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## Electoral and Non-Electoral Lessons of the Crisis of Spanish Leftist Alliance Izquierda Unida

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### Abstract:

This paper analyzes the role that Izquierda Unida plays in Spanish politics and tries to assess if the reasons for its downfall are mainly provoked by the Spanish electoral system or if, on the contrary, some other elements outside the electoral mechanisms contribute greatly to the collapse of the electoral support of this party.

### Keywords:

Spain, Izquierda Unida, electoral system, Duverger, Mechanical and Psychological Effects

'The evidence of this crisis has been exposed with all its strength in very negative electoral results that threaten our institutional representation and our social presence, as the defendants of a political space for a necessary, critic, alternative and transformative left. But the crisis is not only electoral, it is also related with the constant loss of members and supporters, in the extension of "barren areas", the stagnation of assemblies and areas and, in the loss of presence and social activity.'<sup>1</sup>

This was the crude beginning of the document that analysed the state of Izquierda Unida (United Left) the largest leftist opposition coalition in Spain after the 2004 elections, when the main leftist party, the Social-democratic PSOE managed to change the Spanish political panorama defeating the governmental Popular Party. In the electoral night of the 2008 voting, the leader of the alliance, Gaspar Llamazares, bitterly complained that "the electoral system vanquished IU" and that Spain had witnessed a "Two-party Tsunami".<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we are going to analyze the role that Izquierda Unida plays in Spanish politics and we will assess if the reasons for its downfall are mainly provoked by the Spanish electoral system or if, on the contrary, some other elements outside the electoral mechanisms contribute greatly to the collapse of the electoral support of this party.

Izquierda Unida was born around the movement opposing the referendum held by the socialist government about the accession of Spain to NATO on the 12 March of 1986. A Civic Platform was created in January 1986 to group all those organisations, movements and individuals that rejected the NATO membership of Spain. Most of the leftist forces rallied behind this platform (including members of the Socialist Party that supported officially the accession despite former political manifestos against when it was still in opposition). The supporters of the "No" option managed to achieve almost 40% of the total of the votes and this spurred the creation of a coalition, IU, that would be the representative of this alternative stream in the Spanish left. Izquierda Unida referred to

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<sup>1</sup> 'VIII Asamblea Federal Extraordinaria; Manifiesto Político: Para una Nueva Etapa en Izquierda Unida', Izquierda Unida's Website, <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es/doc/1169750156617.pdf>, p. 3, accessed 28 November 2007 [own translation].

<sup>2</sup> Agustín Yanel, 'Llamazares dice Adiós', El Mundo, 10 March 2008, electronic version, <http://www.elmundo.es/papel/2008/03/10/espana/2343050.html>, accessed on the 30 June 2008.

the 'the withering away of the project of change as a consequence of the centrist attitude of the government of the PSOE in its economic policy and his turn to the right in foreign policy and defence'<sup>3</sup> as the element that pushed 'all progressive forces of Spain to look for the bases for a convergence that would lead to an agreement to create a joint electoral platform for the legislative elections of 22 June 1986.'<sup>4</sup> Despite the fact that IU was a coalition of multiple parties such as the Communist Party of the Peoples of Spain (PCPE), Party of Socialist Action (PASOC), Republican Left (IR), Progressive Federation (FP), or the Humanist Party (PH); the main core of IU was constituted (around 80% of the members of IU were affiliated of the PCE) by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and its leader, Gerardo Iglesias, occupied the position of General Coordinator of the coalition.

The PCE had been the main reference of the radical left in the Spanish political scenario receiving more than 9.3% of the votes in the 1977 general elections, 10.7 in 1979; however, the internal dissent and the rise of a PSOE as a force with enough electoral support as to win the elections in 1982, provoked that the PCE received only 4% of the total of the votes. The coalition IU was the window of opportunity that the leaders of the PCE were waiting for in order to refound a real leftist alternative to the PSOE. Even if in the 1986 elections the results were not spectacular with 4.6 of the votes, they manage to almost double the number of seats (7 in 1986 for 4 in 1982) in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament. In the next elections, they were able to increase the electoral support to almost 10% until the 2000 elections when they fell below 6% again. In the 2004 elections the results were far from satisfactory since their support did not reach to 5% receiving only 5 seats in the parliament that is the worst result since 1982. In 2008, the electoral catastrophe deepened with levels of support dropping to a historical 3.80% and only two seats in the lower chamber of the parliament.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this paper will be to analyse the extent to which the Spanish electoral legislation can be considered the fundamental reason for the electoral collapse of the coalition as some voices within IU tend to suggest. Our working hypothesis is that despite it is clear that the electoral norms in Spain tend to facilitate the success of two main parties at the national level, making very difficult for a third force to receive a critical mass

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<sup>3</sup> 'Documento del Acuerdo Político que Fundó Izquierda Unida', Izquierda Unida's Website, p. 1 <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es/doc/1169749294628.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2007 [own translation].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Results of elections in Spain collected from the website of the Spanish Ministry of Interior, [www.elecciones.mir.es](http://www.elecciones.mir.es), accessed 28 November 2007.

of votes that would allow it to become a significant parliamentary force; the electoral law in itself does not explain all the difficulties of IU to consolidate as the third Spanish political force since 1977. In addition to the electoral dimension, it is crucial to add other variables to explain the rise and the current demise of the coalition IU.

