources extraction associated with centralism is presented as extractivism. Galician nationalists, in a somewhat contradictory way, exemplify this problem condemning the 'predatory wind power boom' derived from the PPdeG policies, which promote —under the guise of the need for renewable energies— massive wind farms all over the country. They see the wind farms with high environmental impact and little direct benefits for Galicians. The benefits, they claim, fall on the electric companies that operate them. The nationalists have adopted the slogan 'wind farms yes, but not like this'<sup>11</sup>, which is shared in some sectors of the Galician environmental movement.

If Madrid wants energy, they can place wind turbines in la Castellana<sup>12</sup>. We are fed up with being a colony so that others [territories] take advantage of our resources.

The energy is used as a frame of empirical objectivity with the purpose of presenting the interpretative scheme explained in an objective, concrete, and measurable form: Galiza suffers from energy resources extraction from Madrid (cause) without any kind of compensation (injustice), tolerated by the PPdeG (responsible) and executed through private Spanish electric corporations (perpetrator). The latter political-economic association would form an anti-national power bloc opposed to Galician national interests, which are presented as the general interest.

It is evident that Pontón's BNG constructs a public discourse centered around social and economic topics, emphasizing the defense of Galicia's interests and relegating identity issues to a secondary position. The only recurrent mention of this type of issues occurs when nationalists state that the spiking loss of Galician speakers is a response to an explicitly anti-Galician project directed by the PPdeG, which uses public schools as ideological de-Galicianizing artifacts.

There are thousands of parents who report that their children enter school speaking Galician and leave it speaking Spanish. This can be described with two words: linguistic genocide. And we must say it like this and denounce that we are before a premeditated and deliberate attack on what unites all Galicians the most: our language.

### *Imaginaries of Sovereignty*

The alternatives proposed by the BNG to solve the national problems are grouped under a 'sovereigntist project'. This, in line with the nationalist premise, is the result of a basic notion: the need for greater self-government capacity. The BNG focuses on acting as a corrective factor to a historical anomaly, that is, 'as a form of remedial political action' (Brubaker 1996, 79).

Here it is the BNG and a clear objective: to govern ourselves our own land.

The sovereigntist conception of the prognostic frame has internal and external consequences for the party. Internally, the vacuity of the term is useful because it allows the different national sensibilities—ranging from militants in favor of independence to those who only want increasing competencies within the current Autonomic State—to feel comfortable under a label that simply refers to 'govern ourselves'. Externally, it serves to represent the linkage between nationalist and left-wing frames. A process that connects sovereign aspirations with market regulation and the control of natural resources and strategic sectors through state intervention: Galician public banking, Galician public energy company... In this way, greater government capacity is understood as greater administrative powers, but also as the construction of a state structure that reinforces the nation's capabilities.

The project combines public control measures with others aimed at reversing the lack of investments in Galiza by defending existing industries, calling for further industrialization, and extending the rail system within the region. These solutions seek to correct a historical deficit. Once again, the primacy of foreign interests rather than Galician ones would be the reason why there is a railway line to Madrid, but not between Galician major cities.

In addition, they demand compensatory measures adapted to the particularity of Galiza, which would distinguish it from other national realities. In this sense, the most notorious one is cheaper energy because 'Galiza is a producer country', a measure included in the 'The Future of Galiza is Green' strategy (BNG 2021a) that also incorporates the defense of Galiza's biodiversity, public control of renewable energy to avoid threatening the landscape and rural population centers, energy saving, and also the 'Galician Urban Agenda 2030'. To sum up, they demand structural changes in the productive and territorial model to alleviate the multifaceted crisis (inequality, climate change, exploitation...).

The party presents itself as the only actor in the Galician political system with enough historical legitimacy, 'the Galician Party of the 21<sup>st</sup> century', and enough freedom to defend Galician national interests. In other words, the logic of centralism and, ultimately, the relationship with Spain determines which political parties are free from external influences. This understanding also affects the rest of the left-wing parties, as their leadership would be affected by the influence of Madrid's political directions. Thus, what Galiza needs is a leading political force and a president with 'free hands to act'.

