

# The framing of energy transition by Italian and Spanish parties

## Abstract

The climate crisis is a stress factor for democracies and a relevant issue within inter-party conflict. Besides environmental aspects, the economic and national security dimensions of energy policy are involved, as well as a wide range of social and political consequences of policy choices.

This article analyses the framing of the energy transition by political parties, i.e. how they define the problem, propose and legitimise solutions, and identify and qualify the actors involved. Parties are central to the institutional system and the formation of the policy agenda, competing in the construction and transmission of frames while shaping conflict and policy solutions. The research questions of this article regard the articulation of frames along the left-right axis and the impact of the crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine.

The work draws on the literature on energy policies and the framing of climate change and energy transition in order to first outline three main multidimensional frames: sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist. The empirical research consists of qualitative analysis of Italian and Spanish political party manifestos in the national and European elections between 2018 and 2024.

Results confirm that parties frame the energy transition on the basis of their underlying ideology. External shocks, such as the Ukrainian crisis, lead to a rearticulation of frames, but the left-right alignment still holds as politicisation is reinforced.

**Keywords:** Energy transition; Political parties; Framing; Party manifestos

## 1. Introduction

Scholars and commentators have used the term “polycrisis” to describe the present state of constant challenge to political, social, institutional and economic equilibrium. The economic crisis of 2008-2011, the pandemic crisis of 2020-2021 and its economic and social consequences, and then, in 2022, the invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, all contributed to an uncertain and volatile context. The climate crisis, which had been described as the *super-wicked problem* of our times, has become one among many and attempts to find solutions to it must now compete for priority within the policy agenda.

This article deals with a central pillar of ecological transition that has been particularly challenged by the polycrisis: the energy transition. This appeared to be underway and gathering increasing momentum, but was directly affected by the war in Ukraine and the halt to Russian gas supplies with long-term consequences that are still hard to gauge. A push to invest further in renewables, a pull to diversify to alternative gas and nuclear and constant pressure posed by increasing inequalities and risks of poverty are all at play and significantly influence the pursuit of climate goals.

The article looks at how political parties define and make sense of the energy transition problem in these uncertain times. Within the given complexity, the way they frame the issue may vary widely

and determine the content, as well as the success or failure, of future climate and energy policies. Drawing on established literature that connects climate policy and politics (Jensen e Spoon 2011; Thonig et al. 2021), we adopt the method of framing analysis (cfr. Brondi et al. 2015). Our aim is to test a hypothesis on the alignment of discursive frames on the energy transition along the left-right axis, through a comparative analysis of Italian and Spanish political party manifestos between 2018 and 2023, as well as to explore the impact of the war in Ukraine.

The article first discusses the concept of framing in reference to the energy transition (section 2), then presents the research hypothesis (section 3). The cases and method are then presented (section 4) and the findings are described (sections 5 and 6). Conclusions are drawn in section 7 which point to a significant alignment of discursive frames along the left-right political continuum and an equally meaningful reinforcement of this alignment after the Ukraine crisis.

## 2. Framing the energy transition

The energy transition, understood as a transformation of the energy system based on the shift away from climate-changing fossil fuels towards renewable and non-polluting sources, is the object of regulation, research projects and EU and national programmes of great significance in terms of economic investment and organisational commitment.

As in any agenda setting and policy formulation process, the communicative dimension and symbolic representations are not neutral and contribute to the construction of social reality and the definition of possible solutions. The concept of framing (van Hulst and Yanow 2016) describes the processes by which actors "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman 1993, 52). The framing process is strategically orientated: actors compete for hegemony over problem interpretation and solution articulation (Boin et al. 2009); in particular, political parties aim to build consensus and consolidate their competitive positions and have the means to orientate, select and aggregate demands, which makes them central actors in the formation of public opinion. Reacting to shocks with discursive turning points (Buschman and Oels 2019), parties 'make sense' of the complexity of social reality through framing and reframing activities and, for this reason, analysis of the communicative dynamics that are established between parties during policy problem definition also means examining their competitive logic in the light of pre-existing identity constraints and external influences.

These discursive dynamics appear particularly relevant when looking at the energy transition, a wicked problem that mixes technical complexities and uncertainties on one hand and conflicts of interests and values on the other (Alford and Head 2017). Fossil fuels continue to enjoy a structural advantage over alternative energy sources due to a technological, institutional and social 'carbon lock-in' (Unruh 2000) as well as a "discursive" one made up of the dominant discourses that constitute and justify the status quo (Buschman and Oels 2019).

This complexity is further compounded by the fact that energy policy, and thus energy transition policy, is itself multilevel (spanning across international, EU, national and local policy) and cross-sectoral (intersecting energy policy *strictu sensu* and other policies that affect - and are affected by - the energy sector) (McGowan 1996).

Further multi-dimensionality of energy policy is expressed in the "trilemma" (Khan et al 2022) that includes:

- energy security: an ambiguous concept (Sovacool 2011) that, in industrialised countries with limited fossil resources, generally concerns the security of supply and international and geopolitical strategies;
- the economic dimension, which includes the impact of energy prices on economic growth and competitiveness, as well as strategic choices in industrial policy;
- environmental sustainability and, most importantly, green-house gas emissions, pollution and the environmental risks posed by different technologies.

A further, cross-cutting scientific and political debate concerns the distribution of costs and benefits deriving from the energy transition, the democratic governance of transition processes and the different socio-technical power structures embodied in different technologies. For example, several authors see the transition as a paradigm shift towards more widely distributed and democratic economic and industrial systems (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023; Singh Garha et al. 2022).

Such complexity implies that the interpretive frames constructed by political actors may vary widely, and lead to diverse policy decisions and outcomes. These frames may change over time, depending on the technological and socio-economic context, sudden shocks and actor agency (Prontera 2018). Political parties have a pivotal role in the framing and re-framing processes in this field. They exercise great influence on the level of politicisation of environmental and energy issues (Carmichael e Brulle 2017), can foster or hinder support for an ecological transition based on the energy transition (Birch 2020; Carter et al.2018; Schulze, 2014; Jensen e Spoon 2011) and can influence the polarisation of public opinion on the issue (Birch 2020; Egan e Mullin 2017).

This essay aims to investigate how parties frame energy transition issues. More specifically, our research questions are: how is the energy transition framed in party manifestos? To what extent do the frames depend on given ideological orientations and how stable is this alignment in the face of critical shocks?

To answer these questions, we analyse the frames constructed by Italian political parties between 2018 and 2022, a timeframe which saw significant progress in the transition to renewables, but also a significant increase in the complexity of the energy issue due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Steffen and Patt 2022; Natili and Visconti 2023).

### **3. Research hypothesis: energy transition frames across the left/right divide**

Starting from these premises, our first expectation is that the energy trilemma will translate into three frames centred on the environmental, economic and security dimensions respectively. Based on the definition of framing proposed by Entman (1993), it is possible to identify a logical sequence of problem definition and moral evaluations, on one hand, which constitute the problem-setting dimensions of the frame; and the subsequent identification of its content, actors and solutions on the other, which constitute the problem-solving dimensions of the frame. We use these dimensions of framing to conceptualise the articulation of the three frames - sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist.

Tab. 1 Framing the energy transition

	Sustainability frame	Eco-modernist frame	Eco-nationalist frame
<b>Dominant dimension of energy policy</b>	Environmental dimension	Economic dimension	National security dimension
<b>Problem definition</b>	Transition as a necessity	Transition as an opportunity	Transition as a strategic option
<b>Moral evaluations</b>	Equity in the distribution of costs and benefits	Market efficiency for growth	Safeguarding national sovereignty
<b>Content of the transition</b>	Rapid decarbonisation through renewables	Pragmatic and incremental energy mix	Capitalising on national strategic resources
<b>Actors and solutions</b>	Grassroots innovation and catalytic state  (Critical) EU cooperation  International cooperation	Market regulation by the state  EU cooperation  International competition	Political authority  EU competition  International competition

As summarised in Tab.1, the sustainability frame rests on a definition of energy policy as an environmental issue and therefore sees transition as a necessity to counteract the effects of the climate crisis. The proposed transition is based on renewable energy sources, the spread of which must be promoted and accelerated for rapid decarbonisation. Consistent with the Sustainable Development approach (Magnani 2012), great attention is paid to the distributive effects of the transition, which may involve inequalities between social classes, generations, and territories and must be governed to ensure a just transition. The protagonists of the transition are territorial communities, grassroots innovation and new multi-stakeholder, decentralised and cooperative models in which the state plays a 'catalytic' role that helps coordinate, support and direct non-state actors (Wright and Kurian 2010; Prontera and Quitzow 2022). European and international cooperation is viewed positively, but with possible criticism for its market approach, which is insufficiently attentive to inequalities (Buzogany and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022).