The literature on the effects of the electoral laws in the transformation of the electoral preferences of the individuals that conform a political community, into a given distribution of parliamentary seats that reflects the balance of powers among the different political options, is extremely rich. Especially after 1950, a great number of scholars have tried to analyse the keys of the relation between electoral laws, electoral systems and the consolidation of party systems.<sup>6</sup> Maurice Duverger was the scholar that somehow was able to focus the debate with his work *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* where he established what we can define as sociological laws. For Duverger,

'1. Proportional representation encourages a system of parties that are multiple, rigid, independent, and stable (except in the cases of popular emotion).

2. The majority system with two ballots encourages a system of parties that are multiple, flexible, dependent and relatively stable (in all cases).

3. The simple-majority single-ballot system with alternation of power between major independent parties.'<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Duverger established a direct relation between the electoral model and the output of the elections. The influence of the electoral system acts, according to Duverger, in two different directions. First, it has a mechanical effect; that is, different ways of transforming electoral preferences into seats in an assembly has a direct effect on the number of parties that will be present in the parliament. Second, a psychological effect, related with the calculations made by voters that would most cast their votes for parties and candidates that have real possibilities to achieve a seat.

Duverger's position on the dual effects (mechanical and psychological) of electoral received hard criticisms from other authors. Focusing on the mechanical dimension, some

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<sup>6</sup> There were earlier attempts to look at the relation between the mode of election and the result of the election as could be the cases of Droop or Ashworth in United Kingdom or Finer, Hermens and Meyer as noted in Juan Rial, 'Leyes Sociológicas de Duverger' in *Diccionario Electoral of the Interamerican Instituto of Human Rights*, [http://www.iidh.ed.cr/BibliotecaWeb/PaginaExterna.aspx?url=/BibliotecaWeb/Varios/Documentos/red\\_diccionario/leyes%20sociologicas%20de%20maurice%20d.doc](http://www.iidh.ed.cr/BibliotecaWeb/PaginaExterna.aspx?url=/BibliotecaWeb/Varios/Documentos/red_diccionario/leyes%20sociologicas%20de%20maurice%20d.doc), accessed 2 December 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, 1954), pp. 204-5 as quoted in Virigílio Afonso da Silva, 'Duverger's Laws: Between Social and Institutional Determinism' in *European Journal of Political Research*, n. 45, 2006, p. 33.

scholars noted that the analysis made by Duverger was too simple and it was necessary to take into consideration some other elements apart from the majority-proportional character of the electoral system. Thus, Rae stressed the need of including other variables in the analysis of the electoral law such as the size of the parliament, the size of the electoral district or the number of existing district to get an accurate picture of what are the real effects of the electoral legislation.<sup>8</sup> Other authors also demand the redefinition of the concept proportional measuring the proportionality of the different electoral formulas that are grouped under the label "proportional representation". That is the case of Giovanni Sartori that demands to leave aside the dialectic majority-proportional representation and transform it into a strong-week electoral system.<sup>9</sup>

The second group of critics attacks Duverger psychological approach to electoral motivations. One of the earliest critics, Grumm, indicated that it is not correct to think of electoral systems as institutions that define party systems but, on the contrary, electoral systems adapt to the sociological conditions of the society that instates them.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the electoral system cannot chain politically the representation to patterns decided before by political leaders but, on the contrary, electoral systems are products tailored for each society's circumstances. We can use the metaphor of a group of workers trying to dig a small artificial channel to redirect the water, but when heavy rain takes place, the running water will return to its original course. This sociological approach to the weight of electoral laws in political systems challenges the rational choice mechanism hinted behind Duverger's approach as Norris states.<sup>11</sup> Groups that are sociologically well rooted cannot be expelled from the party system simply by the action of an electoral law. The notion of

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas W. Rae, *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Sartori defined strong electoral system as the one that has notorious constraining effects on the number of parliamentary parties (and not necessarily just majority electoral system) and those, weak electoral systems, that do not shape so strongly the electoral results. See Giovanni Sartori, 'The Party Effects of Electoral Systems' in Larry Diamond (ed.), *Political Parties and Democracy* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 90-107.

