Dalton’s Citizen Politics and the 15-M Movement in Spain

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**Introduction**

On May 15, 2011, about 20,000 people gathered in Puerta del Sol under the slogan of, “Real Democracy Now: we are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers” (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012, 43). Soon after, a movement bigger than Real Democracy Now, called the 15-M movement came into being (Silva 2011, 60). Eight million people, of varying socioeconomic status and age say they have participated in the 15-M movement one way or the other (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012). Although many issues have been addressed within the movement, its central demand is for a direct, deliberative democracy in which citizens debate issues and seek solutions in the absence of representatives (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012, 43). Dalton (2008) argues that there is a new type of politics that places more control over political activity in the hands of the citizenry (Dalton 2008, 55). Part of his theory includes the cognitive mobilization of citizens, the increase in postmaterialist values, and the rise of protest and contentious action as a valid means of participation. Cognitive mobilization has two parts to it: the ability of individuals to acquire political information and the ability of individuals to process political information (Dalton 2008, 21). Dalton’s citizen politics also alludes to an increase in postmaterialist values. Inglehart describes this development as a “shift from survival values to self-expressive values” (Inglehart 1997; Dalton 2008,82). Dalton (2008) also believes that citizen politics gives rise to political participation in more unconventional forms than historically recognized such as protest and contentious action. For this essay I plan to explore three aspects of citizen politics: (1) Cognitive mobilization, (2) Postmaterialism, and (3) an increase in protest and contentious action as a new unconventional form of participation. I will then establish whether or not these facets of Dalton’s theory of citizen politics apply to Spain and in particular, to the 15-M Movement.

**Cognitive Mobilization**

Dalton (2008) claims that individuals involved in the new type of citizen politics have a higher level of political sophistication (Dalton 2008, 13). Citizens are shifting from an unsophisticated public to a society that is both politically interested and politically educated. Dalton believes that advanced industrial democracies have allowed for social and political changes through the process of cognitive mobilization (Dalton 2008, 18). There are two parts to cognitive mobilization Dalton addresses in his theory.

The first characteristic of Dalton’s cognitive mobilization theory is the availability of political information to the public (Dalton 2008, 19). Dalton claims that the expansion of mass media allows people to have an array of information that was not available to them a generation ago (Dalton 2008, 19). The Internet creates a new form of political participation entirely. It makes connecting with others, gathering and sharing political information, and mobilizing individuals to influence the political process possible within seconds (Bimber 2003; Dalton 2008). This growth in the quantity and the quality of political information provided by the media should consequently improve the political awareness of individuals (Dalton 2008, 19). I chose to use the degree of Internet use in Spain as an indicator to the availability of information in Spain. I chose to use online and offline participation in Spain to measure whether or not an increase in Internet use leads to more political sophistication as Dalton suggests (Dalton 2008, 19). If there is a visible rise in Internet use and online/offline participation, it will confirm Dalton’s theory.

A second aspect to Dalton’s theory of cognitive mobilization is the public’s ability to process the political information received (Dalton 2008, 19). More citizens have the political resources and skills necessary to deal with the complexities of politics and to reach their own political decisions (Dalton 2008, 21). Dalton (2008) argues that a possible measurement of an increase in political skills is through the increase in the public’s level of education. Research shows that the rising levels of education increase the breadth of citizens’ political interests, even if they do not raise overall levels of political knowledge by the same amount (Samuel Popkin 1991, 36). In other words, even though levels of political sophistication would not triple just because education levels triple, it should still indicate an increase. In order to apply Dalton’s second theory of cognitive mobilization to Spain, I chose to examine the education levels in Spain. If levels of education are at a rise in Spain, it will confirm Dalton’s theory.