The 'eco-modernist', or 'ecological modernisation' frame (Magnani 2012, Wright and Kurian 2010) defines energy policy as an economic problem and thus sees the transition predominantly as an opportunity for growth within the existing capitalist model. The focus on equity issues is minimal, consistent with a trust in the market and economic growth to benefit the system as a whole. The transition process must ensure continuity of supply and is therefore incremental, pragmatic and closely linked to technological innovation: a mix of sources is proposed that guarantees security and stability in availability and prices. The state is entrusted with the role of regulator of competitive markets (Wright and Kurian 2010) and European cooperation is embodied in the single energy market concept. On the other hand, relations with global powers, again in a logic of economic policy, may be more competitive than collaborative.

The eco-nationalist frame (Aronczyk 2023) primarily poses the energy issue as a national security problem and thus defines transition as a potential obstacle or a strategic option to be exploited if and when it supports national interests. Rather than equity or market growth, it sets itself the primary and

morally legitimising goal of protecting the sovereignty and self-determination of the nation. Hence, it may breed distrust in private - and especially multinational - energy companies, EU and international organisations and any actor that threatens local resources or to take control of them away from native people (Okpadah 2022). The transition will thus be pragmatically (or opportunistically) shaped around locally available resources over which sovereignty is claimed (de-Shalit 2006). Political authorities recognised as the legitimate expression of the nation/people are the designated agents of transformation.

As energy policy and energy transition have gained relevance in the debate on climate change over recent years, political parties have been under pressure to adopt them as a new political issue. We expect ideological orientation to be a central factor among the several that may influence how parties frame issues: strategic or ideological considerations, internal organisational equilibria or external influences. As Marks et al. (2002, 585) noted with reference to EU integration, political parties' preexisting agendas influence their reaction to new challenges and induce them to incorporate and interpret new issues on the basis of their respective ideological orientations. The literature also confirms that the left/right divide influences the degree of party concern with climate change and with environmental transition policies (Birch 2020; Huber et al. 2021; Berker and Pollex 2021; Carter et al., 2018). Right-wing parties, and especially the populist right ones, generally minimise or even deny climate change, leading to very limited support for energy transition policies. This is also often the result of eurosceptic attitudes that induce a "reluctance to 'sacrifice' national sovereignty for the benefit of international agreements and cross-country collaboration" (Gottner and Mulholland 2019, 12). Sovereignist and securitarian orientations help explain the adoption of more ambivalent stances by some of these parties (Huber et al. 2021; Lockwood 2018) in which climate scepticism is not necessarily accompanied by an outright rejection of renewable energy.

The left is generally more concerned with climate change and is particularly sensitive to the alarming messages of the scientific community (Neumayer, 2004). It therefore generally proposes radical goals that become all the more ambitious with the populist left (Huber *et al.* 2021), which stresses the need for mitigation policies and point to specific elites as the culprits of climate change. They often criticise the neoliberal and market-oriented logic of the mainstream discourse on environmental transition as shown in its "techno-managerial framing of the process" (Bouzarovski 2022, 1004) and its concern with the interests of large corporations rather than social issues and energy democracy (Riexinger et al. 2021). Proposed solutions include the strengthening of international cooperation, citizen participation (Lockwood, 2018; Huber *et al.* 2021) and redistributive policies that compensate social groups who are most vulnerable in transition processes. Our first set of hypotheses is therefore that:

H1) a direct relationship exists between parties' ideological positioning and the frame adopted;

H1a: right-wing parties will tend to adopt the eco-nationalist frame;

H1b: centre parties will tend to adopt the eco-modernist frame;

H1c: left-wing parties will tend to adopt the sustainability frame.

What is more, parties' framing activity is not immutable. Ample literature shows that external shocks can act as stimuli or focusing events (Kingdon 2003) which may alter dominant narratives, encourage discursive turning points and even act as catalysts for policy change. Focusing events draw attention to pre-existing, but weakly politicised problems, opening windows of opportunity for political actors to advocate one or more explanations of the problem, its causes and solutions (Boin et al 2009). However, the perceived complexity of the event often prevents the establishment of a dominant discourse (Hurka and Nebel 2013) to the point of generating competition between frames and counter-frames supported by opposing discursive coalitions (Hajer 1993).

With reference to climate and energy issues, a series of transformations and contextual factors have recently increased their centrality in the public debate: environmentalist mobilisations have multiplied nationally and internationally, sudden catastrophic climate events have occurred more frequently and the pandemic has fostered aspirations towards sustainable energy models, while there has also been a self-protective reaction of the fossil fuel industry and state support for it in a more general attempt at economic recovery (Zakeri et al 2022). The Russian-Ukraine war is the latest shock to open a new phase of destabilisation, strengthening and expanding the polycrisis (Zeitlin et al. 2019). European democracies that were traditionally dependent on Russian gas supplies have been deeply affected (von Hoymer et al. 2021) and the EU approved the RePowerEU initiative in March 2022 to rapidly 'eliminate' its dependency on Russian fossil fuels (Prontera 2023). The various components of this initiative, as well as specific member-states' measures, are inconsistent when it comes to the previously established ambitious energy and climate goals because, while some of them aim to accelerate energy transition, others go in the opposite direction, i.e. they look for alternative fossil fuel suppliers and allocate funds to additional import infrastructure such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals (Siddi 2023).

This incoherence demonstrates how the energy crisis triggered by the conflict constitutes a policy puzzle given the need to balance the conflicting exigencies of the 'energy trilemma' (Natili and Visconti 2023; Wiertz et al. 2023): acceleration of the transition and the difficulties of rapid realisation of large-scale renewable-energy infrastructures conflicts with an immediate reduction in energy costs, so affecting the desirability of the transition in the eyes the public, or, at least, part of it (Steffen and Patt 2022; Dennison 2022). Based on these premises, we formulate a second hypothesis: H2: the war and the energy crisis have increased the politicisation of energy issues among conflicting discursive coalitions, leading to a consolidation of the ideological anchorage and alignment of the parties' frames.

#### **4. Case selection: similarities and differences between Italy and Spain**

Understanding of the conceptualisation of the energy transition in Italian and Spanish political debate is still rather limited. Until a few years ago, the social construction of sustainable energy by policy-makers and stakeholders in Italy was orientated to preclude public engagement (Brondi et al. 2015). Since then, however, much has changed, both domestically and internationally, and, with reference to the Italian case, scholars have analysed transition processes at the local level (Magnani and Carrosio 2021), the social implications of transition-related change and aspects of policy design and capacity (Barroco Fontes-Cunha et al. 2021; Magnani and Carrosio 2021; Prontera 2021).

