

# Gendering Austerity: A Longitudinal Perspective

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Austerity measures are commonly adopted to address economic crises. Despite the particularly adverse effects that austerity have on women, these consequences are silenced to legitimise the austere project. This article examines variation in when and how the gendered effects of austerity are addressed in newspaper media, and by which actors. It draws on an original dataset of more than 9,000 newspaper articles published between 2010 and 2020 on the topic of austerity measures introduced by the Spanish government. I demonstrate that despite limited attention to gender perspectives in the news coverage of these austerity measures, there is significant variation in when, how and by whom the gendered effects of austerity are addressed when such considerations do appear in the media. The article proposes a theoretical framework for better understanding variation in how austerity becomes gendered in the public discourse.

**Key words:** Austerity, gender equality, Spain, political communication, news media

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## Introduction

European governments adopted austerity measures in response to the economic crisis that started in 2007, strongly encouraged by the EU. Austerity reduces the scope of the state and relies more on private solutions to address the citizens' needs, and it therefore has particularly adverse effects on women. Public budget cuts have gendered effects, as women shoulder a larger part of caring responsibilities and make up a greater share of the public employment, and the deregulation of the labour market harms those with more precarious working conditions and higher care burdens, such as women (Rubery, 2013; Verge, 2020). A significant body of literature has demonstrated that the austerity measures adopted by European governments following 2007 were gender blind, meaning that their gendered implications were neither evaluated nor acknowledged by policy makers (Rubery, 2013, 2015; Emejulu and Bassel, 2015, p. 88, 2018; Conley and Page, 2018, pp. 793–794; O'Dwyer, 2018). Gender has played a contradictory role in debates about austerity (O'Dwyer, 2018). Whereas proponents of austerity have stressed the importance of gender equality and female labour market participation, they have at the same time promoted measures that counteract female employment (O'Dwyer, 2018). Whether critiques of austerity measures include reflections on their gendered effects varies, and in some contexts there is evidence of such concerns receiving attention (Budgeon, 2019) whilst opponents of austerity have also been critiqued for not taking its gendered implications into account (O'Dwyer, 2018, p. 759).

How have the gendered effects of austerity been discussed in the public debate over time? What factors may explain variation in when and how a gender lens is applied in discussions about austerity measures, and by whom? In this article, I explore the role of three different factors that may help us understand the dynamics behind how gender equality features in discussions about austerity. I propose that the gendering of austerity in the public debate varies with important political events and expect to find that gender equality is discussed more during significant events such as election campaigns. I also expect to find variation in how gender equality is addressed by

different actors, such as politicians, trade union representatives, social movement participants and news media outlets, depending on their political ideology. Lastly, I predict that politicians' engagement with the gendered effects of austerity will vary depending on whether they are in opposition or government.

I examine these questions in the context of the media debate about the labour reforms introduced in Spain as part of the governments' austerity measures in response to the economic crisis. Spain was one of the European countries most severely hit by the economic crisis, and the Spanish government introduced a particularly severe labour reform in 2012 (Picot and Tassinari, 2017). I draw on an original dataset comprising over 9,000 newspaper articles published between 2010 and 2020 in two of Spain's largest newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*, that address these contentious labour reforms. The data set provides me with a comprehensive overview of the development of the debate about these austerity measures during an entire decade. It allows me to combine the mapping of when the reforms and their gendered effects are discussed in relation to significant political events in Spain during the past decade, such as elections, strikes and votes of no confidence against the Prime Minister, with a systematic collection of smaller subsets of articles for in-depth analysis to examine the debate in detail.

[This paragraph will outline my findings and describe my contribution to the literature, but as the analysis is incomplete I leave this empty for now]

The article starts by providing an overview over the literature on the role played by gender and gender equality during economic crisis and austerity and outline the three factors that I propose are central to explaining variation in the gendering of austerity. It moves on to give an overview over the Spanish political context during the past decade, and the labour reforms in question. It proceeds to describe the data and research design, and to present the results. This is followed by a discussion of the results, and a conclusion examining what can be learned from the

in-depth examination of the Spanish media debate about the labour reforms and their gendered effect.

### **The gendered effects of austerity**

Governments across Europe introduced austerity measures to address the economic crisis that begun in 2007, under significant pressure from the EU, the World Bank and IFM. Austerity has particularly adverse effects on women (Annesley and Scheele, 2011; Annesley, 2012). The measures included severe cuts in public spending and deregulation of the labour market, both which have particularly negative effects on women (Annesley and Scheele, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; McKay *et al.*, 2013; O'Dwyer, 2018; Budgeon, 2019) (Allen *et al.*, 2015, p. 907). Black women and women of colour were disproportionately affected by government cuts, and their experiences were silenced to privilege white working- and middle-class experiences (Emejulu and Bassel, 2015, p. 88, 2018). The gendered implications of the austerity policies were not reviewed for their gendered effects because 'any evaluation would point to their strong and negative gender equality implications' (Rubery, 2015, p. 734). Gender equality must often yield to other policy areas that are prioritised higher (Skjeie 2006; Teigen and Skjeie 2003), and during the economic crisis gender equality was neglected.

The austerity measures introduced in response to the financial crisis in 2007-08 were gender blind, and their severe gendered effects were not acknowledged by policy makers (Rubery, 2013, 2015; Stephenson, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018). Austerity was presented by policy-makers as a necessary condition to get through the economic crisis (Brah, Szeman and Gedalof, 2015; Budgeon, 2019), but feminist researchers have shown the logic of this assumption requires the obfuscation of austerity's disproportionate effects on women (O'Dwyer, 2018). Gender plays a contradictory role for austerity policy. EU's recommendations for improving the labour market encourages a higher female labour force participation to boost economic growth, whilst at the

same time, austerity measures create working conditions that are unfavourable to female employment (O'Dwyer, 2018). This contradiction is visible in European governments' austerity policies, such as David Cameron's coalition government that both encouraged mothers to work whilst at the same time cutting in public childcare services (Boyer *et al.*, 2017, p. 61).