<sup>10</sup> Grumm maintains that "PR is not a result rather than a cause of the party system in a given country", in John G. Grumm, 'Theories on Electoral Systems' in *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, num. 4, 1958, p. 375.

<sup>11</sup> 'The logic of rational-choice institutionalism is both powerful and attractive, with a seductive elegance and a parsimonious Ockham's razor capable of cutting through the swathe of complexities in understanding human behavior [...]. Yet, of course, it is recognized widely that the rational calculus of rewards may have limited impact, for multiple reasons. Deep-seated and habitual patterns of behavior may persist unaltered, frustrating the dreams of electoral reformers' in Pippa Norris, *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (West Nyack: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p 16.

political cleavage, as a concept that helps to understand the political structuration of the different human communities is relevant here. Rokkan and Lipset<sup>12</sup> refer to the existence of lines of division (cleavages) that divide societies in groups and that are the seed of the development of party systems that are stable in time. Thus, the foundations of the party system are not the electoral formulas chosen, but the internal configuration of the society that will compete in elections along these existing lines.

However, these two different approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As Amorim Neto and Cox point out, 'to assert that social structure matters to the formation and competition of parties [...] does not imply that electoral structures do not matter. [...] Similarly, to assert that electoral structure affects party competition in important and systematic ways does not imply that the social structure is irrelevant.'<sup>13</sup> The two schools of thought, the institutionalist and sociological approaches are going to give different weight to each of the variables but, in our opinion, it is necessary to consider both perspectives to be able to make an accurate description of the processes that take place in a political community and that result in the conformation of a given party structure.

Thus, following this holistic approach, we are going to analyse both the electoral-institutional dimension (how the electoral system limits the chances of IU to achieve good result in the Spanish general elections) and the societal dimension (how IU is being unable to mobilise the Spanish electorate and to appear as a clear alternative to the other two main political forces).

### **The Spanish Electoral Legislation and the Two-Party System**

Assessing the Spanish electoral legislation from a formal perspective, a superficial analysis could lead to think that Spain belongs to the group of countries that have adopted proportional representation models. If it is true that Spain applies the D'Hondt formula for the allocation of seats in the different electoral districts, analysing from that global perspective the electoral legislation, we can say that there are pro-majoritarian dynamics that should make us reconsider the initial statement.

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<sup>12</sup> Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, 'Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: an Introduction' in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: The Free Press, 1967) as referred in Carlos Jalali, 'Old cleavages in new democracies: The consolidation of Portuguese electoral behaviour since 1974', Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, Papers of the Conference 2005 on Electoral Behaviour and Political Attitudes, <http://www.ics.ul.pt/agenda/comportamentoeleitoral/pdf/CarlosJalali.pdf>, accessed 4 December 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Octavio Amorim Neto and Gary W. Cox, 'Electoral Institutions, Cleavage Structures and the Number of Parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 41, n. 1, 1997, p. 151.

The origins of the current Spanish electoral law can be found in the Law 1/1977 that created the "Law for the Political Reform". This law attempted to establish the bases for a peaceful transformation of the political institutions that operated under the regime of the General Francisco Franco and prepare the country for the first competitive elections that would give birth to a real democratic regime. In its transitory order number one, this decree established the future bases of the electoral system in Spain: "a congress made up by three hundred and fifty members elected and two hundred and seven senators, four in each province and one more for each insular province and two for Ceuta and Melilla."<sup>14</sup> It also indicated that 'the elections to the Congress would be inspired by proportional representation criteria, according to the following bases: 1. corrective mechanisms will be introduced in order to avoid inconvenient fragmentation in the Chamber [...], 2. the electoral district will be the province, establishing an initial minimum number of Deputies for each of them'.<sup>15</sup> This law, that was submitted to referendum to increase its legitimacy<sup>16</sup> was accepted by the Spanish people and completed by the Royal decree-law of 18 March 1977. This electoral law built over the foundations laid by the Law for the Political Reform. It regulated the procedural aspects of the elections but it included three very important substantial elements. First, the number of seats that each of the provinces elected. This is a vital element, however, the Law 1/1977 created a general framework due to the fact that had mentioned explicitly the existence of minimum number. That implied a very reduce space to manoeuvre. Second, the electoral formula to allocate the votes. The government selected the highest average D'Hondt model. Third, the threshold that the Law for the electoral reform mentioned was kept at the 3% per district.<sup>17</sup> This decree, as Gunther points out, was 'the product of a complex set of deliberations, involving discussions between Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez and representatives of various opposition forces. These decisions involved trade-offs and compromises among a wide

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<sup>14</sup> 'Ley 1/1977 para la Reforma Política', Boletín Oficial del Estado, n. 4, 5 January 1977, p. 170-1 [own translation].

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 171 [own translation].