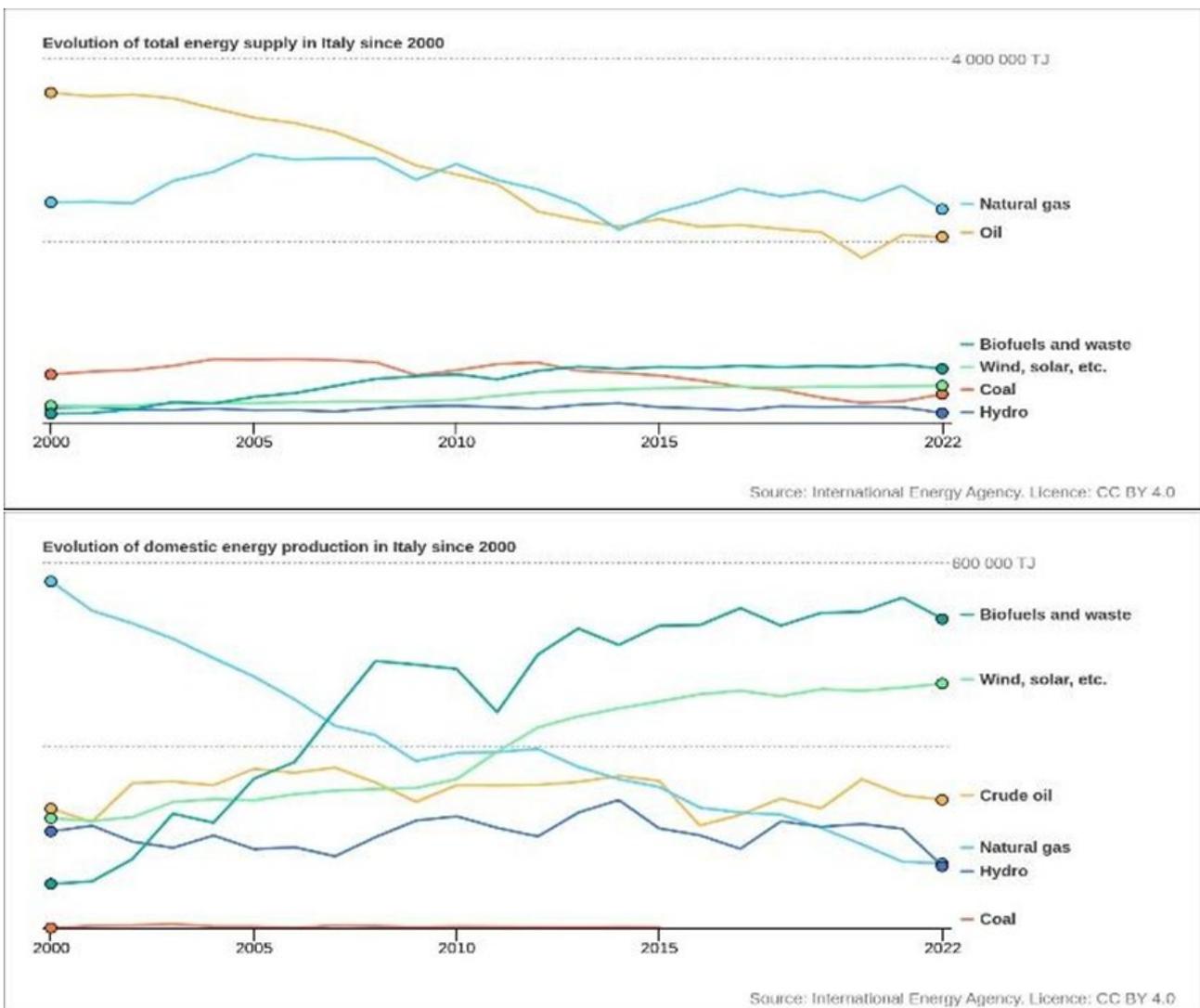
With reference to the Spanish case, the scholarly debate on the energy transition has mainly focused on economic and social aspects (Haas 2019), and increasing attention has been paid to the regulation of the subject through the preparation and approval of the 2021 Law Project on Climate Change and Energetic Transition (Sorman et al 2020; Moreno and Thornton 2022). Some studies have focused on party policy approaches (Caldés 2019), with particular interest in the proposals and approaches of the conservative right (Hess and Renner 2019) and the radical right (Ungureano and Popartan 2024). However, the two countries' dynamics of political competition and power logics involved in the energy transition process, as well as in the forms of discursive legitimation of its advances or, on the contrary, its interruptions, still appear understudied.

Two further factors make the analysis of the Italian and Spanish cases particularly relevant. First, just like other southern European democracies, the Italian and Spanish political systems have never included a significant Green party, such as those that emerged as single-issue parties in northern European democracies in the 1980s and challenged other parties to adopt environmental and energy

issues. This allows for analysis of the role of the left/right ideological variable by minimising the impact of contagion from single-issue parties (Marks et al. 2008), and may allow considerations to be extended to similar cases which are equally understudied.

Alongside the similarities, there are differences between the two democracies that mainly concern the composition of energy supply, its production and import. Both countries are energy importers, but they differ significantly in the composition of the energy mix. In particular, as can be seen in Figures 1-2, Italy is a net energy importer. “On average between 2016 and 2021, Italy imported 80% of its Total Energy Supply (TES), mostly oil and gas. Domestic production consists mainly of renewable energy sources such as bioenergy, hydro, solar and wind. Production from renewable sources has increased in the last decade to reach 74% of domestic energy production in 2021” (IEA 2023, 17). The country has a high dependence on gas imports from Russia, which accounted for 41% of its total gas imports in 2021 (IEA 2023).

Fig. 1-2 Italy energy supply and domestic production 2000-2022

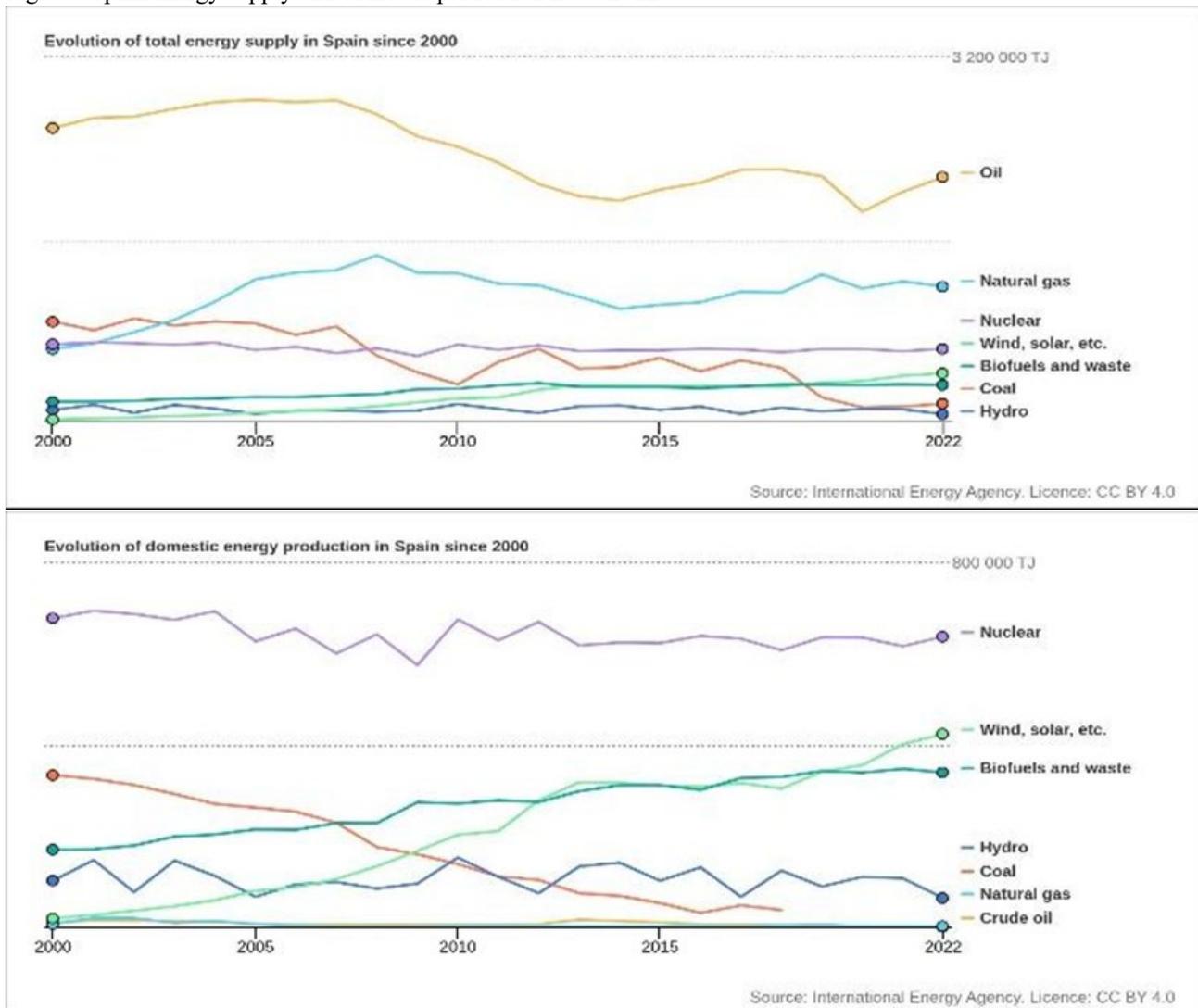


Source: IEA

As Figures 3-4 show, “most of Spain’s energy supply and demand is met with fossil fuels, which accounted for 72% of total energy supply (TES) and 68% of total final consumption (TFC) in 2019. Only one-quarter of TES was produced domestically in 2019; the remainder was imported. Domestic

production consists mostly of nuclear energy (45% of total production) as well as bioenergy and waste and other renewables, notably wind and solar. Production of renewable energy increased by 47% between 2009 and 2019 to cover more than half of total domestic production in 2019 (55%)” (IEA 2021, 19-20). In the early 2000s Spain was considered among the forerunners of the transition, having significantly accelerated the development of the renewable energy sector (Haas 2019). This growth had been interrupted since 2008 by measures that led to the so-called green moratorium and thus to renewable energy paralysis. In recent years, the energy transition process has gained renewed momentum (Sorman et al. 2020).