Gender plays a central role in the construction of austerity as a legitimate solution to the financial crisis. O'Dwyer (2018) argues that for austerity measures promoted by the European semester, such as the deregulation of the labour market, to make sense they rely on female workers easily can move in and out of the labour market to create this adaptability for the businesses and on women taking on the increasing care burden resulting from the cuts in public services. This deregulation relies on the idea that labour market flexibility 'is supposed to temper the unemployment caused by austerity' (O'Dwyer, 2018, p. 754). Flexibility, in this context, primarily refers to employers' ability to change working conditions to reduce their costs, by making it cheaper to fire workers or increasing part-time employment. The increased flexibility required from workers makes it particularly difficult for employees with caring responsibilities to work, and makes female employment less likely given the public service cuts, women's lower salaries and higher care burden (O'Dwyer, 2018). O'Dwyer (2018, pp. 754–5) argues that 'the keyword of flexibility is then a rhetorical tool for obscuring this contradiction, and is therefore central to the coherence of austerity'.

News media played an important role in the legitimization of austerity (Budgeon, 2019; Savigny and Scullion, no date). Budgeon (2019, p. 1142) argues that the 'media reporting on austerity functioned to reduce complexity surrounding the economic crisis by delineating possible interpretations of social conditions which could then provide guidance on appropriate courses of action'. In her study of how gender and austerity is addressed in a set of 109 newspaper articles published in British media during David Cameron's coalition government (2010-2015), Budgeon finds that news stories criticised the government's austerity measures for having particularly

negative effects on women, and for not caring about these gendered effects. She argues that in British media, the ‘privileging of an equality discourse to interpret austerity signifies a high level of resonance of this ideal which may be attributable to its sufficient institutionalization prior to the financial crisis’ (2019, p. 1148). Although the news media articles contained a critical evaluation of the gendered impacts of austerity, it was primarily a moderate liberal feminism that appeared in the news media, whilst more radical feminist critiques of neoliberal capitalism were not given space in the debate (Budgeon, 2019, p. 1149).

Existing literature demonstrates how gender is employed in multiple ways and for multiple purposes in discussions about austerity measures. It provides valuable knowledge as to how austerity affects women disproportionately, that subduing this is important for austerity to appear a coherent and legitimate policy choice, that news media is important in the legitimization of austerity, and that critique against its gendered effects presented a moderate liberal feminist viewpoint. However, earlier works do not provide a systematic study of variation in how, when and whom address gender equality in the context of austerity measures. Which actors address the relationship between austerity and gender equality, and in which media outlets are these actors heard? Are politicians more likely to address the effect on austerity on gender equality when they are in opposition than in government?

I propose that there is interesting variation in how the gendered effects of austerity are discussed in the public debate and in this article, I focus on three dimensions of variation: political events, actors and government-opposition dynamics. From the literature on the role of gender in political communication and electoral campaigning, the literature on party political variation in conceptualisations of gender equality, and the literature on government-opposition dynamics in political agenda setting, we know that there is important variation in how different actors engage with gender equality and when they chose to do so. I draw on these three bodies of literature to

identify three factors that I expect help us understand who addresses the gendered implications of the labour reforms, at what times, and in what way.

Political conjuncture matters to how likely gender equality is to be addressed, and as outlined above, times of crisis are usually times when concerns for gender equality are moved far down on the list of priorities. However, over the last decades gender equality policy has become an important electoral issue for many political parties, in an attempt to compete for women's votes (Campbell and Childs, 2015a; León *et al.*, 2019). Political parties are more prone to attempt to attract female votes by adopting gender equality policies, such as gender quotas, when they are facing electoral uncertainty (Weeks 2018, cited in Weeks *et al.* 2020: 8). We could therefore expect to see political parties and news media pay attention to gender equality during electoral campaigns, especially if there is a high level of electoral instability, which has been a prominent feature of Spanish politics during the last decade. I expect to see that the gendered effects of the austere labour reforms are paid more attention in the media and by politicians during election campaigns.

Political ideology used to provide an indication of *whether* political parties address gender equality policies but is increasingly understood as a predictor of *how* parties address gender equality (O'Brien, 2018; Weeks *et al.*, 2021). Left-wing political parties in Europe have had a stronger track record than conservative parties when it comes to encouraging women's political participation and giving importance to gender equality in their policy making (Rincker and Ortals, 2009; Ruiz Jiménez, 2009; Htun and Weldon, 2018; O'Brien, 2018). Conservative parties have however become increasingly concerned with gender equality, and have for example worked to increase the number of women legislators, often in response to electoral competition and in an attempt to modernise the party (Ruiz Jiménez, 2009; Campbell and Childs, 2015b; Celis and Childs, 2018b, 2018a; O'Brien, 2018; Schreiber, 2018).

Left and right parties tend to represent women differently, and whereas left parties often have incorporated many of the demands of the women's movements, conservatives focus on

women's traditional gender roles, such as motherhood (O'Brien, 2018; Schreiber, 2018). Whereas feminists and leftists share a concern with structural inequalities and power differentials between classes and genders, conservatives and liberals tend to focus on individual agency and limiting state action (Campbell and Childs, 2015b, p. 156; Evans, 2015). Htun and Weldon (Htun and Weldon, 2010, 2018) argue that party political ideology is most likely to affect gender equality policy if it relates to class-based questions of redistribution, such as parental leave and funding for abortion, and to be less determinant for the development of gender status policies, such as legislation on violence against women. The austerity labour reforms are an example of class-based policies, given that they are most likely to affect workers who cannot afford to pay for care services and who have precarious employment, and we should therefore expect political ideology to affect which political actors' address the gendered effects of the reforms and how they choose to do so. The proximity of left parties to the women's movement and their greater willingness to incorporate their demands is also likely to make party ideology play an important role in differentiating the political parties' responses to the reforms.

From the literature on political agenda setting, we know that parties attempt to affect the political agenda differently depending on whether they are in opposition or in government (Thesen, 2013; Vliegenthart *et al.*, 2016). Thesen (2013, pp. 381–382) finds that in the Danish context, the opposition is more likely to respond to bad news that the governing parties can be held responsible for, whilst the government is more likely to respond to good news that can be used to demonstrate policy success, or if forced to by news that highlight the government's responsibility. He argues that policy responsibility together with whether the news coverage captures positive or negative developments, is key to determine when and how parties respond to news. Hence, he concludes that 'parties use news of social problems in their competition with each other and that differences in policy responsibility direct opposition and government attention to different news tones in political communication' (Thesen, 2013, p. 381). In electoral campaigns, oppositional parties are more likely to have a negative tone in their electoral campaign than the



parties currently in office (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). Given the polemic nature of the labour reforms, it is expected that opposition parties are more eager to address the reforms and critique them, whilst the governing party is expected to not address the reforms.