**Evidence of Cognitive Mobilization in Spain**

Dalton (2008) argues that the advancements in societies have allowed individuals to have access to large quantities of news resulting in more politically informed citizens. According to research done by Anduiza et al (2012) using the 2007 Spanish Survey, Spanish Internet users have higher levels of maintaining a blog or website than Internet users in the United States. This is relevant because items of higher difficulty such as maintaining a blog or website are assumed to indicate higher levels of Internet skills. Consequently, the higher a respondent’s level of Internet skills, the more likely the respondent is to have completed multiple difficult tasks online (Anduiza et al 2012). This means that Spanish Internet users are not only using the Internet more, but they are skilled at it. According to recent data[[1]](#footnote-1), out of 47,042,984 individuals in Spain, 31,606,233 are Internet users. That comes out to 67.2 percent of the population in Spain. This is an increase from the 62.2 percent of individuals in Spain who were Internet users in 2011. Furthermore, the proportion of Internet users in Spain who have posted a comment on an online forum, web, or blog as a form of political participation is twice as high than Internet users in the United States (Andruiza et al. 2012, 94). Spain is a third-wave democracy, which occurred after a long period of dictatorship. The transition process has had significant consequences for the political culture. Spaniards tend to have lower levels of political efficacy and trust in government institutions resulting in great disconnect between Spanish citizens and political authorities (Andruiza et al. 2012, 88). Due to the political climate within Spain, Spaniards use the Internet primarily as a means to communicate with other active citizens (Andruiza et al. 2012, 98). Research shows that there is a positive relationship between Internet usage and political activism (Adruiza et al. 2012, 130). There is a higher probability of taking part in a protest with higher Internet usage. This mobilizing process can be explained by the effects of searching for political information on the Internet and engaging in online interpersonal exchanges, or even surfing the Internet with no specific purpose (Adruiza et al. 2012, 134).

The availability of new forms of media, especially the Internet has a mobilizing affect on the 15-M Movement. The movement started through an Internet-based group, Real Democracy Now that organized the gathering of 20,000 people in Puerta del Sol (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012). By midnight, a little over 20 remained in the square and spent the night. Through the use of social medias such as Twitter and Facebook, another sleepover was publicized and around 200 people showed up. Two days later, the number quickly grew to a thousand and now around 8 million people have said they have participated in the 15-M Movement in some form (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012). The current wave of youth protests against the policies and practices of political and economic elites is facilitated by the rise of the Internet and social media (Sloam 2013) as demonstrated by the 15-M Movement. The 15-M Movement began as a small protest against the management and consequences of the economic crisis in Spain but quickly materialized (with the help of online social networks) into a movement of denunciation against the failures of the political system (Andruiza et al. 2012, 134-135).

The second part of Dalton’s theory of cognitive mobilization is the ability for citizens to comprehend the political information given to them. An increase in education levels should indicate an increase in the ability of the public to understand political material. According to research found by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[[2]](#footnote-2), Spain has one of the lowest attainment rates for secondary education among 25 to 34 year-olds, however it is important to focus on increasing levels of education overtime rather than how it compares to other European nations. Primary and lower secondary education is compulsory in Spain and have near-universal enrollment rates. There is also a 30 percent increase of education attainment in the current generation the last generation (Gonzalez 2012). This increase in the acquisition of education from generation to generation demonstrates an escalation in the level of education of the public. The literacy rate among citizens from ages 15 to 25 has exhibited a steady increase from the years 1980 to 1991 from a 99.1 percent literacy rate to a 99.6 literacy rate[[3]](#footnote-3). A prominent group of individuals involved with the 15-M Movement is of the educated, younger generation protesting the government’s role in the economic crisis. Spiegel International[[4]](#footnote-4) reported the unemployment of Spanish citizens under 25-years old to be at 45 percent. Younger generations of Spanish people do not only face problems in obtaining their first job, but they also have difficulties in maintaining it (Blazquez 2005, 192). Furthermore, young workers entering the Spanish labor market usually accept jobs for which the required level of education is much lower than the level they have attained (Blazquez 2005, 192). This group of educated individuals that take part in the 15-M Movement is evidence to a positive relationship between education and political sophistication.

There is evidence in Spain that validates Dalton’s theory of cognitive mobilization. The first part of cognitive mobilization is how the availability of information through new types of media leads to more politically knowledgeable citizens. The increase in Internet usage in Spain and the positive relationship between Internet usage and the probability of political participation shows evidence that the increased availability of information does in fact lead to an increase in political knowledge among individuals. The 15-M Movement confirms this theory because it was itself mobilized mainly through the use of the Internet. The use of Internet proved to contribute to a more participative society by informing and involving previously less active members of the public to the 15-M Movement. The second part of cognitive mobilization addresses the ability of citizens to then process the political information available to them. Dalton (2008) links education to a citizen’s level of political knowledge, interest and sophistication. There is evidence of rising levels of education in Spain and many members of the 15-M movement are themselves highly educated. A sophisticated and cognitively mobilized public places less dependence on voting as the primary means of influencing the government (Dalton 2008, 54). Spain’s political environment of distrust and dislike of the structure of government has created a shift in the types of political participation done in Spain. The 15-M Movement is sign of a change to other forms of political participation that resulted from an increase in cognitive mobilization within the public. Dalton’s theory of citizen politics, specifically the idea that citizens are becoming more politically sophisticated through cognitive mobilization can be applied to Spain.