Fig. 3-4 Spain energy supply and domestic production 2000-2022



Source: IEA

Given the differences between the energy sectors of the two countries, the effects of the conflict in Ukraine have been diverse, although significant in both. Italy, due to its longstanding dependence on Russian energy supplies, is among those industrialised democracies that has been most affected by the conflict. Fast diversification strategies have been a short-term buffer, but have also opened a debate on long-term change of the energy system (Prontera 2023).

Spain is in a different situation, because its peninsular geography made it “an energy island with large energy infrastructure facilities and low ties with the Russian supplies” (Ribó Pérez 2023, 3). The conflict thus has never generated a fear of energy shortages, but it has affected the country in

economic terms. “The stress on the gas market brought several consequences, particularly the sudden rise in electricity prices, which led to increasing inflation” (Ribó Pérez 2023, 3).

Given the different impacts that the crisis has generated in economic and energy terms in the two countries, the analysis is oriented towards testing whether there is also a differentiation in terms of impact on the political debate or, on the contrary, whether a convergence of discursive and competitive dynamics can be detected.

## 5. The analysis of parties’ manifestos: data and method

The empirical investigation of party framing of the energy transition is performed through the analysis of party manifestos for the national elections of 2018 and 2022 in Italy and of 2019 and 2023 in Spain and the EU election of 2019 and 2024 in both countries. The decision to analyse electoral manifestos poses some analytical issues as they present less articulate communicative and discursive registers than other sources, such as parliamentary or public speeches, and the audience is more limited. While acknowledging these limitations, as previous studies show (Kiratli 2016; Chaney 2014) the analysis of frames through manifestos has some advantages stemming, on the one hand, from the nature of the text as a basis for the strategic construction of identities and underlying values (a significant theme for framing studies) and, secondly, the possibility to investigate solutions and policy proposals, a fundamental element of any frame.

The chosen time-frame allows for analysis of the impact of the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The parties selected for analysis include all those state-wide parties that won representation in the national parliamentary elections taken into account and cover the full left-right ideological spectrum (Fig. 5).



Fig. 1 - Left/Right ideological positioning of Italian and Spanish parties;  
Source for the positioning: Chapel Hill Expert survey 2019.

Looking at the Italian party system, towards the left end lies Sinistra Italiana (SI), a democratic socialist party established in 2017 after various mergers and divisions among the radical left (Chiocchetti 2023). In 2018, it ran in a coalition called LEU (Liberi e Uguali) with other smaller groups whereas it was part of a new coalition called La Sinistra in the 2019 EU election and it formed a two-party alliance with the small Green Party in 2022. The main party on the centre-left is the Partito Democratico (PD), established in 2007 from the merger of DS - Democratici di Sinistra and DL - La Margherita, which brought together parts of the post-communist and catholic traditions into

a new political project targeted at the “reformist” electorate (Bobba and Seddone 2016, 68). After the disappointing results in the 2022 general election, the party elected a new secretary through a primary election in which the more radical candidate from outside the party (she had only been a member for a few years) Elly Schlein prevailed. Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), a hybrid populist, anti-establishment protest party which came to the fore nationally in 2013, is located at the centre in the latest available data from Chapel Hill (Fig. 1), but has since developed a clearer, more leftist ideology (Russo and Valbruzzi 2022, 184); more consistently at the centre of the spectrum across elections is +Europa, a small liberal, pro-EU formation with its origins in the Radical party. On the right lie Forza Italia (FI), the liberal-conservative “personal party” (Calise 2010) founded by Berlusconi in 1994; Lega per Salvini Premier, a radical right-wing populist party heir to the regionalist Lega Nord; and Fratelli d’Italia (FdI) a radical right-wing party with populist elements (Donà 2022) that has its origins in the post-fascist MSI.

Looking at the Spanish party system, on the left end lies Izquierda Unida (IU), a radical left party, established in 1986 as an umbrella organization that brought together the PCE and other minor left-wing parties. Although plans were initially made to dissolve the founding parties of the coalition into the new organisation, it still allows for both the individual affiliation and the integration of parties or organizations (Verge 2010; Plaza-Colodro and Ramiro 2023). Next to IU is Podemos that was founded in 2014 as a genuinely new party (Tarditi 2017) and represents the populist radical left (Campolongo e Caruso 2021). From 2016 until 2019, IU and Podemos, together with other minor and regionalist parties, formed the Unidos/Unidas Podemos coalition, running with common candidates and a single programme in the various elections. In 2023, the two parties joined together in Sumar, a broad left-wing coalition led by Yolanda Diaz coming from the PCE. In 2023 Mas País, the party born in 2016 as a result of an internal split from Podemos, also participated within Sumar. Mas País participated autonomously in the 2018 political elections, while not running in the 2019 European elections. Podemos ran for the 2024 EU elections independently, leaving the Sumar coalition.

The main party on the centre-left is the PSOE, whose historical origins date back to 1879 and which in the democratic context re-emerged as a relevant political actor in 1977 elections under the leadership of Felipe González (Kennedy 2009). It has been one of the protagonists of the two-party competition that characterised the Spanish party system from the Eighties until the 2015.

On the centre-right lies the Partido Popular, heir of the Alianza Popular and the main competitor of the PSOE since the 1990s (Orriols and Cordero 2016). Finally on the extreme right side of the political spectrum there is Vox, a populist radical right party, that was created in 2013 as a result of an internal split of young activists from the PP (Rama et al. 2021, 2), and gained national visibility in 2018 under the leadership of Santiago Abascal. The party manifestos for each selected party at each of the three elections were collected.<sup>1</sup>

The initial phase of the empirical analysis consisted of identifying every section which contained references to energy, energy transition, and environmental transition. In a second phase, all the sections and paragraphs containing references to energy transition were transcribed and tokenized into units that expressed self-contained symbols or key ideas (Lasswell 1956; van Dijk 2011) which were then manually classified according to the components of the frames described in the previous section. Each component of the frames - dominant dimension of the energy issue, problem definition, moral evaluation, content of the transition, actors and solutions - was examined separately so that different degrees of adherence to each frame could be recorded, as well as their variance across each

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<sup>1</sup> FI did not publish its own manifesto for the 2018 election, and relied solely on the coalition manifesto, which was therefore used in our analysis. Similarly, Lega did not publish a manifesto in the 2019 EU elections, so the manifesto of its European alliance “Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENF)” was used; however, it did not contain any reference to energy, climate or the environment.

component. We looked for explicit references to the main dimension – environmental, economic, national - recalled to place the transition, the way transition was problematized (necessity, opportunity, strategic option) and on the basis of which priority it was legitimised (equity, market efficiency, sovereignty); finally, we identified the strategy delineated by each party to realise the transition within the wider energy policy, the relative solutions and actors to involve in this process. This analysis was conducted by the authors separately and then discussed collectively to address divergences in interpretation.

## **6. The energy transition in party manifestos before the Ukrainian conflict**

The framing of the energy transition in the manifestos of Italian and Spanish parties for the national and European elections held before the Ukrainian crisis are aligned along the three frames - sustainability, eco-modernist and eco-nationalist - reflecting each party's positioning from left to right.