### **A volatile decade in Spanish politics**

Spain was severely affected by the economic crises that started in 2007, and experienced significant changes to its political party system and society during the past decade. It saw new political parties enter the national stage, such as popular leftist Unidas Podemos and centre-right Ciudadanos. It went from a from biparty to multiparty system at the national level. It experienced massive social mobilisation by the 15-M movement and the feminist movement, and significant electoral instability with five national elections in ten years, as well as two votes of confidence against the Prime Minister, one of them which led to a change of government. This section provides a brief overview over events in Spain during the past decade that are important to make sense of the role played by gender and gender equality in the media debate about austerity.

### **Austerity and the labour reforms**

Spain adopted drastic measures to address the economic crisis, strongly encouraged by the EU, World Bank and IMF to pursue austerity measures. Amongst these measures were significant reforms of the Workers' Statute, the most important source of labour law in Spain. The most significant and contentious labour reform was introduced in 2012 under the conservative government of Mariano Rajoy. The social democratic government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero did however also introduce a labour reform in 2010, and more minor changes to the Worker's Statute were also introduced in 2013.

The most central critique against the labour reforms introduced after the financial crisis, particularly the 2012 reform, is that they contribute to shifting the power balance between

employers and employees to benefit the employer further. The reforms have been critiqued for representing a neoliberal commodification of the worker, and for making Spanish labour law less able to protect workers' rights (Guamán Hernández and Illueca Ballester, 2012; Preciado Domènech, 2012; Amorós, 2013; Pérez Infante, 2015, p. 280; Martínez Veiga, 2016; Cos Egea, 2018, p. 66). The reforms have even been accused by two regional courts of being unconstitutional and incompatible with the European Social Charter (Furió Blasco and Alonso Pérez, 2015, pp. 15–18).<sup>2</sup>

The literature on the Spanish labour reforms since 2010 particularly critiques two groups of issues.<sup>3</sup> The first is the increased flexibility measures in hiring and firing practises, which is not new in Spain, but which has been intensified with the 2012 reform. The second, is the changes made to the practice of collective bargaining. The 2012 reform introduces a permanent contract with a one-year trial period for companies with less than fifty employees, permits successive fixed term contracts with the same employer and working extra hours despite having a part-time contract, and reduces the costs and requirements for legitimate firing (Pérez Infante, 2015, pp. 253–4). The 2012 reform has also altered the conditions for collective bargaining and have decentralised it by shifting the site of employer-employee conflicts to the workplace rather than sector-wide bargaining (Pérez Infante, 2015, p. 255). Centring negotiations in the workplace is particularly problematic in smaller businesses, as workers' representation might not be very strong, and Spain has a high number of small and medium businesses (Amorós, 2012, p. 29). These measures are particularly problematic for the more vulnerable sectors of workers, including women, young people, and immigrants. In this paper, I am concerned with the gendered effects of the reform. It has been predicted that particularly the increased flexibility, to the advantage of employers and disadvantage to women who often bear the brunt of caring responsibilities, and

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<sup>2</sup> It is the regional courts in Madrid and Toledo that have presented these claims, the Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Madrid and Juzgado de lo Social numero 1 de Toledo.

<sup>3</sup> See overview of legal scholars' critique against the reforms in Perez Infante (2015, pp. 252-3)

changes to employment in small business, which often have a rate of female employees, that will threaten female employment (Ballester-Pastor, 2012).

### **Electoral instability and election campaigns**

Spain was a two-party system at the national level from the 1980s to 2015, in which the two largest parties, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) and the conservative Popular Party (PP), often won up to 80% of the votes and alternated in central government (Falcó-Gimeno and Verge, 2013, pp. 389–390; Orriols and Cordero, 2016, p. 476; Simón, 2016, p. 498, 2020, p. 28). Two relatively new parties, Unidas Podemos (UP – United We Can) and Ciudadanos (Cs – Citizens) won 34% of the vote share the first time they ran in a national election in 2015, and this rapid change in the Spanish party system contributed to the failure to create a new government and the call for new elections six months later, an unprecedented event in Spain (Orriols and Cordero, 2016, p. 476; Simón, 2016, pp. 493, 498). Both PSOE and PP performed poorly in the 2015 and 2016 elections, but after a year of political deadlock the conservative PP's minority government was approved with the support of Cs and a small regional party, and thanks to the abstention in the investiture vote by the majority of PSOE's members of parliament (Simón, 2016, p. 512).<sup>4</sup>

Conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy only stayed in power until June 2018, when he had to leave office following a vote of no confidence proposed by PSOE, resulting in its leader Pedro Sánchez taking over as Prime Minister.<sup>5</sup> The vote of no confidence followed from new developments in an already well-known corruption case whereby the Spanish National Court condemned the governing party PP for having kept secret accounts since the late 1980s, something Prime Minister Rajoy had denied (Simón, 2020, p. 5). PSOE formed a minority government without parliamentary majority, forcing it to pass their measures by decree (Simón, 2020, p. 8).

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<sup>4</sup> This was unprecedented in modern Spanish democracy, as the Prime Minister had never before been approved due to the abstention of the main opposition party (Simón, 2020, p. 3).

<sup>5</sup> Unidas Podemos presented an unsuccessful vote of no confidence in April 2017, which PSOE abstained from (Simón, 2020, p. 5).

New elections were held a year later, in May 2019. PSOE won, but failed to form government due to the lack of necessary support from UP who were unhappy with the deal offered them by the socialists. Elections were called again in November that same year, and this time PSOE managed to form a coalition government with UP. At the national level, Spain has not had a coalition government since the 1930s, before the civil war.

[To be completed: This section will end with two paragraphs on Spanish election campaigns and the political parallelism in Spanish news media, whereby *El Mundo* closely align with PP position and *El País* with PSOE's position (Valera-Ordaz, 2015, p. 118)].