The BNG is always with Galiza. Always with confidence in Galicians. Always knowing that remedy or hope won't come from the outside, because Galiza is itself the hope.

This is well reflected in the advancement of economic patriotism, even at the expense of unfolding contradictions within the party's antagonism towards economic elites. While Pontón criticizes 'foreign' (Spanish) multinationals, she praises 'national' (Galician) companies for the development of the nation's industrial capabilities (BNG 2022; 2023). The differentiation among the economic



actors (national versus non-national) establishes the possibility of blending national and economic interests.

### **One Party, Two Souls**

The BNG, as previously stated, is committed to a repertoire of mobilization with the objective of leading the regional government. The electoral and parliamentary work is mixed along with (1) short-term and multi-party mobilizations in defense of public services and the territory, and (2) more traditional ones linked to national exaltation and the celebration of anniversaries or tributes to historical figures of Galician nationalism. Notoriously, Galician-language writers Alfonso Castelao and Rosalía de Castro stand out: the former, for his ability to link the left and nationalism; the latter, for her prominent literature work that can be easily assimilated into feminist rhetoric.

The action frame is common, historically coherent, and generally shared by all party members and sympathizers; nonetheless, internally, we find two different styles: the one represented by Ana Pontón in Galiza and the one represented by Néstor Rego in Madrid.

In the case of the national-populists we can speak of ‘bad manners’ (Moffit 2016) as one of the keys to understanding their leadership. In the case of Pontón, it is actually the opposite. The nationalist leader assumes part of the performative repertoire of technocracy and bases her behavior on ‘good manners’, which characterize her political persona, from the tone voice she uses —calmed and respectful— to the way she acts in parliament, where she is often interrupted by members of the PPdeG who behave in a more confrontational form.

In the BNG we have had, have, and always will have a helping hand to reach agreements, dialogue and find solutions that improve the lives of the people of this country. But we already see that our helping hand finds nothing but arrogance; arrogance of those who think they are always right.

In the 2020 regional election, according to a representative survey carried out by the CIS (study 3294), almost 35% of the BNG voters stated that the main reason to cast a vote for the nationalists was, indeed, because of the candidate. Pontón’s leadership matters for explaining the vote choice, as she is the main element of identification of current Galician nationalism. She does so by adopting an institutional and moderate style, in contrast to the common portrait made by the leading groups who link the party with radicalism and independence (Núñez Seixas 1997).

Respecting the norms and the conventions and showing herself to be more educated than the elites is complemented by a performativity focused on the representation through images of the national people she addresses. This, from a socio-cultural perspective (Ostiguy and Roberts 2016), is constructed through a popular (not populist) identification (Casullo 2020, 31), based on the interpretation of ‘the low’ as that of people with humble origins. Thus, it is common for Pontón to employ scenarios characterized by their everydayness (see Figure 6) in which people and even food respond to the same logic: common people with common appearances, and problems and banal food present in any Galician home. She also uses a very correct, simple, and direct rhetoric that correlates with the leadership traits she wants to promote, such as closeness with the people (see Figure 7). We do not find the ‘flaunting of the low’ (Ostiguy 2020) but empathy as a form of collective representation, an attitude very much present in new female leaderships defined by positive styles and emotional reflexivity (Holmes 2012).

At the same time, Pontón has erased words like ‘self-determination’ or ‘independence’ from her vocabulary. In her speeches, it is very difficult to find references to the national issue; this is reduced to more abstract signifiers such as the need for ‘sovereignty’ or ‘self-government’, and they always are means for the true objective: social justice. Aware of the historical difficulties of Galician nationalism to penetrate sectors with mixed national identities, Pontón appeals to broad forms of Galician identification. Indeed, one of her favorites phrases is: ‘there are many ways to be Galician, and they are all necessary to open a new era’.



Figure 6. Pontón with her family in her hometown at the beginning of the 2020 electoral campaign. Source: BNG.



Figure 7. Pontón meeting with students to hear about the housing problems. Source: BNG.