<sup>16</sup> It is important to remember that at that time there was clear division among those that represented the francoist forces, reformers-hardliners, and that the government of Adolfo Suárez needed the legitimacy offered by a popular referendum to neutralise the influence of the most conservative sectors in the institutions of the state. See for instance, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 93-5

<sup>17</sup> 'Real Decreto 20/1977 de 20 de marzo 1977 sobre Normas Electorales', Boletín Oficial del Estado, n. 70, 23 March 1977, pp. 6584-600.

variety of both partisan and broader societal concerns. The choice of an electoral system in advance of Spain's first democratic election was of particular great significance from the standpoint of the legitimacy and viability of the new regime itself.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the mode of electoral competition was decided in Spain before the political parties had the chance to measure their strength in the electoral arena but, at the same time, was a product of the discussions between the government of Suárez (and Suárez had the support of the King Juan Carlos) and the opposition parties. Everyone knew of the difficult equilibrium of Spanish politics and that time, and many parties had to be generous because being maximalist and trying to pull too hard from the rope could break it.<sup>19</sup> Elections in June 1977 were celebrated under this model and despite the fact that these elections created a constitutional assembly the Constitution maintained the model that the 1977 royal decree had established. The article 68 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 proclaims that the Congress should have between 300 and 400 members, that the electoral district must be the province and that an electoral law must regulate a minimum number of deputies for each of the provinces.<sup>20</sup> This is a model that replicates the one already drafted in the Law for the Political Reform.

The royal-decree of 1977 is going to be substituted by the Organic Law 5/1985 of the General Electoral Regime (LOREG)<sup>21</sup> that polishes the model already installed by the electoral practice. The minimum number of members in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament is reduced to two per province, but this does not change much the nature of the electoral system in Spain. Regarding the Senate, each province selects four senators

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Gunther, 'Electoral Laws, Party Systems, and Elites: The Case of Spain' in *American Political Science Review*, vol. 83, n. 3, 1989, p. 837.

<sup>19</sup> This was the case of the Communist Party of Spain, PCE, that favoured a single district PR model. But first of all, the PCE was not legal (they achieved this on 9 April 1977) yet and that limited its bargaining power. Second, they know that pressing too hard on the government could make Suárez feel to be substituted by a hardliner bringing Spain closer to an scenario of violent confrontation. See, '25 Años del Referendum: Un Instante Crítico en la Historia de España', *Diario El Mundo del Siglo XXI*, 16 December 2001, [http://www.elmundo.es/2001/12/16/espana/1085364\\_imp.html](http://www.elmundo.es/2001/12/16/espana/1085364_imp.html), accessed 4 December 2007.

<sup>20</sup> *Constitución Española* (Madrid: Editorial Civitas, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ley Orgánica 5/1985 de 19 de junio del Régimen Electoral General', *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 20 June 1985, pp. 19110-34.

and, then, each autonomous community will receive one senator and one extra per each million inhabitants in that territory.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Spanish Electoral System: Mechanical and Psychological Effects**

Thus, if we evaluate globally the Spanish electoral system since 1977 it is necessary to admit that despite it belongs formally to the group of countries that have adopted models of proportional representation, the overall result is that the Spanish electoral model tends to reward the two largest electoral options.

First of all, we can say that D'Hondt electoral formula is considered one of the least proportional among the PR models. According to Payne, 'the D'Hondt formula tends to be the least proportional, even relative to other divisor systems, and systematically favors the larger parties.'<sup>23</sup> In general, it is accepted that D'Hondt series of divisors tends to diminish the chances of smaller parties to have access to the parliament. This is particularly evident if we compare D'Hondt with Saint Lagüe, Saint Lagüe modified, largest remainder Hare and Droop. It is also true that there is one element that can decrease the capacity of D'Hondt system to expel minority parties from the parliament and that is when the magnitude of the electoral districts is big. Thus, Rae suggests that this takes place when the districts select 7 or more representatives.<sup>24</sup> The case is that the Spanish electoral districts tend to be small. The average size of the Spanish electoral district is 6.7 (6.9 if we exclude Ceuta and Melilla that elect only one each); however, 32 of the electoral districts are below this mark (30 provinces plus the two autonomous cities) and 5 more are in the border with 7. Only 6 of the provinces elect 10 or more representatives: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Alicante and Malaga.

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<sup>22</sup> The mode of elections of the senators representing the autonomous communities is indirect, since the regional parliaments are in charge of selecting this representatives according to their territorial laws. The islands and Ceuta and Melilla are also exceptions to the general rule since they do not elect four senators but a number that ranges from 1 to 3, *ibid.*, art. 164, p. 19128.

<sup>23</sup> J. Mark Payne, *Democracies in Development: Politics and Reform in Latin America* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 2002) p 90.