### **Political ideology and gender equality policies**

In Spain, the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) has been the primary driver of gender equality policies, enacting several significant policies during their 1982-96 and 2004-11 governments (Valiente, 2013). The conservative Popular Party (PP) has at times opposed attempts to improve gender equality, for example the introduction of gender quotas in politics, and at other times maintained PSOE's initiatives, but PP has rarely been a catalyst for change in this area (Valiente, 2013, p. 181; Verge and Lombardo, 2015). Recent literature on party politics and gender equality in Spain, has however emphasised how the conservative party has converged towards social democratic family policies, emphasising the importance of female employment (León *et al.*, 2019). In an investigation of gender discourses in Spanish policy documents and parliamentary debates addressing reconciliation, care policies and domestic work between 1995 and 2010, Peterson (2011, chap. 5) finds that both conservative PP and social democratic PSOE consider dual-earner families the ideal, a shift from the breadwinner model that traditionally dominated in Spain. Female employment is promoted as important to economic growth, gender equality, and as evidence of Spain's modernisation. Both conservative and socialist representatives were primarily concerned with the labour market participation and work-life reconciliation of white, middle-class, heterosexual and Spanish-born women (Peterson, 2007, 2011; Kvist and Peterson, 2010).

It seems Spanish social democratic and conservative politicians' discourses have increasingly converged in some policy areas, such as women's political representation, discourse on caring and family policies, and the importance of female employment, whilst they remain opposed to each other on some matters such as abortion (Ruiz Jiménez, 2009, p. 258; Peterson, 2011; Paleo and Alonso, 2015; León *et al.*, 2019). Ruiz Jimenez (2009) and Leon et al. (2019) compare Spain with Portugal and Italy and argue that Spain has witnessed a much harder competition for the female vote than their neighbours, which has been an important factor in pushing the conservative Popular Party to engage with women's representation and "women's issues" to a much larger extent. In terms of the parties' conceptualisation of gender equality, Lombardo and Meier (2009, p. 371) argue that conservative PP has a more liberal understanding of equality whereby they consider women and men to have equal opportunities to gain political power, meaning that they do not identify gender inequality as a problem, exemplified by their resistance towards gender quotas. Peterson (2007, 2011) however considers that left parties do not have a significantly more detailed understanding of structures of gender inequality than the conservative party, arguing that both parties fail to address the experience of women who do not belong to the hegemonic middle-class, Spanish-born population.

[To be completed: This section will also include a paragraph about the mobilisation of the feminist movement and the social movement 15-M in Spain during the last decade]

### **Empirical expectations**

Following the discussion of the existing literature, what kind of associations should we expect to find between when the gendered effects of the labour reforms are discussed in news media, by whom and in what way?

It is unlikely that reflections about the gendered effects of the labour reforms will feature prominently in the media debate about these reforms for two reasons: 1) Gender equality has had

to yield to other policy issues considered of more pressing importance during the economic crisis, and 2) policy makers have not been eager to bring to the fore any potential gendered effects of the austerity measures they have proposed. However, evidence from the mediatic debate about austerity measures in the UK also suggests that the gendered effects of austerity may be used to fuel critiques against austerity (Budgeon, 2019). I predict that attention to gender and gender equality in the discussion about the reforms may grow over time and become more prominent as the economic crisis becomes less acute. I expect to find that attention to the gendered effects of the reforms will receive more attention in the media and by politicians during significant political events such as elections, votes of no confidence and general strikes.

Different actors are also likely to dedicate different degrees of attention to discuss the gendered aspects of the reforms. The austerity labour reforms are an example of class-based policies, given that they are most likely to affect workers who cannot afford to pay for care services and who have precarious employment, and we should therefore expect political ideology to affect which political actors' address the gendered effects of the reforms and how they choose to do so. Politicians from leftist parties are more likely to address the negative implications that the labour reforms may have on women and female employment. The proximity of left parties to the women's movement and labour unions and their greater willingness to incorporate their demands is also likely to make party ideology play an important role in differentiating the political parties' responses to the reforms. Given the political parallelism in Spain, I also expect to see variation between how the two newspapers address the labour reforms and their gendered effects, whereby I expect *El País* to feature more critical coverage with a stronger gender equality perspective.

Government and opposition dynamics are also likely to have an effect and given the polemic nature of the labour reforms we should expect that opposition parties are more likely to address the labour reforms than the party in government. Both Zapatero's social democratic government and Rajoy's conservative government introduced labour reforms, and although we

should expect parties on the left to be more prone to address the gendered effects of the reforms, this is primarily likely to happen when they are not the incumbents. If conservative politicians address the gendered effects of the reforms, it is most likely to happen in response to critique from the opposition.

## **Data and research design**

Newspaper media is a central source of communication between politicians and their population. It is ‘a crucial site where politics is enacted’ (Savigny and Yates, 2019 intro: 319), and it is an important stage for politicians to reach their voters. Political discourse in the news media is a co-production, and elite actors, journalists and editors together engage in ‘frame building’ (Cheng *et al.*, 2011, p. 5), which informs how people perceive and feel about a particular issue (Entman, 2007, p. 164).<sup>6</sup> Spanish news media can therefore be expected to play an important role in shaping how the labour reforms are perceived, and whether their gendered effects are taken into consideration. In this article, I focus on the most important actors that frequently appear in the newspaper articles about the labour reforms, mainly politicians and union representatives. In this analysis, I treat the newspapers as a stage where these actors can communicate with their voters and acknowledge that different newspapers are likely to portray the actors in a different light. However, I am not primarily concerned with the role played by the newspapers’ journalists, editors and owners.

I have chosen to examine two of Spain’s most read newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*. Spanish news media is characterised by a high level of political parallelism, and the former newspaper has traditionally had a centre-left editorial line whilst the latter has a centre-right one

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<sup>6</sup> Although other media such as television and social media are important sources of news consumption in Spain, newspapers remain a source of political information for about half of the population (Humanes, 2014, p. 787).

(Valera-Ordaz, 2015, p. 118). *El País* has become less associated with the left during the latter years, but I chose to stick with these two newspapers given their substantial readership.