**Postmaterialism**

 Dalton accounts the new occurrence of the style of citizen politics to a rising number of citizens changing their basic political values from materialist values to postmaterialist values (Dalton 2008, 79). Dalton introduces Ronald Inglehart’s (1997 and 1990) theory of value change within advanced industrial societies. Inglehart bases his theory on two principles: the scarcity hypothesis and the socialization hypothesis. The scarcity hypothesis is the idea that individuals place the most value on things that are in short supply. The socialization hypothesis is the idea that an individual’s values reflect the conditions they grew up in. Inglehart then uses the research of Abraham Maslow (1954) and applies it to political issues. Maslow established a hierarchy of individual needs. Maslow believed that people were first driven to satisfy their basic needs required for survival such as water or air. Inglehart (1997) linked this to basic political needs such as economic security, law and order, national defense, tap sustenance, and safety needs and labeled these goals as material values (Dalton 2008, 82). Once the basic needs were covered Maslow suggested individuals would move on in search of goals which are less survival and more self-expressive. Inglehart associates this to a shift of an individual’s political needs to things such as freedom, self-expression, and participation and labels these goals as postmaterial values (Dalton 2008, 82).

When applying Inglehart’s scarcity and socialization hypothesis to postmaterial and material values it reveals that the values and attitudes of citizens are modified by the living standards one grew up in. Postmaterialists are generally most common in nations that had relatively high living standards during the formative years (Dalton 2008, 87). Individuals that have not experienced physical hardship lack the motivation for material goals since these basic necessities will already be existent. Instead, individuals will move on to value more postmaterial goals. It makes sense then that there is a negative correlation between postmaterialism and age (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 176), especially in Spain, since the younger generations did not experience the political hardship the older generations have. Some other characteristics of an increase in postmaterial goals are an increase in education and political interest, and political participation by other means then voting (Dalton 2008, 91-92). I have already confirmed an increase in education and political interest within the public through the analysis of Dalton’s theory of cognitive mobilization. In order to establish whether or not Dalton’s theory that postmaterial goals increase is applicable to Spain I will look into the transition of Spain into a more advanced industrial society, the levels of political participation in unconventional forms, and the overall levels of postmaterial values in Spain. Evidence of Dalton’s theory will exist if research reveals increasing levels of postmaterial values and unconventional political participation in Spain.

**Evidence of Postmaterial Values in Spain**

Democracy in Spain is a recent development, however Spain is slowly transitioning into a more advanced industrial democracy. This transition is a characteristic of postmaterialism (Dalton 2008, 87). Spain was under a dictatorship for forty years and only transitioned into a democracy in the late seventies (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 169). This transition towards democracy initiated a change of political culture in Spain. Between 1980 and 2000, three different political parties governed in Spain. In the first democratic elections after the end of dictatorship, former members of the Franco regime were elected to lead the country (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 169). In the1982 parliamentary election the Socialists’ (the first left-wing government) won and ended the phase of transition from dictatorship. In 1996, the Popular Party went into government and gave the Spanish right a presence in the political arena. After Spain joined the European Community it became even more Europeanized and experienced economic growth and prosperity (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 170). There is a clear transition in political culture that occurred in Spain increasing living standards of its citizens. GDP is also an indicator of high living standards within a country. According to data from the CIA World Fact Book[[5]](#footnote-5), the Spanish economy spent 15 years with an above average GDP growth rate. In late 2007, the Spanish economy began to slow and eventually entered into a recession in the second quarter of 2008. GDP then reduced by 3.7 percent in 2009, reduced again by 0.3 percent in 2010, increased by 0.4 percent in 2011, and dropped by 1.4 percent in 2012. This data would seem to indicate that levels of postmaterialism is declining in Spain, however Dalton argues that the greatest value shift to postmaterialism from materialism happens during the transition period and that further improvements in living standards produce progressively smaller changes in values (Dalton 2008, 88). This means that Spain’s 15 years of an above average GDP growth rate following its transition into a democracy still is a strong indicator of a rise in postmaterial values in Spain.