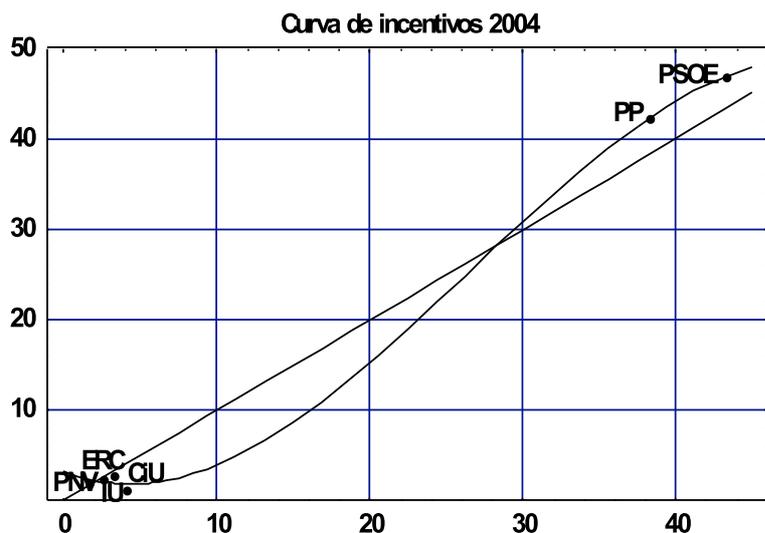
<sup>24</sup> Douglas W. Rae, *The Political Consequences...*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

**Table 1:**

<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Number of Seats</b>	<b>Number of Votes</b>	<b>Votes per Seat</b>
United Left (IU)	5	1284081	256816
Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG)	2	208688	104344
Aragonesist Union (CHA)	1	94252	94252
Convergence and Union (CiU)	10	835471	83547
Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)	8	652196	81524
Basque Union (EA)	1	80905	80905
Canarian Coalition (CC)	3	235221	78407
Spanish Soc. Workers' Party (PSOE)	164	11026163	67232
Popular Party (PP)	148	9763144	65967
Navarre Yes (NaBai)	1	61045	61045
Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	7	420980	60140

Source: Ministry of Interior, own elaboration

In the 2004 elections, the average of the cost in terms of votes for a member of the parliament was 73428. However, this figure hides a reality: in the 2004 elections, in Madrid it costs 99514 votes a seat in the parliament and in Barcelona 97831; while in Soria it costs only 19362, in Melilla 27090 or in Ceuta 35601. One could argue that this does not represent an inequality if all the parties are evenly represented. However, the reality is that some parties are going to benefit of having strong support in the low-populated rural areas, while parliamentary representation it is more difficult for the parties that received most of their support in highly-populated urban and industrial territories. It is quite interesting to analyse the expense of each member of the lower chamber of the parliament for the parties that achieved representation in the 2004 elections. In table 1, using the results published by the Ministry of Interior, we have reordered the 2004 results according to the number of votes that cost each party a member of the Congress of Deputies. We can see that the two main parties were below the threshold of the average cost of a member of parliament in terms of votes, only accompanied by Nafarroa Bai and the Basque Nationalist Party. On the other hand, IU is the one that pays a higher price per deputy.

**Figure 1:**

Source: J. Mario Bilbao Arrese <sup>25</sup>

A similar conclusion can be reached if we use the concept of incentive curve. An incentive curve is the Cartesian relation between the percentage of votes that a party receives (axis x) and the percentage of the seats that is able to collect (axis y).<sup>26</sup> As it can be seen in figure 1, the two main parties national parties appear in the positive side of the line, while the rest of the parties are cornered in the left down of the figure below the limit established a fair representation (equal % votes - % seats) with the exception of the Basque Nationalist Party.

Focusing more in the case of Izquierda Unida; this party is only able to achieve parliamentary representation in Barcelona (2), Madrid (2) and Valencia<sup>27</sup>. It is not surprising the fact that these are the three largest electoral districts in Spain. It is a contradiction that these are not the districts in which IU is able to receive their highest electoral support. In fact, official data show that IU received its highest electoral support in Córdoba; however it was not enough to secure parliamentary representation in that circumscription (see table 2).

<sup>25</sup> J. Mario Bilbao Arrese, 'Sistema Electoral y Alternancia en España', Curso de Verano Universidad de Almería, 2006, in <http://www.esi2.us.es/~mbilbao/LeyElectoral.pps>, accessed 4 December 2007.

<sup>26</sup> See J. Mario Bilbao Arrese, 'Ley Electoral y Sistema de Partidos en España', *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, n. 85, 1994, pp. 313-21.

<sup>27</sup> The representation of IU in the Senate is even more limited due to the fact that it has only 2 representatives. One directly elected by the citizens (in Barcelona) and another one belongs to the group that represents autonomic assemblies (for Catalonia). We will focus from here onwards on the Congress due to the different nature of the representation in the Spanish Senate.