### *Constructing the corpora*

I constructed two corpora, one for each newspaper, by web scraping relevant articles. This allows for the structured collection of large amounts of data, with the aim of ensuring that the corpora would be an as complete representation as possible of the writing on the 2010 and 2012 labour reforms in *El País* and *El Mundo*. I wanted to capture all relevant articles, and therefore used three general search terms: ‘reforma laboral,’ ‘reformas laborales,’ and ‘ley reforma laboral’. I began by searching for the term ‘reforma laboral’ in the newspaper search engines and found that *El País* used these three tags to identify articles addressing the labour reforms. To ensure homogeneity across the newspapers, I used the same key terms to search for articles in *El Mundo*, which had an inconsistent use of tags that made it impossible to identify relevant tags for the topic of the labour reforms. To clean the data and make the corpora as relevant as possible, I removed articles that did not fall within my chosen time frame (2010 to 2020) and any article that did not mention my chosen search terms.<sup>7</sup> I then removed a small number of duplicates and articles that were missing the body of the text. Lastly, I identified all articles that included mentions of another country and not Spain, made a list of the titles of these articles and removed those that did not address the Spanish labour reforms. This process is described in detail in Appendix A.

### **Table 1. Overview over the two corpora**

[To be completed]

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<sup>7</sup> The search engines of the newspapers are somewhat imprecise, so I therefore wanted to make sure by double checking that the articles contained my search terms.



### *Selecting articles for in-depth analysis*

After the data cleaning, I was left with 5117 articles from *El País* and 4301 from *El Mundo*. Given the substantial size of my corpora, I had to narrow down the number of newspaper articles that I would read in-depth. The aim of the selection strategy was to get an overall understanding of what articles about the Spanish labour reform looked like during periods in which I expect the reforms to be prominent in the media debate, which themes and actors were predominant, and to get a detailed understanding of how articles about the labour reforms address women and gender equality. I selected the subsets of articles that would be submitted to qualitative analysis through a three-staged process in which I: 1) decided on a set of time periods to pull the articles from, 2) randomly selected a small number of articles published during these time periods and removed any articles that did not substantially address the labour reforms, and 3) identified all articles that mentioned one or more terms that address gender equality, women or female workers (see Table 1) and removed any articles that did not substantially address the labour reforms or gender equality or women's working conditions. I chose the time periods based on my interest in how the labour reforms were discussed during periods of heightened political tension (general strikes, elections and votes of no confidence), and when there were spikes in the number of published articles per month that addressed the labour reforms. The events I had chosen based on my reading of earlier literature significantly overlapped with the periods during which the newspapers published a high number of articles about the reforms.

**Table 2. Time periods identified for sampling of articles for qualitative analysis**

<b>Time period</b>	<b>Events of interest during this period</b>
1 March 2010 – 31 December 2010	General strike in September 2010
1 January 2012 – 1 August 2014	General strikes March and November 2012
1 September 2015 – 1 June 2016	General elections in December 2015 and June 2016
1 May 2017 – 1 July 2017	Vote of no confidence in June 2017
1 May 2018 – 1 July 2018	Vote of no confidence in June 2018
1 January 2019 – 1 April 2020	General elections in April and November 2019

To sample a manageable number of articles for in-depth reading, I randomly selected 1% of these articles and was left with 76 articles. I also wanted to create a subsample of articles that explicitly mention both the labour reforms and women and gender equality. I chose a broad set of terms to capture articles that may discuss the reforms in the context of gender equality and women's working conditions: *igualdad*, *mujer*, *mujeres*, *género*, *trabajadora/s*, *empleada/s*, *femenino*, *femenina*. The three first words were the most common and captured most of the articles, but I included all the terms to get a larger subset given that I would manually inspect the articles before reading them in-depth. To limit the number of articles submitted to in-depth reading, I randomly selected 10% of these articles. I was left with 90 articles that I manually inspected from *El País* and 66 from *El Mundo*.

### *Text analysis*

I have conducted an in-depth reading of the newspaper articles, through which I examined the gender perspectives within the discourses on these reforms: which actors talk about gender, and how do they talk about it? I relied on NVivo to carry out the analysis and paid particular attention to expressions of support for or criticism against the reforms from a gender perspective. I focused on actors that feature prominently in the media discourse about the reforms, such as politicians

on the left and right side of the political spectrum, as well as trade union representatives and social movement participants.

## Results

The structured collection of all articles published by *El Mundo* and *El País* that mention labour reforms between 2010 and 2020, allows us to get an overview over when this topic received attention in the press and how this has changed over time. Figure 1 provides us with two important pieces of information. First, we can observe that the number of articles published peaks when conservative Prime Minister Rajoy announces his labour reform early 2012, a spike that also overlaps with the general strike called by the unions in opposition to this reform the same month. In alignment with the literature, this suggests that the 2012 reform was subject to more debate than the 2010 reform. Second, we observe a significant overlap between spikes in publication and the events that I have theoretically identified as interesting, particularly the general elections in 2015 and 2016.<sup>8</sup> The newspapers published a similar number of articles mentioning the labour reforms during this timeframe, 5117 by *El País* and 4301 by *El Mundo*. It should be noted that the graph includes any article mentioning the labour reform terms outlined in the Methods section.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Another observation that is worth keeping in mind, but which will not be the focus of the analysis in this paper, is the significant discrepancy between *El País* and *El Mundo* when it comes to publishing articles addressing the labour reform introduced by social-democratic Prime Minister Zapatero in 2010. Whilst *El Mundo* publishes a significant number of articles addressing labour reforms in 2010, *El País* publishes a very low number of articles addressing labour reforms that year.

<sup>9</sup> These were the three terms: 'reforma laboral,' 'reformas laborales,' and 'ley reforma laboral'.