Specifically, SI in Italy, Sumar and Mas País in Spain adopt a consistent "sustainability frame" which systematically covers all the dimensions. On the centre-left while the PSOE in Spain elaborate a hybrid frame, where eco-modernist and sustainability elements coexist, PD in Italy employs an eco-modernist frame that places it – although with differences - in the same discursive coalition as the Italian centrist +Europa and centre-right FI and the Spanish PP.

The eco-nationalist frame is adopted by right-wing parties in both countries, Lega and Fdi in Italy and Vox in Spain, but lacks full articulation and coherence. The Italian M5S, consistently with its hybrid-populist positioning of the time, does not articulate the issue fully and adopts elements of both the eco-modernist and sustainability frames.

In order to highlight similarities and differences within our sample, for each country we proceed in two steps of comparative analysis: we first compare how parties across the political spectrum have framed the energy transition in the problem-setting dimensions (dominant dimension of energy policy, problem definition and moral evaluation); we then compare how they framed it in the problem-solving dimensions (content of the transition, actors and solutions).

### **Italy (2018-2019)**

SI mostly stresses the environmental dimension, proposing a 'big green plan' aimed at 'total decarbonisation' (SI 2018, 6) and based on full coordination - which was considered non-existent at the time - between the national energy strategy (Sen) and climate strategy. This is intended to guarantee an equitable distribution of costs and benefits, according to an energy democracy model (see below)

The economic dimension prevails instead for PD, +Europa and FI, although environmental concerns are also mentioned. In the PD 2018 programme, the topic of environmental and energy transition is discussed in two sections: one devoted to labour policy and the green economy and the other to European cooperation. In the former, environmental protection is related to 'beauty and quality' (PD 2018, 10), which are identified as assets of the Italian economy. Climate change is mentioned, but is an ancillary factor to economic necessity. In this sense, the energy transition represents an opportunity for economic stimulus, leading to the equation 'Energy: sustainability equals competitiveness' (PD 2018, 11).

In +Europa's manifestos the fight against climate change is supported, but is subordinate to the economic dimension and the transition is expected to ensure 'economic efficiency, energy independence, security of supply' and lastly 'environmental protection' (+Europa 2018, 26).

FI does not discuss energy extensively. It ties energy policy to the economic dimension by stating the goal of greater efficiency of networks and production in order to ensure 'security of supply' (FI 2018, 11). Consistently with its centre-right positioning, it describes the energy transition as an economic issue functional to national security and, only subordinately, an environmental issue 'because economic development, industrial competitiveness and climate policies are complementary' (FI 2019, 18).

M5S, then a hybrid populist party, hardly articulates any discourse in its manifesto and positions itself between the sustainability and the eco-modernist frames.

Finally, the right-wing parties emphasise the national security dimension, although they vary widely in the extent to which they discuss the energy issue: Lega is an exception among Italian right-wing parties since the energy issue is given much more relevance in its manifestos, while For FdI, the energy issue is marginal. In the Lega 2018 manifesto, the need to strengthen actions against climate change is accompanied by promotion of "an entirely Made in Italy supply chain" of renewables to stop incentives flowing "into the pockets of Chinese companies" (Lega 2018, 47).

For FdI environmental concerns are subordinate to national pride: 'one cannot be a patriot without also being a defender of nature and the environment. Because Homeland, fatherland, and environment are very closely related words and we strongly claim this identity of ours' (FDI 2019, 11).

Turning to the content, actors and solutions of the transition, the manifestos of Lega and FdI lack full articulation and coherence. There are references to energy autonomy, "Homeland, Fatherland and the environment" (FDI 2019, 11) and to international competition which are consistent with the eco-nationalist frame, but the frame is not developed in all its dimensions.

More specifically, Lega presents generic, but rhetorically ambitious targets (such as the end of internal combustion engines by 2030). To protect national sovereignty in energy production and renewables, it proposes a mix of market and public instruments, such as 'national planning' to improve energy efficiency and 'the establishment of a national energy transition fund to support concrete changes through reward mechanisms and incentives' (Lega 2018, 37). Lega proposes tax relief and energy production through waste disposal processes (waste-to-energy and biofuel production) for the reduction of energy costs.

FdI's proposals are even more vague: they combine generic support for renewables with the goal of taking Italy as close as possible to energy autonomy, calling for an environmentally-committed Europe through a generic 'promotion of clean and renewable energy' (FDI 2018, 5) without ever mentioning the fight against climate change.

FI, +Europa and PD are again consistent with the eco-modernist frame, but differ in the level of articulation of their proposals.

In the case of FI, the content of the transition clearly conveys a pragmatic approach, expressed in acknowledging the centrality of the fight against climate change in EU politics but 'without useless extremism' and 'by coupling development and the preservation of the planet' (FI 2019, 18). Very few, rather general solutions are proposed, including support for renewables and innovation and the need to coordinate with other southern European countries.

+Europa advocates a need for a 'market transition in the energy sector', as pollution and poverty are closely linked, and the solution for both problems is seen as 'development, growth and technological innovation' (Radicali 2018, 13). The whole transition discourse in the manifesto revolves around increasing the efficiency of market instruments to make the economy more sustainable and achieve ambitious decarbonisation targets. The energy mix and targets are in line with EU policy: total phasing-out of coal by 2025 and zero net emissions by 2050, to be achieved through a mix of renewables and gas. To achieve these goals, +Europa proposes 'liberalisation of the internal energy market and strengthening of the trans-European network' (Radicali 2019, 10).

Finally, PD claims merit for the drafting, in the 2013-2018 legislature, of the Sen aimed at having 55% of electricity produced from renewable sources by 2030 and achieving overall decarbonisation by 2050 (PD 2018, 11). Gas, however, is mentioned as a key resource in the transition phase, hence the need to improve the interconnection infrastructure, guaranteeing security of supply (PD 2018, 11). In the European election programme, the link between economic recovery and energy transition appears further strengthened and is accompanied by a proposal for an extraordinary investment plan (EUR 290 billion) through the issuing of European debt (Eurobonds) to achieve 'ambitious' targets and the decoupling of green investment from national deficit limits set in Brussels (PD 2019, 7). As early as 2018, energy was mentioned as the first sector for completion of the internal European market (PD 2018, 13). The role of market instruments is emphasised among the proposed solutions to ease the energy transition, and the party proposes more incisive liberalisation of the national and European energy market (PD 2018, 11).

M5S, consistently with its vague and ambiguous framing of the problem-setting dimensions, proposes a few ambitious and generic programmatic points or short slogans: energy production based exclusively on renewables and 'exit from oil by 2050', and the positive impact of investment in renewables on the economy and employment (M5S 2018, 3).

A much more articulated development of problem-solving dimension is offered by SI, which holds true to the sustainability frame. The party outlines a project of 'energy democracy' (SI 2018, 6) that guarantees equity through the convergence of state economic intervention and the protagonism of communities and citizens as producers and distributors of energy to reduce the power of 'oligopolists' (SI 2018, 6). The energy goals are also ambitious at the European level and the elections are seen as an opportunity to build a common space receptive to the demands of social and environmentalist movements to build a Europe based on "social, environmental and fiscal justice" (Si 2019, 1). With a view to strengthening democratic decision-making processes, an incisive role of the EU Parliament is also advocated in facilitating "public intervention in the economy, in order to steer it towards conversion" (Si 2019, 3).

### **Spain (2019)**

The radical left parties recognize ample space for the issues of ecological and energy transition. Mas País, in particular, makes it a defining issue of its identity profile. Emphasis is placed on the environmental dimension by referring to both the indications of scientific communication on the danger of "serious and irreversible" effects and the social pressure of collective movements (UP 2019E). The energy transition is thus presented as an environmental necessity (Mas País 2019) and an opportunity that can "pave the way for other necessary transformations in the territorial, ecological and economic fields" (UP 2019E). They speak of a "just transition," understood as a means to help achieve social justice (Mas País 2019, 4) or as a strategy in which the costs should be shouldered by multinationals and big property, with the guarantee of the creation of new jobs in the same territories (Podemos 2019E). Transition is also portrayed as a strategy of democratising the energy sector and empowering communities and citizens over large oligopolistic companies in the sector (UP 2019E). In the pre-war context, the energy issue in the Psoe programme is not particularly relevant and is placed in the frame of eco-modernism, despite some nuances. For the Psoe, the fight against climate change represents 'a social and economic urgency' (Psoe E2019,16). Transition is counted among the objectives of 'democratic regeneration' to be achieved by 'practising political dialogue' and is often associated with the objectives of economic and social modernisation (Psoe E2019). The Psoe, therefore, draws on the technological imaginary and presents itself as a conciliatory force capable of building agreements between different territories and social partners in order to decrease polarisation and by claiming the achievements already obtained during its government.