IU has raised its voice against the unjust and non-proportional character of the Spanish electoral legislation. In a document titled 'Reflexiones sobre el Valor del Voto en las Elecciones Generales de 2004' the leaders of IU refer to the fact that 'more than 750000 IU votes have been mistreated by the current electoral law. It is necessary to reform the electoral law to make it more "proportional" and satisfy the equation of one person, one vote.'<sup>28</sup> The alternative that IU proposes is simple.

**Table 2:** Votes IU per district and seats

District	% votes	Seats
Córdoba	9.7	0
Vizcaya	8.9	0
Asturias	8.4	0
Álava	7.8	0
Guipúzcoa	7.7	0
Seville	6.7	0
Barcelona	6.5	2
Madrid	6.4	2
Valencia	5.4	1

Source: Own elaboration

They think that it is not necessary to change nature of the Spanish electoral law. In fact, they do not propose the substitution of the PR D'Hondt formula but a different application changing the electoral district from province to autonomic community or allowing a higher tier corrector at the national level.<sup>29</sup> IU calculates that simply changing the electoral district from the province to the autonomic community they would have

<sup>28</sup> 'Reflexiones sobre el Valor del Voto en las Elecciones Generales de 2004', Izquierda Unida' Website, p. 9, <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es/doc/1169750407748.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2007.

<sup>29</sup> The leader of Izquierda Unida, Gaspar Llamazares maintains that 'we (IU) have defended a change in the electoral law since the beginning of the mandate of the present parliament, and that they will continue. The main problem is the fact that they only party that would gain with this change and the only ones that will lose would be the two largest parties, and this increases the difficulty of the reform. [...] It could be a change of the circumscription or through a counting of rests at the national level, as it happen in the German model', Pedro Antonio Navarro, 'Entrevista con Gaspar Llamazares', *El Siglo de Europa*, n. 631, 10 January 2005, <http://www.elsiglodeeuropa.es/siglo/historico/Entrevistas/Entrevistas2005/631llamazares.htm>, accessed 11 December 2006.

scored much better results increasing its parliamentary presence 240% (12 MPs instead of 5).<sup>30</sup>

It is evident that the electoral system in Spain tends to expel "mechanically" from the parliament those smaller national parties that are not able to concentrate their electoral support in some of the territories. Nevertheless, the question that we are analysing in this paper is not if the Spanish electoral system reduces the Spanish party system into a two party model but if the crisis of IU in terms of results is directly caused by the electoral system. A second aspect that is worth taking into consideration is the psychological effect that the Spanish electoral system causes to the electors. Leaders of IU tend to refer often to the "useful vote" that makes potential IU voters to change in the last moment their vote and to give it to the only leftist alternative of the Popular Party: the moderate Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (PSOE). This reference to the psychological effect that the electoral system in Spain causes to the leftist voters has become so central that in the new slogan for the 2008 elections IU will make a direct reference to it. IU has just announced the slogan for that campaign: "LlamazarES izquierda útil."<sup>31</sup> A game with words that denounces the desertion of the leftist electorate towards more moderate options that assure that those vote will not be wasted.

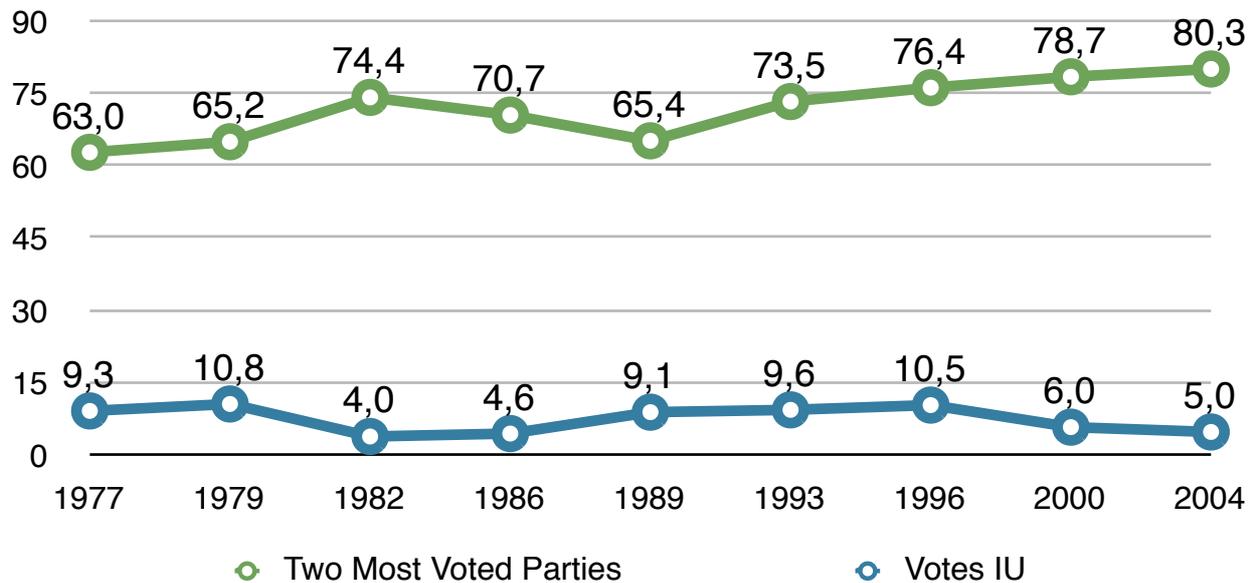
But the question that is relevant for us here is if has it been always like this since 1977. That is, if the current crisis is the product of the mechanical and psychological effects caused by the electoral system or, on the contrary, this is just an element that contributes to the crisis.