**Figure 1. Number of articles published per quarter**

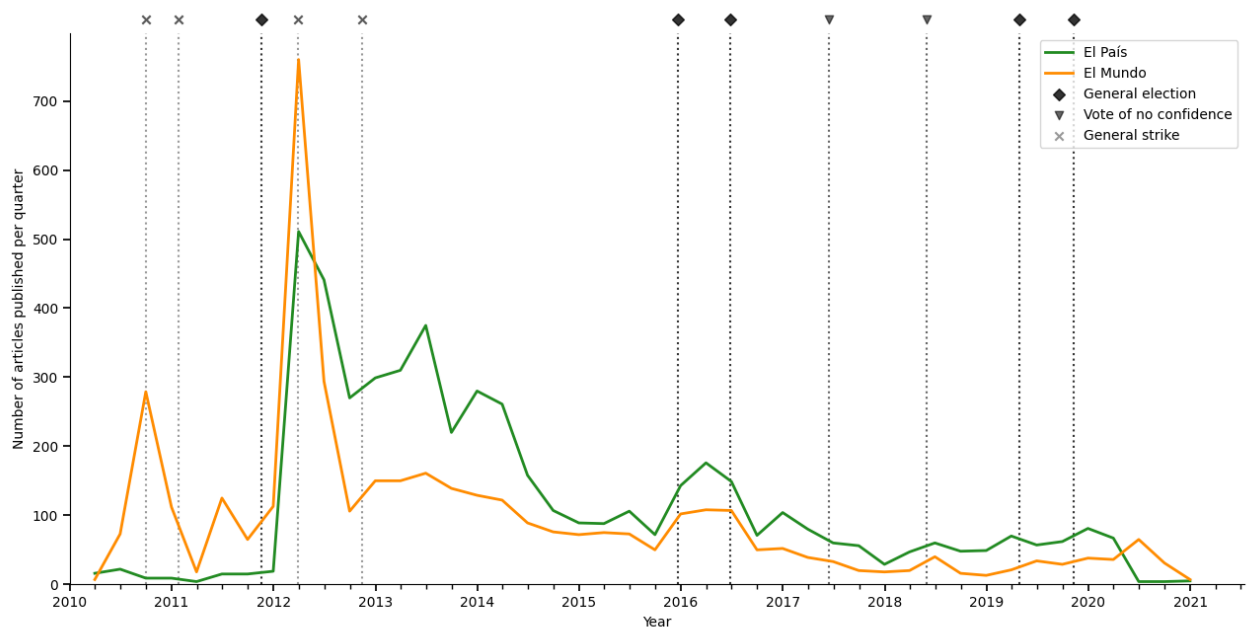


Figure 1. Publication of articles mentioning the labour reforms in *El País* and *El Mundo* from 2010 to 2020, as expressed per quarter.

I am also interested in examining the publication pattern of articles from the corpora that mention the gender equality terms outlined in the Methods section.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2 draws on a subset of the two newspaper article corpora and illustrates the ratio of articles published that mention one or more of the labour reform terms, together with one or more of the gender equality terms.

<sup>10</sup> These were the terms: igualdad, mujer, mujeres, género, trabajadora/s, empleada/s, femenino, femenina

**Figure 2. Ratio of articles mentioning a gender equality term published per quarter**

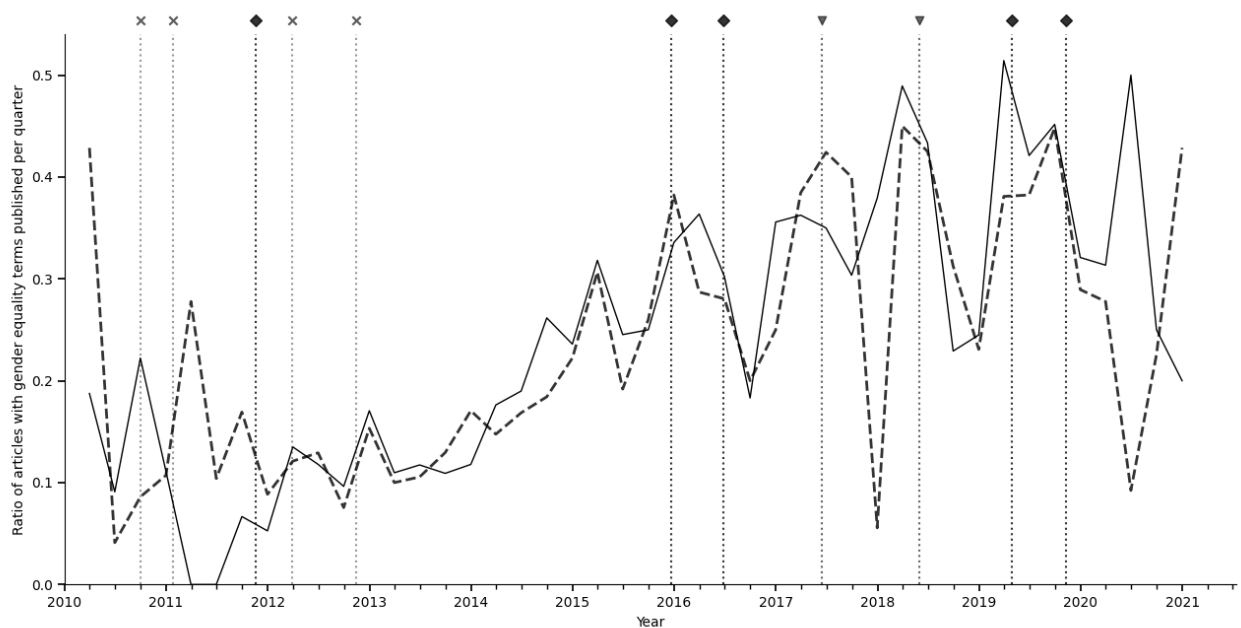


Figure 2. Ratio of articles published that mention one or more of the labour reform terms, together with one or more of the gender equality terms. The dotted line represents *El Mundo* and the full line represents *El País*. The events are represented by the same symbols as in Figure 1.

The first observation to note in Figure 2 is the steady increase in the ratio of articles that mention a labour reform and gender equality term from 2015 onwards. The second interesting observation is the close overlap from 2015 onwards between spikes in the ratio of articles mentioning gender terms and the four general elections held in 2015, 2016, and 2019, as well as the votes of no confidence against Prime Minister Rajoy in 2017 and 2018. It is important to note that these newspaper articles may not discuss the gendered effects of the labour reforms, as I defined the subset of gender equality articles broadly. The graph does however provide us with an indication of time periods during which we should expect to find that a gender perspective is more present amongst the newspaper articles that mention the labour reforms. It suggests that the salience of articles mentioning the reforms and terms such as equality, gender and women increase around political moments of tension, such as elections and votes of no confidence.