However, Pontón's style, electorally successful, is not replicated in Madrid by Rego. The only BNG representative in the Congress, instead, practices a tough style in which the strategy is aimed at symbolically representing the oppressive relationship between Galiza and Madrid. This representation is made evident through a maneuver of moralization (Hatzisavvidou 2022) that rests on the exploitation to which 'Galiza' would be subjected. This frame turns 'Madrid' into the embodiment of evil within a binary moral logic and 'Galiza' into a community in which a feeling of belonging is produced through the collective experience of victimization (Noor et al. 2017). This is the origin of

the stylistic duality that exists in the BNG: Pontón works to represent the national people in Galiza and Rego the defense of Galician interests in Spain ('Madrid').

This interpretation has led the deputy to use transgression as a performative strategy (Aiolfi 2022) through a belligerent rhetoric that includes uncommon expressions in parliamentary sessions, usually directed against Vox, the monarchy, businessmen, or the Spanish state; and also, his way of acting in Congress includes breaching formal procedures (e. g. when he decided speaking Galician until he was ejected in November 2020 and June 2022). This strategy adjusts Rego's style to a more traditional one within the framework of Galician sovereignty, where references to self-determination and the Galician Republic are common. This more bellicose style, being emotionally dense and identity-defining, is also reflected in roll-call voting, where the BNG refused several times to vote in favor of approving the left-wing coalition's annual budget, unlike their nationalist allies *Esquerra Republicana* or *EH Bildu*.

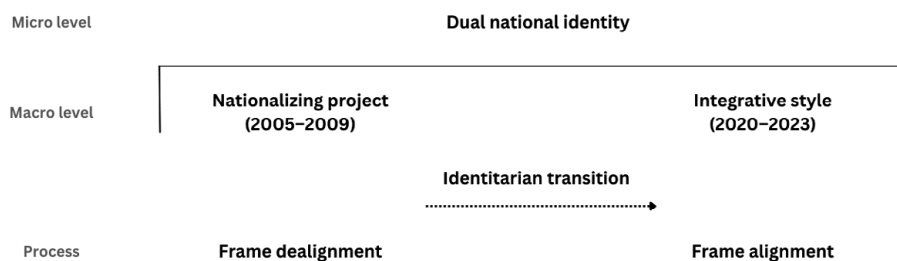
## Conclusions

In this study we covered an exploration of Galician nationalist strategies during two different time periods (2005–2009 and 2020–2023) relying on text and visual data in order to uncover how national identity influenced the party's political praxis.

The results shed light on the importance of subjective national identification in Galician politics, as it represents a raw material that conditions nationalist practice. In fact, Galician national identity, a contingent result of the PPdeG's hegemonic position and governmental action over the years among other causes, is characterized by the overlapping of identities (Galician and Spanish) that affect the vast majority of the population, including BNG voters.

The party's electoral strength has increased under the leadership of Pontón with a social project far from essentialist perspectives that appeals to diverse social groups. This nationally-oriented strategy, as opposed to a more nationalist one centered on partisan references, is intended to redefine the territorial cleavage and reconfigure political competition based on the defense of Galicia's interests. This formula found limitations when the BNG was in office as many proposals and policies aimed at defending and promoting Galician identity generated a backlash of the centralist/pro-Spanish wing along with an opposition strategy carried out by the PPdeG that firmly denounced the imposition of nationalist identity. The consequences of this governmental praxis, where national recognition and ethnocultural issues took over an important part of the core of the BNG framing strategies, produced frame dealignment between the nationalist-engaged sectors and the rest of the population. The argument here presents the unsolved contradiction of the BNG due to the prevalence of a strong dual national identity. That is, the clash between the strategy they are constricted to follow once they reach government positions and the strategy that has proved to be the most effective to widen electoral support.

The findings also show differences between periods in terms of ideology. Quintana, as Vice President of the Xunta, promoted a pragmatic and moderate discourse, in which government proposals were fundamental and social antagonism was reduced to the minimum. In contrast, Pontón defends stronger government intervention in the economy, calling for the establishment of strategic public companies while strongly criticizing Spanish multinationals by accusing them of exploiting Galicia's economic dependency situation. This does not prevent the nationalist leader to have a different discourse with Galician companies, often linking national and economic interests. Both leaders agree on the basics: Galicia is a collective entity historically mistreated by the Spanish state, which prevents the country from developing its full potential. The solution lies not in independence, but in 'sovereignty' and/or 'self-determination' interpreted as the means to achieve greater decision-making capacity. In any case, the differences reveal that ideology is not enough to achieve nationalist frame alignment. Quintana tried to include different sectors in his ideological-economic project, but failed due to the greater importance of the ethnonational marker.