In its programmes for the 2019 general and European elections, the PP tackles the energy issue by referring to all three dimensions of the trilemma, but emphasising above all the economic one. Most

of the proposals focus on Spain's economic development, technological capacity and innovation. The transition is linked, for example, to a sustainable touristic offer (PP 2019N, 21) and is more generally described as an opportunity for 'el crecimiento económico y la creación de empleo' (PP 2019E, 31). In 2019, Vox devotes only one point to the energy issue, reconnecting it mainly to Spain's self-sufficiency (Desarrollar un Plan de la Energía con el objetivo de conseguir la autosuficiencia energética de España sobre las bases de una energía barata, sostenible, eficiente y limpia) (Vox 2019, 18). In the European elections, there is only a brief section on the environment in which the issue of agriculture and hunting is mainly discussed.

While Vox's programme does not articulate other dimensions of the energy issue, the other parties also develop problem-solving dimensions and they do so in a coherent manner with the theoretical premises.

The radical left shows very ambitious energy targets and social measures to ensure universal access to energy. Both Mas País and Podemos propose an energy mix that in a relatively short time favours a production based exclusively on renewables, completely abandoning coal-based production and nuclear power in 2025 (Up E2019, 57), reaching 100 per cent renewables by 2040 (Up E2019, 10). The two programmes present an articulated plan to decarbonise the various sectors and proposals aimed at guaranteeing access to a minimum share of energy for the most vulnerable (Uo 2019, 15; Mas País 2019, 27). The transition becomes the lever for a new industrialisation process based on state intervention, in direct (as producer) (UP 2019, 38) and indirect (as regulator and coordinator) forms. With regard to the direct intervention of the state, the creation of public energy companies and a greater role in industrial policies is proposed, referring several times to the "entrepreneurial state" (Mas País 2019, 7-18). The state becomes the centre of the transition and also directs the private sector in strategic investments, counteracts the large oligopolies and, through the creation of a state agency for the transition, fosters greater coordination in initiatives and bureaucratic simplification for citizens. European and international cooperation is evoked as essential for a successful transition, which, however, requires the pursuit of more ambitious goals.

Psoe proposes the realisation of a just transition and the 'green new deal,' understood as a pact between 'capital, labour and planet' based on 'the development of maximum efficiency in the use of natural resources, less polluting technologies, less impact on biodiversity', avoiding possible negative effects on investment and labour (Psoe E2019, 42). The protection of the most vulnerable strata is ensured through the provision of special bonuses and through the strengthening of the European Just Transition Fund, but excluding direct public intervention measures (Psoe E2019, 18). The party advocates the closure of coal and nuclear plants and the accelerated development of renewable energies. In the European context, the development and pursuit of energy transition goals are also linked to security aspects for both Spain and the EU.

In its discussion of the energy issue, the PP devotes more space to the problem-solving dimensions compared to the previous dimensions, enumerating (especially in the programme for the Europeans) a series of measures to be implemented. The party's energy strategy is typically pragmatic, envisaging the approval of a National Energy and Climate Plan reflecting European objectives, based on an energy mix that ensures security but also meets the needs of consumers (2019 N). This approach to the transition is described as 'ambitious but realistic' (PP E2019, 30). The result is an energy mix project, which in some ways also recalls aspects of the eco-nationalist frame: in fact, alongside the promotion of renewable energies, measures for the collection and storage of coal are also envisaged (PP E2019, 30), the promotion of a European energy market is accompanied by the pursuit of a differentiation of energy channels to protect against external threats.

## 7. The energy transition in party manifestos after the Ukrainian conflict

In the aftermath of the conflict in Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis, both in Italy and in Spain, there have been significant changes in the way the parties address the energy issue in their programmes.

There is generally increased importance of the issue in terms of extent and articulation in political manifestos. However, while the radical left in both countries already had a highly developed energy agenda in the pre-war elections, the centre-left and right-wing parties are adapting by expanding the space given to the issue.

Most significantly, the eco-nationalist frame develops to a level of articulation that parallels the other two. Lega, FdI and Vox now make references to all relevant dimensions of the frame: national security, opportunities for national advancement, defence and use of national resources, and the safeguard of national sovereignty in a context of international competition.

There is also significant change on the left, where SI is joined by M5S and PD; the latter appears to abandon the last remnants of the eco-modernist frame which it still maintained in 2022 and move fully towards the sustainability frame. Similarly, also the PSOE in Spain emphasises aspects of the sustainability frame, especially with regard to the policy instruments. The eco-modernist frame is still adopted by +Europa and FI and the PP; in both countries, however, the centre-right parties make some concessions to the eco-nationalist frame as far as the energy mix is concerned.

### Italy (2022-2024)

More specifically, and again comparing first the problem-setting dimensions of the framing, SI, in coalition with the Greens, further stresses the emergency posed by climate change and the need for swift solutions. The Ukrainian crisis is indicated as a further element demanding rapid decarbonisation. As in the past, the moral evaluation at the base of this conception is the achievement of energy democracy, that is the affordable and stable access to energy for all citizens without financial speculation and negative environmental consequences, and the guarantee of a more peaceful international environment (2024).

The party that comes closest to SI is M5S which, as was mentioned earlier, has evolved over the years to a more leftist identity, following the governing coalition with the PD in 2020-2021, the new leadership under Giuseppe Conte and the departure of some of the more right-wing members. This ideological change is reflected also in its full adherence to the sustainability frame: energy policy is defined as an environmental priority and the Ukraine crisis and its effects on prices is described as a stimulus to pursue rapid decarbonization at the European level.

With reference to the problem-setting dimensions of the frame, PD moves away from the eco-modernist frame towards the sustainability frame. This partial shift is in line with a more general strategy by the party leadership to radicalise conflict with the right-wing, proposing a dichotomy between its “determination to make the fight against climate change a great engine for the relaunch of the country” and the short-sightedness of the right that “continues to choose the black of fossil fuels and thus condemn us to disaster” (PD 2022, 5). The justification for the energy transition is expressed in all three aspects of the trilemma, but greater attention to the environmental drive is now discernible: environmental disasters are repeatedly mentioned and the transition is no longer just an economic opportunity but a necessity, and must take social sustainability into account especially in light of the increase in energy prices following the war in Ukraine.

The 2024 EU elections appear to represent a further step towards polarization and the affirmation of a just transition: “a Green Deal with a red heart”, because “social justice and climate justice are inextricably linked” (PD 2024).

In the centre, +Europa emphasises the economic dimension by linking the transition to the achievement of a 'fair and efficient' society.

Within the centre-right coalition, FI grants the least space to the energy issue and confirms the adoption of the economic frame, although with increased emphasis on security aspects. It emphasises that environmental protection is exclusively achieved through 'support for research and innovation' (FI 2022, 24).

National security is rather the characterising feature of the manifestos of Lega and FdI.

The former claims that energy policies must guarantee 'the security of the energy system' and the supply of energy 'in necessary quantities and accessible to households and businesses in a continuous and stable manner' (Lega 2022, 45). Moreover, interweaving national and territorial dimensions which are relevant to the party's identity, it claims that energy policies must 'return value to the inhabitants of the territories' (Lega 2022, 43). While not denying the need to combat climate change, it states that a transition should not be pursued 'with the environmentalist ideologism' of EU policies, 'but gradually, with a pragmatic approach' to ensure its 'economic' and 'social' sustainability, avoiding the dependence on external producers of renewables technology of Italy and Europe (Lega 2022, 45). Accordingly, the existing Green Deal emerging from the false promises of the left must be scrapped, in favour of a "return to common sense" and a more pragmatic approach to the environment that will not damage the economy (Lega 2024, 5).