### **Who talks about the gender perspective, and how?**

Next, I am interested in examining how different actors address the gendered effects of the reforms. The actors that most prominently feature in the newspaper stories are politicians and union representatives. Politicians from centre-left and left parties and union representatives critique the labour reform from 2012 harshly and argue that it damages women's labour market opportunities. In November 2012, Yolanda Díaz is cited in *El País*, critiquing the politics of the conservative government: 'We are experiencing economic and work-related violence'. She provides the labour reform as an example of this and refers to its effects on work-life balance. The then-deputy spokesperson for the regional leftist party Alternativa Galega de Esquerda, and since January 2020 Minister of Labour, argues that PP's politics 'mistreat women' (*El País*, 21.11.2012). A year later, during a debate in the Spanish parliament about how to change the late working hours in Spain to allow for better work-life balance, PSOE's spokesperson for equality Carmen Montón is cited to have said that such a change will have limited effect given that the government has adopted measures such as the labour reform that are 'harmful to work-life balance', and has cut in public spending (*El País*, 26.09.2013). In an article published by *El Mundo* on the day before the International Women's Day in 2012, the social democratic party is reported to critique the 'very damaging' effects that the labour reform will have on women, both because of the general content of the reform and because it limits workers' flexibility when it comes to choosing how they want to organise their use of leave policies to care for children (*El Mundo*, 07.03.2012).

A newspaper article named 'PSOE fears "lethal" effect of labour reform on female workers' provides one of the more in-depth accounts of the social democratic party's opposition to the gendered effects of the labour reform adopted by Mariano Rajoy. The article recounts a meeting between PSOE's deputy secretary general Elena Valenciano, the secretary for equality Purificación Causapié, and representatives from more than thirty women's organisations (*El País*, 23.02.2012). Valenciano is quoted critiquing the new conservative government for using the economic crisis as an alibi for the labour reform, and stating that 'It is a setback of more than 30

years, and Spanish women are not willing to go back 30 years'. She argues that the reform will have a 'lethal' effect on women given that they have the lowest salaries, the most precarious employment and are 'the easiest to dismiss'. It is particularly the greater prerogative given to employers to modify employees' working hours and use of leave policies, together with the weakening of the collective bargaining, by prioritising negotiation at the workplace, that are highlighted as having damaging effects on women workers and gender equality in the labour market.

Trade union representatives are another important set of actors in the newspaper articles, and they critique both the 2012 reform introduced by Rajoy and the 2010 reform introduced by Zapatero for having negative effects on female workers (El País, 05.09.2019, 08.02.2016, 07.03.2014). An article covering the upcoming celebration of the International Women's Day in the Basque Country in 2014, features trade union representative Emilia Málaga who argues that the labour reforms have deregulated working conditions and working hours to such an extent that 'many women are forced to give up their jobs and take care of children and dependents' (El País, 07.03.2014). One of the few newspaper articles that includes an intersectional gender perspective also features a trade union representative. The secretary of Equality and Social Politics at the trade union UGT in Cataluña draws attention to immigrant women's labour market situation in an article published in *El País* in 2010, where she warns that 'the labour reform represents a step backwards in terms of acquired rights' that will worsen immigrant women's already precarious work situation, characterised by higher rates of temporal work, unemployment and low-pay feminized sectors (El País, 05.08.2010).

Politicians from conservative and centre-right parties very rarely feature addressing the gendered effects of the labour reforms in the newspaper articles. When they do discuss the 2012 reform with attention to gender equality and female work, it is presented as having a positive effect on employment. In an interview with the conservative Minister of Employment and Social Security, Fátima Báñez, published by *El Mundo*, the Minister is presented as an assertive

stateswoman with attention to women's situation: 'She was given one of the heaviest portfolios of this term of office that is now coming to an end, that of Employment and Social Security, with many millions of unemployed in Spain. She got down to work, signed a labour reform and now speaks, proudly, of other figures [...] Women have been in her sights, and she is happy to leave them a legacy' (El Mundo, 28.11.2015).

The political actors' evaluation of the labour reforms is modulated by government-opposition dynamics. Between 2010 and 2020, PSOE was in government until 2011, then PP governed from 2011 to 2018, in 2018-2019 PSOE entered government again, and from 2020 onwards a coalition government between PSOE and Podemos has held power in Spain. A striking example of how the politicians modify their discourse depending on government-opposition dynamics, is that both conservative and social-democratic politicians are cited as having called the labour reform of the opposing party 'the law of dismissal' (El Mundo, 09.03.2012; El Mundo, 25.08.2010). The leader of PSOE in 2012, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, refers to Rajoy's reform as 'the law of dismissal' ahead of the large general strike organised against the reform (El Mundo, 09.03.2012). Only two years earlier, two conservative senators are quoted referring to Zapatero's reform as 'the reform of dismissal' (El Mundo, 25.08.2010). Both Prime Ministers Zapatero and Rajoy also defend their respective labour reforms as necessary.

[To be continued: Will add another two paragraphs that situate these discussions about the gendered effects of the reforms within the larger debate about the reforms, to illustrate that overall these gender perspectives were not particularly prominent in the news coverage]

## **Discussion**

[Remains to be completed]



## **Conclusion**

[Remains to be completed]

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## Appendix A: Creating the corpora

### Collecting the newspaper articles

I used web scraping to collect the newspaper articles, which allows for the structured collection of large amounts of data in a robust and efficient manner. It ensures that the corpora are as complete representations as possible of the newspaper articles written between 2010 and 2020 that address the labour reforms. The web scraping was conducted in two stages. First, I conducted key word searches in the search engines of *El País* and *El Mundo*, and collected the individual URLs of the newspaper articles that appeared in the searches. Then, I used these URLs to collect the following information from each individual newspaper articles: date of publication, author, title, lead paragraph, and the body of the text.

#### *Collecting article URLs*

I wanted to capture any newspaper article that mentions Spanish labour reforms from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2020, independently of how thoroughly the articles address the topic, and make the corpora as relevant as possible through data cleaning at a later stage. To select my search terms, I started out by searching for the term ‘reforma laboral’ in the newspaper search engines. I noticed that *El País* organise their articles with topic tags, and the articles in my search often appeared with the two tags ‘labour reform law’ and ‘labour reforms,’ and sometimes with the tag ‘ley reforma laboral’.<sup>11</sup> Many articles were tagged with several tags, but the former tag seemed to include most articles. *El Mundo* occasionally provide topic tags on their articles, but as far as I have been able to see, they did not have any tags for the labour reforms. I therefore decided to use the newspapers’ search engines to collect the articles and not rely on the topic tags used by *El País*, to use a similar method of collecting the articles across the two newspapers. However, the *El País* key term search engine includes both words found in the body of the newspaper article

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<sup>11</sup> I searched for all the terms using lower case letters and encapsulating the entire term in double quotation marks.

text as well as the topic tags that are listed at the bottom of the article text. Hence, using the search engine provided me with both articles that contained my selected search terms in the body of the text, and articles that were tagged with my search term. I conducted three separate key term searches using *El País*' search engine, where each term was searched for in quotation marks. I used the same key terms to search *El Mundo*'s search engine.