**Figure 8.** Evolution of the BNG's strategies regarding national identity.

The analysis of stylistic differences reveals that these are extremely important for Galician nationalism. We observe that variation occurs depending on the objectives pursued. Quintana had problems building a strong leadership in an adverse context, where he opted for developing a populist, personalistic, and presidential style. With this approach, he aimed to differentiate himself from other politicians and, at the same time, legitimize himself as the leader of the entire political space he represented. On the other hand, Pontón's leadership stands out as an integrative style, characterized by a non-essentialist Galicianism, the subtle embrace of dual identity, and the use of positive emotions, which has successfully steered the BNG away from the imagery of resistance. To sum up, the performativity within the new BNG can be divided into (1) party leadership, (2) representation of the Galician people, and (3) representation of the oppressive relationship with the parent state.

To conclude, the results highlight the failure (frame dealignment) of Galician nationalism to nationalize identity and, thereby, to produce a high degree of groupness. Unable of activating ethnonational conflict through the generation of antagonistic/exclusionary frames between Spain and Galicia, their most successful mobilization strategy (frame alignment) occurs when they adapt to the dual and non-conflictive national vision shared by the majority of Galicians and propose integrative styles (see Figure 8).

This research underscores the importance of examining the evolving dynamics of nationalist political parties' strategies over time, particularly in different institutional settings. Future research should, where possible, increase the number of cases analyzed to identify the specific mechanisms of nationalist mobilization and produce a comparative analysis across national contexts where dual identity sentiments prevail.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <http://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.77>.

**Data availability statement.** The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Harvard Dataverse at: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/EXJTEB>

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## Notes

- 1 For a detailed picture of the different organizational changes in the early years, see Barreiro Rivas (2003).
- 2 It contrasts with the attitude assumed by three nationalist members of parliament, who, in 1981, decided not to abide by the Spanish Constitution, even at the expense of losing their credentials as representatives.
- 3 For a complete development of the argument, see Máiz (2018, 156–164).

- 4 We use the categories of Caballero and Baigorri (2019).
- 5 The quotes appearing in section 5 are the authors' own translation. All of them are contained in the documents listed in 'Data analyzed', Appendix B.
- 6 For a review of the attempted reform process of the Galician Autonomy Statute (2006–2007), see Pérez (2021).
- 7 While Quintana defended *Galescolas* as a commitment to 'a national educational project', the opposition accused the government of drawing inspiration for its educational model from the *Ikastolas* (a network of charter schools in the Basque Country that use Basque as the language of instruction), attempting to link the BNG with radical Basque nationalism. One of the first measures of the PPdeG after regaining power in 2009 was to change the name of the nursery schools to *Galiña Azul* (Blue Hen), justifying it as a depoliticization of education in Galicia. For an analysis of the transition from *Galescolas* to *Galiña Azul*, see Román Masedo and Rodríguez Teijeiro (2013).
- 8 We have focused on the more contentious components of the nationalization process. Nonetheless, there were also other banal elements, such as the revival of the Galician national football team.
- 9 The musical piece, inspired by Don Omar's 'Pobre diabla', can be accessed in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTtGLRtctVU> (accessed June 20, 2023).
- 10 The roots of the defense of the territory as part of Galician nationalist ideology can be found already in one of the reference theorists, Alfonso Castelao, who wrote in his famous work *Sempre en Galiza* (2000 [1944], 190): 'a land with trees in the hills is worth more than a state with gold in the banks'.
- 11 Popular mobilizations in recent years against new wind farms contrast with barely any opposition during earlier decades (Simón, Copena, and Montero 2019). Galicians moved from passive to active attitudes, expressed through organized protests. Local associations, environmental groups, and the nationalist party join forces together under the movement 'Eólicos así non' (Wind farms yes, but not like this).
- 12 La Castellana refers to Paseo de la Castellana, which is one of the main avenues of Madrid.

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