Education is another indirect measure of an individual’s economic conditions during an individual’s formative years because access to higher levels of education often reflects the family’s social status (Abramson and Inglehart 1995; Dalton 2008, 90). The increase in cognitive mobilization as measured by an increase in education levels in Spain (mentioned previously in the essay) suggests that Spain is transitioning into a more advanced industrial democracy with citizens growing up in greater living conditions. Another test of the postmaterial theory involves the socialization hypothesis (Dalton 2008, 88). Generations of Spanish individuals that grew up after the transition of Spain from a dictatorship into a democracy in the late 1970’s are more likely to have postmaterial goals than of older generations who grew up under Spanish dictatorship. According to data of the age structure in Spain from the CIA World Fact Book[[6]](#footnote-6), 15.4 percent of the population is under 14 years of age, 9.7 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 and 24, 46.2 percent of the population is between the ages of 25 and 54, 11.3 percent of the population is between the ages of 55 and 64, and 17.5 percent of the population is 65 years or older. Figure 1 shows the age and sex structure of the Spanish population. Only 28.8 percent of the Spanish population makes up older generations of individuals who may have grown up during times of dictatorship in Spain. The majority of citizens in Spain grew up during the time of Spain’s transition into democracy, which would indicate increasing levels of postmaterial values in Spain.

 Figure 1: Age Structure of Spain

 Source: CIA World Fact Book, 2013

Research from Cantijoch and Martin (2009) looks further into levels of postmaterialism in Spain. Based on the data provided by ASEP in a monthly poll of ‘The Public Opinion of Spaniards’, trends of postmaterialism in Spain from 1988 to 2007 can be reviewed. Results show that that around 60 percent of the Spanish population has mostly mixed values of materialism and postmaterialism. 30 percent of the population expresses materialist values, and only ten percent of the population has postmaterialist values. The percentage of people belonging to the mixed value groups has grown fairly constantly over the last eighteen years with a total growth of almost 18 percentage points while the percentage of the population with materialist values has decreased (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 175). The percentage of the population with postmaterial values has remained virtually constant around ten percent throughout the years. Although the average of the index indicates that Spaniards have predominantly materialist values, in the last two decades there has been a fairly constant shift towards more postmaterialist values. This shift can be divided into two parts: one phase from 1988-1999 with a constant move towards less materialist values, while from 2000 until 2007 these values seem to have stabilized (Cantijoch and Martin, 175). Data shows indication of the slowing down of the process of value change in Spanish society. This still resembles Dalton’s theory in many ways. Dalton (2008) argues that most people attach positive worth to both material and postmaterial goals rather than one or the other (Dalton 2008, 86). He also claims that the greatest value shift to postmaterialism from materialism happens during the transition period, and that further improvements in living standards produce progressively smaller changes in values (Dalton 2008, 88).

 On the Maslovian Value Hierarchy, some postmaterial values include aesthetic values and intellectual values, which have to do with issues such as free speech, a clean environment, and a value in ideas (Dalton 2008, 83). Other postmaterial values include values of belonging and esteem, which have to do with issues such as a less impersonal society, more say on employment and the community as well as more say on the government (Dalton 2008, 83). The 15-M Movement has evolved into a movement involving people of all ages, social status, political party preference, and values. The manifesto of the 15-M Movement posted online[[7]](#footnote-7) has demands that reflect both postmaterial and material values. The central demand for the 15-M Movement is for a direct, deliberative democracy in which citizens debate issues and seek solutions in the absence of representatives (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012, 43). This demand for a more representative democracy reflects Dalton’s argument for postmaterial values. The manifesto also reads: “The priorities of any advanced society must be equality, progress, solidarity, freedom of culture, sustainability and development, welfare and people’s happiness”[[8]](#footnote-8). This is another indication of postmaterial values within the 15-M Movement. Deference to all types of authority is present in the 15-M Movement. This reflects the postmaterial credo that an individual earns authority, rather than has it bestowed by another individual of political position (Dalton 2008, 91). Other demands of the 15-M Movement range from demanding more culture and more bike friendly cities to cuts on military spending (Silva 2011). While there are clear indications of postmaterial goals in the 15-M Movement, there are also some materialist values in their demands as well. A stable economy and economic growth are both material values (Dalton 2008, 92) and a component in the concerns of individuals in the 15-M Movement. Postmaterialists advocate a greater use of initiative and referendum, the opening up of administrative processes, and the expansion of the legal rights of citizen groups (Dalton 2008, 94). There are mixed values within the 15-M Movement, however it is still overall a sign of postmaterialism in Spain.