#### **Table X. Key word search results**

[To be completed]

#### *Collecting the article contents*

The second stage of the web scraping entailed collecting the content of each individual article. This is done by inputting the individual newspaper article URLs from the lists created above, into a script that accesses the contents of each article. I decided to collect the following information from all the newspaper articles: date of publication, author, title, lead paragraph, and the body of text. I did not collect the images or the comments under the news articles because this material is outside the scope of this article.

The newspaper articles were collected in two separate corpora, one for each newspaper. Each row in the corpora represents an individual article and in addition to the information listed in the paragraph above, it also contained columns for the URLs and the newspaper in which the article was published.

The scraping code failed to collect the contents of a small number of articles, 13 articles from *El País* and 78 articles from *El Mundo*. In the case of *El Mundo*, the scraping failed because the articles contained multimedia content such as videos and pictures. Given that audio-visual material is outside the scope of this article, this does not pose a problem for my analysis. The articles that were not scraped from *El País* make up a minimal fraction of the total data set and

were from several different years. Hence, leaving these out of the corpora does not skew my data.

### **Cleaning the data**

Before I could use the corpora for conducting analyses, I conducted various types of data cleaning to them as relevant as possible for my investigation. I first ensured that all the articles fell within my chosen time frame (2010 to 2020), and that all the articles contained at least one of the terms I had used to identify articles addressing the labour reforms: ‘reforma laboral’, ‘reformas laborales’ and ‘ley reforma laboral’.

Next, I looked for duplicates and found duplicated titles, leads and text body. I removed 18 articles that had duplicated text body from *El País* and [X] from *El Mundo*, and kept the ones with duplicates in the titles and leads.

I identified [X] missing cells in *El País* and [X] in *El Mundo*. This is after having worked on improving the scraping code to fill as many cells as possible. Given that the focus of my analysis is on in-depth reading of the newspaper articles, I decided to remove articles that did not contain the body of the text, and to keep articles that were missing the title, lead or date. I removed [X] articles from *El País* and [X] from *El Mundo*. In the case of missing dates, I extracted the date from the URLs.

I also wanted to exclude articles that dealt with other labour reforms than the Spanish. This was done by identifying newspaper articles that contain the name of any country that is not Spain in the text body. I inspected the titles of these articles manually and kept those articles that did not clearly refer to other countries in the title.

I included all different types of texts published by the newspapers online, from articles, to opinion pieces to blog posts. I decided to include articles published both in the regional sections of the newspapers, e.g. the Valencian or Galician news sections, as well as in the national section, to capture the full range of the debate.



**Table X. Overview over number of articles before and after data cleaning**

[To be completed]

## Appendix B: Selection of articles for in-depth qualitative analysis

Given the substantial size of my corpora, I had to narrow down the number of newspaper articles that I would read in-depth. The aim of the selection strategy was to get an overall understanding of what articles about the Spanish labour reform looked like during periods in which I expect the reforms to be prominent in the media debate, which themes and actors were predominant, and to get a detailed understanding of how articles about the labour reforms address women and gender equality. I selected the subsets of articles that would be submitted to qualitative analysis through a three-staged process in which I: 1) decided on a set of time periods to pull the articles from, 2) randomly selected a small number of articles published during these time periods and removed any articles that did not substantially address the labour reforms, and 3) identified all articles that mentioned one or more terms that address gender equality, women or female workers (see Table X) and removed any articles that did not substantially address the labour reforms or gender equality or women's working conditions.

I chose the time periods based on my interest in how the labour reforms were discussed during periods of heightened political tension (general strikes, elections and votes of no confidence), and when there were spikes in the number of published articles per month that addressed the labour reforms. The events I had chosen based on my reading of earlier literature significantly overlapped with the periods during which the newspapers published a high number of articles about the reforms (see Figure X). Figure X includes the full corpora and provides an overview over how many articles mentioning my chosen labour reform terms that were published per month. For *El País*, we can observe that after 2011, most of my chosen events are associated with spikes in publication. For *El Mundo*, [to be completed]. The limited attention to the topic of labour reforms prior to 2010 also suggests that the reform from 2012, which is considered the more comprehensive reform between the two, that has received most media attention. Based on this information, I chose to examine articles published during the time periods identified in Table X in-depth.

**Table X. Time periods identified for sampling of articles for qualitative analysis**

<b>Time period</b>	<b>Events of interest during this period</b>
1 March 2010 – 31 December 2010	General strike in September 2010
1 January 2012 – 1 August 2014	General strikes March and November 2012
1 September 2015 – 1 June 2016	General elections in December 2015 and June 2016
1 May 2017 – 1 July 2017	Vote of no confidence in June 2017
1 May 2018 – 1 July 2018	Vote of no confidence in June 2018
1 January 2019 – 1 April 2020	General elections in April and November 2019

The number of articles published during my chosen time periods is [X]. To sample a manageable number of articles for in-depth reading, I randomly selected 1% of these articles and was left with [X] articles. I manually inspected these articles to ensure that these articles discussed the labour reforms and not only mentioned them briefly. I proceeded by getting a quick overview over the data set, and to determine if an article substantially addressed the labour reforms, I asked the following question: Does the article discuss the reforms or briefly mention them? I removed [X] articles that I did not consider to actively discuss the labour reforms.

I also wanted to create a subsample of articles that explicitly mention both the labour reforms and women and gender equality. I chose a broad set of terms to capture articles that may discuss the reforms in the context of gender equality and women's working conditions: *igualdad*, *mujer*, *mujeres*, *género*, *trabajadora/s*, *empleada/s*, *femenino*, *femenina*. The three first words were the most common and captured most of the articles, but I included all the terms to get a larger subset given that I would manually inspect the articles before reading them in-depth. I was left with 877 articles that mentioned one of these terms and were published during my chosen time period from *El País* and [X] from *El Mundo*. To limit the number of articles submitted to in-depth reading, I randomly selected 5% of these articles and was left with 44 articles that I manually inspected. from *El País* and [X] from *El Mundo*.