When one assesses the political map of the Spanish parliament can find two main parties that are able to collect around 80% of the votes. In figure two we can see the evolution of the percentage of the total votes collected by the two most voted parties and the evolution of the results for IU (PCE, before 1986).

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<sup>30</sup> IU, 'Reflexiones...', op. cit. p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Translated could be something like "Llamazares (is) useful left", this slogan 'tries to mobilise those people with a "leftist spirit" and to identify the federation with the "useful vote" against the rightist Popular Party and the socialdemocratic policies', 'LlamazarES izquierda útil, el lema de IU busca el voto de jóvenes e insatisfechos del PSOE', El Público, 10 december 2007, electronic edition, <http://www.publico.es/026346/lamazares/izquierda/util/lema/iu/busca/voto/jovenes/insatisfechos/psoe>, accessed 5 December 2007.

**Figure 2:** % Votes Two Most Voted Parties-IU

Source: Data from the Spanish electoral Board, own elaboration

In this figure we can see an increasing trend in the percentage of votes that the two main parties are able to collect from 63% in the first democratic elections in 1977 up to 80% in the 2004 elections. However, this increment has not been maintained during all this period in a constant way but, on the contrary, from the year 1982 until 1989 it decreased. On the other hand, IU has been relatively stable collecting around 10% of the votes with two periods in which its support decreased down to 5% (1982-6 and since 2000 elections). The leaders of IU argue that psychological effect move voters to desert IU in the last moment to vote for PSOE in order to defeat the PP, but this argument cannot be sustained. First of all, we cannot see that IU achieves worse results when the PSOE wins the elections. The socialists won in 1982, 1986, 1989, 1993 and 2004. IU suffered bad results in 1982, 1986, 2000 and 2004. In the year 1989 or 1993 the results for IU are good, however, the PSOE won the elections. These are two exceptions that would put into question the hypothesis that IU does worse when a leftist party wins elections.

A second hypothesis could be that IU does worse when the results of the elections are uncertain. This does make sense since those that campaign for the "useful vote" put the stress on the need of not to waste votes in a party that is not going to be elected benefiting an electoral force that is very distant ideologically from those voters. In the years 1979, 1993, 1996 and 2004 the competition PSOE-UCD or PP was tight. Again, IU or

the PCE made good results in 1979, 1993 and 1996 contradicting this second hypothesis. In addition to that some of the electoral disasters of IU 1982, 1986 and 2000 took place in elections in which it was clear before the elections who was going to be the winner (and even very clear that the winner party was going to achieve an absolute majority in the lower chamber of the parliament).

Thus, it is not clear that the "voto útil" can help us to explain the decrease of electoral support and the subsequent crisis of IU. It may well be one factor that contributes to the decline of support, however, there is not enough empirical evidence as to maintain that the psychological effects are directly behind the fall of IU. In our opinion, it is necessary to add other variables in order to understand the diminishing electoral strength of IU. And in this case, those variables cannot be found within the realm of the purely electoral dimension.

### **The Systemic Dimension: Beyond the Electoral Laws**

Once analysed the main effects of the electoral system in Spain from both the perspective of the purely electoral (the mechanical effects) and the consequences in the minds and strategies of the electors (the psychological effects), it is necessary to look for more variables that can help us to explain the decline of IU. Gunther refers to the need to make 'an effort to explore one crucial set of such intervening factors –the perceptions, calculations, strategies, and behavior of party elites, in interaction with the incentive structure created by the electoral law itself.'<sup>32</sup> Gunther considers the role of the political elites central in order to understand the internal dynamics of a political system. In our opinion, the role of the elites of IU is central in order to understand both the rise and the fall of this electoral coalition.