**Protest and Contentious Action**

 Postmaterial values stimulate participation in citizen initiatives, protests, and other forms of direct action. The 2005-2008 World Values Survey found that postmaterialists are much more likely than materialists to participate in protests (Dalton 2008, 92). Postmaterialists are more interested in politics than are materialists and thus more likely to translate this into political action (Dalton 2008, 92). Dalton views public involvement of citizens to be an important part of a legitimate and quality democracy (Dalton 2008, 32). It is strange that while the number of voting opportunities has increased in most nations, the average turnout in elections has decreased (Dalton and Gray 2003). However, Dalton (2008) argues that participation is not necessarily dropping, but rather it is shifting from elections to new, non-electoral forms of action (Dalton 2008, 32). Historically protest and contentious action arose from feelings of frustration and deprivation. Concentrated among the socially disadvantaged, repressed minorities, or groups alienated from the established political order, protest was an outlet for those who lacked access through conventional channels and arguably maladjusted youth (Dalton 2008, 48; Mitscherlich and Francis 1970). Dalton (2008) argues that protest has broadened from the disadvantaged to include a wider spectrum of society. If Dalton’s theory of citizen politics is applicable to Spain, there should be an indication of a positive relationship between postmaterial values in Spain and unconventional forms of participation.

 Political participation rates in Spain are among the lowest in Europe, similarly to other southern countries. Nevertheless, protest levels have increased in the last 20 years, especially in actions such as demonstrations, strikes and signing petitions (Morales 2003). Even if the proportion of postmaterialism in Spain is among the lowest of Europe, the growth of these values could be one of the influences explaining the development towards higher levels of protest (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 179). To demonstrate the relationship between postmaterialism and participation I referred to survey data found by Cantijoch and Martin (2009). They created a survey to index five forms of participation. Each respondent was asked if they had participated in: signing a petition, deliberately boycotting a product, participating in a demonstration, or taking part in an unofficial strike and occupying a building. The number of affirmative answers puts the individual on an index from zero to five (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 180). The graph below[[9]](#footnote-9) shows the percentage of participants in one or more unconventional activities relative to their position on the postmaterialist index, for each year considered.



The percentage of participants in unconventional activities was higher for postmaterialists in every year. There is a drop of more than 13 points between 1981 and 1990 in the proportion of postmaterialists who participated, but does grow again in following years. Over all, the graph demonstrates evidence in Spain that postmaterialists were more participative in unconventional activities than materialists (Cantijoch and Martin 2009, 180). Due to growing voter cynicism within Spain, reports[[10]](#footnote-10) indicate a decrease in voter turnout at the 2011 Spanish elections. Voter turnout had dropped from 60.95 percent during the last 2008 elections, to 57.59 percent. For many individuals protest has become another political resource for mobilizing public opinion and influencing policymakers (Dalton 2008, 48). The 15-M Movement represents a kind of direct democracy, where people come together as individuals to protest against the current situation of their country. Citizens address topics from proper democratic procedures and mortgage reform (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2012). The movement mobilized the public without associating with any specific political affiliation, but rather the want for more say within the government. The increasing levels of protest and the positive relationship between postmaterial values and unconventional participation in Spain applies to Dalton’s theory that in advanced democracies there is a transition into more postmaterial values and that an increase in unconventional forms of participation such as protest and contentious action.

**Concluding Remarks**

 Although it is true that Spain, in comparison to other European countries, has low levels of participation, there is evidence that Dalton’s argument of citizen politics (in particular the increase in cognitive mobilization, postmaterial values, and an increase in protest and contentious action as a valid means of political participation) still applies to Spain. Increasing levels of education in Spain and an increase in Internet usage among citizens implies growing cognitive mobilization in Spain. Spain did transition into a more democratic government, which suggests increasing postmaterial values, especially for the younger generations who did not experience life in Spain under periods of dictatorship). Postmaterial values in Spain show signs of increase, but there are higher numbers of individuals who have mixed values of postmaterialism and materialism. Dalton’s theory that unconventional forms of participation have increased is applicable to Spain as well. The 15-M Movement embodies the Spanish political transition. Individuals involved have been mobilized through use of the Internet under the fundamental demand of a more representative government. While the movement resembles postmaterialism, the mixed values in Spain translate into the movement as well. Within the central demand of the movement, there are also facets of political goals that reflect material values as well. Citizens protest issues ranging from having a cleaner environment to being able to obtain employment during the economic crisis. The political culture in Spain has evolved into a culture having more correspondence to Dalton’s theory of citizen politics. Overall, the public’s growing political skills, resources, and cognitive mobilization have increased participation in activities that are citizen-initiated, less constrained, more policy-oriented, and directly linked to government (Dalton 2008).

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