FdI presents a more articulated manifesto than in the past, strengthening its adhesion to the eco-nationalist frame. Fdi, like Lega, believes that the impact of the energy transition as envisaged by the EU must be further investigated through a commission to design a sustainable strategy for 'our production system' and to 'prevent possible crises'. The symbolic adherence to the eco-nationalist frame is reinforced by references to relevant figures in Italian history: 'the homeland of Alessandro Volta, of Enrico Mattei and of innovation, must once again play a leading role in the energy field', promoting environmental sustainability and the energy independence of the European continent (FDI 2024, 5) while simultaneously lowering energy costs for companies, local governments and households.

Turning to the problem-solving dimensions of the framing, the full internal consistency of the frames elaborated by the more radical parties - Lega and FdI on the right, SI on the left - is evident.

Lega advocates the development of a national supply chain for the production of renewable energy and the extraction of raw materials. A mix of state and market instruments is envisaged: on the one hand, entrusting the exploration for and extraction of critical minerals to state-owned companies while, on the other, increasing market competition through further liberalisation. As a consequence of the war, hasty, massive development of renewables and the EU-imposed ban on endothermic engines in 2035 are stigmatised as they would facilitate Italian and European dependence on China. Therefore, the emphasising of the eco-nationalist frame leads to a radical change of position on electric cars compared to previous manifestos. The party indicates nuclear power as the long-term solution to combine environmental goals and national sovereignty.

According to FdI, energy policies must pursue 'maximum diversification of foreign supply sources' (FDI 2022, 27) to ensure greater national energy security. In addition, the construction of an 'Italian and European production chain for renewables, grids and storage' must be promoted. (FDI 2022, 27) The proposed energy mix includes renewables, the exploitation of Italian fossil resources and nuclear power. Very few, rather general solutions are formulated but, in order to ensure greater independence from Russia, the party expresses consensus for the strengthening of RepowerEU (FDI 2022, 27). On the opposite side of the political spectrum, SI claims that Italy must "triple" its efforts in reducing GHG emissions and reach carbon-neutrality by 2045 (SI 2022, 2). The realisation of energy democracy requires the convergence between top-down policy and bottom-up prosumerism and a

resilient system free from fossils. A temporary price-cap on gas is proposed, but no investment in oil or gas extraction or nuclear plants is envisaged. European and international cooperation is promoted through partnership in the “Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance”.

Internal coherence also characterises the frames of M5S and +Europa. For M5S, the Ukrainian crisis contributed to the development of a discourse on energy fully consistent with the redefinition of its ideological profile and of its competitive strategy. Its 2022 manifesto indeed includes proposals similar to those of SI and the Greens: the realisation of the transition through renewables, excluding both gas and nuclear power as bridging solutions; decentralised energy production by communities coupled with expansive state support for renewables and a review of environmentally harmful subsidies; a European Green Deal to promote decarbonisation, as well as an Energy Recovery Fund based on EU-bond.

For +Europa, the interpretation of energy policy within a classic neoliberal economic approach is further legitimised: according to their manifesto, indeed, ‘the energy transition must be achieved by making the market work better’ (Radicali 2022, 12). Therefore, the ‘variety of instruments’ needed constantly refers to market efficiency, whether to incentivise the use of renewables or to fight energy poverty. The time targets for the transition are in line with European proposals, and the party’s energy mix includes nuclear power. The European dimension is particularly relevant: proposals include greater integration of the European grid, the adoption of a European cap on gas prices and the strengthening of the energy partnership with Africa to prevent the growing influence of China and Russia.

Some inconsistencies are found in the frames adopted by PD and FI.

The former, while adhering to the sustainability frame in the problem-setting dimensions analysed above, is more cautious with reference to the problem-solving dimensions and especially concerning the timing of the transition which - following a more centrist economic outlook - is anchored to a pragmatic energy mix which appears to further radicalise in the 2024 EU elections. A partial shift towards the sustainability frame is signalled by its exclusion of slowing down the transition and by the proposal of a national plan for energy efficiency and decentralised production through renewables and energy communities. Like SI and M5S, PD refuses nuclear power, but, unlike the two other parties, it promotes LNG terminals and proposes an “anti-NIMBY fund” (PD 2022, 14) to counter local opposition. The EU’s role is seen as central and positive for the transition, but a reform of treaties is envisaged to reduce veto power by individual member states.

FI on the other hand, faced with the energy crisis after the invasion of Ukraine, maintains the eco-modernist frame but emphasises national security significantly more than in the past. Such positioning reflects the attempt to balance its liberal ideological stand with the competitive pressure coming from its allies on the right. It emphasises that environmental protection is exclusively achieved through ‘support for research and innovation’ (FI 2022, 24) and that clean energy is also good for European security (2024). Coherently, the proposed energy mix is varied and includes ‘clean’ nuclear power, biofuels, renewables and the doubling of domestic gas production to compensate for reduced imports from Russia. FI advocates market instruments and simplified bureaucracy for the implementation of renewables and, unlike the other right-wing parties, proposes a windfall tax on energy companies.

The 2024 European elections seem to signal a general alignment of each in their attitude towards the Green Deal. Parties of the centre-left are aligned in their defence of the European Green Deal, openly citing attacks from the right, with SI and M5S calling for more ambitious changes. All centre-right parties, on the other hand, propose significant changes to the European Green Deal, considering it dangerous for European security in terms of economic and social sustainability and inspired by ideological and radical environmentalism.

### **Spain (2023 - 2024)**

In the manifestos of Sumar and Podemos (2024), transition is used as a paradigm of overall transformation that is mentioned in a special section (Sumar 2024) and as a policy goal in other sections as well. For the radical left, the war does not diminish the emphasis on the environmental dimension of the transition but, on the contrary, urges increasing the resilience of the country through the transition (Sumar 2023, 36). The 'just ecological transition' is defined as the process of social reorganisation aimed at 'guaranteeing a life with dignity for all people, on a planet with limits that we have already surpassed' and represents the opportunity 'to make Spain a more resilient country, create employment, modernise our industry, improve our competitiveness and prepare for the future' (Sumar 2023, 36). The vision of transition of the radical left, therefore, continues to intertwine issues of social justice, industry and democratisation with the primacy of the environmental dimension. Transition is described as a strategy to 'build quality jobs', to promote a new process of industrialisation in order to make Spain a 'green industrial power' and increase the country's competitiveness (Sumar 2023, 43), concentrating investment in the most interior and abandoned areas (Sumar 2023, 38). The echoes of the war in Ukraine, however, also seem to be reflected in an increased attention given to the positive consequences of the transition on the country's autonomy (variously declined) (Sumar 2023.44-139 - 165). Finally, the transition to renewables is linked to the democratisation goals by encouraging citizen participation through forms of self-consumption (Sumar 2023, 45-46) and the recovery of European sovereignty (Podemos 2024, 75).

Psoe adheres to the sustainability frame, although the environmental dimension is closely intertwined with those of economic efficiency and competitiveness. Psoe interprets the energy transition as a way "to preserve [resource] availability for the future and generate added value within our production model" (Psoe 2023, 72). Transition-related added value is defined as the ability of the transition to generate innovation, next-generation industry, quality jobs and greater energy independence (Psoe 2023, 72). Psoe constructs its proposal for future policy based by claiming the success of measures taken in government, such as 'greater penetration' of renewable energies (Psoe 2023,19) and the promotion of strategic projects capable of favouring Spanish leadership in the productive sector of 'renewable energies, green hydrogen and storage' (Psoe 2023,20) as well as the containment of energy prices through action in Europe (the Iberian solution) and measures to help families (Psoe 2023, 17-74), which it describes as part of a plan for a "just transition". A just transition "leaves no one behind" (PSOE 2024), and just like in the PD manifesto, is a "green agenda with a red heart". The future national legislature and EU parliament majority are presented as those in which the project of productive transformation towards green industry will be consolidated. PSOE mentions a diverse mosaic of policy actors associated with different proposals: a role for the public sector is envisaged in regulation (market reform) and investment (entrepreneurial state), directing private investment but also leaving room for the participation of citizens as decision-makers (Psoe 2023,88) and prosumers (Psoe 2023, 66-74). On the international front, Psoe claims national and international leadership (climate diplomacy) (Psoe 2023,87) that would foster the achievement of ambitious targets and commits to working towards increasing international targets (Psoe 2023,87). With respect to the EU, there is a whole paragraph entitled 'Spain, engine of Europe. A strong Europe for a strong Spain' (Psoe 2023, 259) in which numerous proposals for greater "European energy sovereignty" which focus on energy capacity, renewables and the European energy market (Psoe 2023, 260); these aspects are further stressed in the EU manifesto, where "more EU" is the solution to fight climate deniers thanks to continuity in investments through the Recovery and resilience facility (PSOE 2024)

In the case of PP, the energy issue covers more space within the 2023 programme (which is also broader than the previous one), being treated in the first section 'crecer de forma sostenible' (PP 2023, 15) but is virtually absent in the 2024 EU manifesto. Even more than in 2019, the proposals on energy in 2024 are included in a discourse of self-promotion as a reliable, reformist party, capable of reviving the country's economy through 'sensible, moderate, efficient and reliable policies' (PP 2023, 12) after

a phase that is considered declining. To the income support policies introduced by the PSOE-led government, the PP juxtaposes economic growth proposals aimed at dynamising the economy in the European and international context. The energy sector is part of this project, it is one of the key pillars for economic development that at this stage, in the face of climate change, is intended to be sustainable and in line with the objectives set at European level (PP 2023, 27). The main objective, both in 2023 and in 2024, is therefore economic growth without forgetting the demands of climate change and the containment of energy prices. Transition is seen as an opportunity to be pursued in a composite energy strategy. Social sustainability is mainly interpreted in relation to the distribution of costs among the various organised economic interests, in particular agriculture.

Also in the manifestos of Vox in 2023 and 2024 the energy issue is extensively addressed, with perfect adherence to the eco-nationalist frame. The party speaks of a green España and the need to valorise its resources and landscape beauty (Vox 2023, 107). Among the moral evaluations that legitimise its position is the idea that the protection of the natural heritage must be compatible with the economic development and welfare of the Spanish people. This conception is contrasted with what the party calls “a radical ecologist agenda” (Vox 2023, 107) or a “climate religion” (Vox 2023, 110) inspired by “globalist elites” (Vox 2024, 22), which is characteristic of both the Spanish government and European institutions, and which impoverishes the Spanish population and territories. The energy issue is thus embedded in a dramatic description of the national economy's performance. In particular, the climate change and energy regulations introduced by the socialist government are considered to be at the origin of the suffocation of Spanish sovereignty through the “demoliciones de centrales energéticas y prohibiendo la exploración y el aprovechamiento de nuestros propios recursos naturales” (VOX 2023, 115). Vox is similarly critical towards the EU Green deal, which “caused an artificial increase in energy prices” and favoured the erosion of the energy sovereignty of Spain and an increase of its dependence on foreign supply (Vox 2024, 22). All this, according to the party, benefits Morocco and China, which profit from the relocation of Spanish factories and power plants (VOX 2023, 115).

It is with this programme, and above all with its policy proposals, that Vox stands out from all other parties, showing a hostile approach to climate change mitigation measures. In particular, it proposes the repeal of the Climate Change Law and the whole Green Deal which, from its point of view, prevent the exploitation of the country's resources, shifting the burden of the ecological transition onto the Spaniards, criminalising farmers; it advocates the inclusion of the concept of 'energy sovereignty' and the revision of emission quotas established at European level or, again, the abandonment of the Paris Agreement, and finally envisaging increased controls for the installation of renewable energy macro-plants. Finally, Vox proposes a series of measures, all described as aimed at guaranteeing Spain's energy sovereignty and reducing dependence on foreign countries. The energy transition and the use of renewable energies are therefore considered strategic options within an energy mix in which nuclear power stands out, but where all other sources and forms of energy production also are included. In this regard, for example, it promises to "prevent the closure of industrial and energy plants" by rejecting the so-called "new climate religion". The ecological conversion of the economy is not excluded but is described as a process of progressive and gradual adaptation, which does not jeopardise the employment of Spanish citizens and the national interest due to what is defined as a "new climate religion". National planning will guarantee national sovereignty, as will the re-establishment of gas routes from North Africa.

PP places its proposal in a framework of European and Atlantic cooperation but claims greater protagonism for Spain in the EU debate and ultimately envisages greater collaboration with North Africa and the Middle East. The energy strategy presented by the party is consistent with the previous dimensions and is centred around the energy mix based on support for renewables but also for other energy assets, such as nuclear. Ample space is given to economic competition, but by emphasising typical aspects of the eco-nationalist frame, an incisive role of the state is also envisaged; among other

measures to reduce energy costs, PP promises to negotiate more feasible targets for the EU “Farm to fork” strategy.

## 8. Concluding remarks

Energy transition is today a relevant issue in the Italian and Spanish party debate. In recent years and, in particular, since the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it has become the object of a discursive clash, assuming increasing space in the parties' proposals. The analysis shows that there is no single hegemonic frame, but that the conflicting aspects of the energy trilemma underpin competing frames centred on environmental, economic or security priorities. This diachronic comparison shows that the energy issue has been progressively integrated within proposals reflecting each party's position and ideological profile in the two national contexts and has grown increasingly consistent with the proposed frames (H1). This issue is not external to the classic left-right conflict, but touches upon the value structure of society (the environment, the economy, security), the distribution of costs and benefits between social groups, and the role of the state and EU and international institutions; increased overall polarisation appears to involve the energy transition as well.

From a qualitative point of view, it is interesting to note how the most relevant issues in each context are used in the parties' symbolic choices and linked to the imaginary of the transition. In the Spanish context, for example, the left devotes ample space to the impact of the transition on gender issues, while all parties link the transition to the long-standing problem of the crisis of internal areas and inequality between territories. With respect to this last element, all parties except Vox believe that the transition, albeit in different forms, could contribute to the development of the inner regions. Finally, the other major difference in context between Italy and Spain is linked to nuclear energy, which in Italy, where it is not present, is assumed as a fundamental objective for the transition in the energy mix of the parties that adhere to the ecomodernist (excluding the pre-war PD) and eco-nationalist frames,

In both national contexts no party, even on the far right, opposes energy transition as such, but each defines its urgency and desirability by placing it within a broader political project inspired by different principles. The ideological anchoring of the frames proposed by the parties, already discernible in the two elections prior the conflict, was consolidated in the 2022 elections in Italy and in 2023 elections in Spain, when the external shock of the war increased the complexity of the problem, forcing parties to further articulate and define their frames, which, in turn, led to ever greater coherence between the various internal dimensions. The energy crisis thus constitutes an impulse to politicisation by encouraging the greater ideological aggregation of conflicting discursive coalitions (H2).

The analysis presented here contributes to the increasing of knowledge about a case in which the discursive dynamics and symbolic representation of energy issues have hardly been looked at. The proposed reflections may provide the basis for future comparisons with other southern European democracies with similar political and energy policy characteristics.

The analysis of the two contexts, moreover, points to further avenues for future research, including the study of how the competitive variable, across and within political areas and coalitions, affects the degree of adherence to frames and the consistency on the various dimensions. In the Spanish context, for example, the governing parties (Socialists and radical Left) compete both in claiming credit for the achievements of the incumbent executive and in seeking votes from certain sectors of the electorate: this seems to produce in the Socialists, compared to Italy's PD, greater and more radical adherence to the sustainability frame in all dimensions except the first. Psoe, in fact, favours a symbolic declination of transition as a primarily economic issue, and this again may depend on competitive strategies oriented to counter accusations of radicalism and economic incapacity coming

from the right wing parties. Within the right-wing coalitions in the two countries, the internal power relations are different: in Italy they are skewed toward the far right with FdI playing the main role followed by the Lega and Fi, while in Spain PP clearly prevails over Vox. This difference between the two contexts could explain how in Italy the hegemony of the radical right favours a certain relevance of the security dimension even in a party like FI, while in Spain PP builds a more moderate and government-oriented profile on the issue, fully adhering to the ecomodernist frame, distancing itself sharply from the radical Vox approach, and aiming for strategic votes.

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