IU since 1986 has had three main general coordinators: Gerardo Iglesias (who won the internal elections in the first and second general assemblies), Julio Anguita (who won in the third, fourth and fifth assemblies) and Gaspar Llamazares that is the current leader and has been elected in the sixth, seventh and the extraordinary eighth assemblies.<sup>33</sup>

Gerardo Iglesias led the coalition from its origins until 1990. Leader of the Communist party he faced the problems derived from the formation of the new coalition and the internal division of the PCE. The results in the elections of 1986 were discreet but

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Gunther, 'Electoral Laws...', op. cit., p. 836.

<sup>33</sup> 'Una Breve Historia de Izquierda Unida', Izquierda Unida Website, <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es/doc/1169749125205.pdf>, accessed 4 December 2007.

a bit better than in the 1982 elections.<sup>34</sup> It is true that these results were considered a failure by some analysts since IU could not rally behind their candidates most of the support of those who vote "No" in the 1986 referendum. The leadership of Iglesias was directed inwards, trying to establish the bases of an electoral coalition that could work united, rather than outwards establishing a clear line of confrontation or alliances with the major Spanish parties. The leadership of Iglesias was questioned within the PCE where he began to be openly questioned as a figure that was not able to project a media image attractive enough.<sup>35</sup> The XII Congress of the PCE implied the substitution of Iglesias for Julio Anguita that at the same time was going to play the leading role in the coalition IU. In February 1989 IU elected him as general coordinator and this is going to imply a radical change in the electoral strategy of IU. If Iglesias was mostly concerned by the internal fractionalization of the coalition, Anguita was more focused on the need of IU to present itself as an alternative in Spanish politics. Not a marginal force but a political party that would play an important role in Spanish politics. He was convinced that it was possible to be a central political actor since IU managed to do that in Andalusia, where in the elections to the regional parliament he was able to collect more than 17% of the votes. In the 1989 campaign, the slogan of IU was very explicit about the goals of the coalition: 'IU, we are the alternative.'<sup>36</sup> IU defended its bid to become a major electoral force. Anguita maintained in that moment that the confrontation of IU in the elections was not against the right but against the socialist party. He spoke when he was elected as the candidate of IU to the presidency of the government about the need of 'overall, confrontation.'<sup>37</sup> The leadership of Anguita is going to be marked by this strategy to confront all the enemies. The electoral results showed the effectiveness of this new strategy. In the 1989 elections IU managed to return the historical line of the 9% and it continued growing up to 10.5% in the 1996 elections. The zenith of the rise of IU was the European Parliament elections

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<sup>34</sup> Especially if we consider the number of seats. IU achieved 7 while the PCE got only 4 in 1982 general elections.

<sup>35</sup> See Luis Enrique Otero Carvajal, 'Izquierda Unidad,: Un Dilema Imposible', en <http://www.ucm.es/info/hcontemp/leoc/Izquierda%20Unida.pdf>, accessed 5 December 2007.

<sup>36</sup> See the electoral poster of IU in <http://www.izquierda-unida.es/afiliacion/galeria/index.html>.

<sup>37</sup> According to the El País, 'he asked IU candidates to be a model of firmness especially after the elections when the temptations of the PSOE snake arrive'; Juan G. Ibáñez, 'Anguita presenta a Izquierda Unida como "alternativa de Gobierno, de Estado y de modelo de sociedad"', El País, 13 Febrero 1989, electronic edition, [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/CASTELLANO\\_CARDALLIAGUET/\\_PABLO/ANGUITA/\\_JULIO/SARTORIUS/\\_NICOLAS/GONZALEZ\\_MARQUEZ/\\_FELIPE/UNION\\_EUROPEA/ESPANA/IZQUIERDA\\_UNIDA/\\_IU/elpepiesp/19890213elpepinac\\_2/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/CASTELLANO_CARDALLIAGUET/_PABLO/ANGUITA/_JULIO/SARTORIUS/_NICOLAS/GONZALEZ_MARQUEZ/_FELIPE/UNION_EUROPEA/ESPANA/IZQUIERDA_UNIDA/_IU/elpepiesp/19890213elpepinac_2/Tes), accessed 5 December 2007, [own translation].

in 1994 with almost 13.5% of the total votes. IU was profiting from the attempt to appear as a party different of the PSOE. Any party was an enemy for IU regardless of being leftist or rightist. Pacts were possible but only negotiating and when IU could put into practice the goals of the electoral program.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the electoral success, the coalition begins to break internally because some sectors accused the leadership of being inflexible paving the way to government for a rightist government due to the erosion that IU was causing to the socialist party. The Popular Party won the general elections and in 1996 and that shocked many members of IU. Internal currents in IU criticised Anguita for doing the "dirty job". This was the case of Nueva Izquierda (new left) that considered that IU could only be in government if they were able to reach agreements with the PSOE.<sup>39</sup> In 1997 internal crisis broke out since members associated to Nueva Izquierda left the coalition and the internal division shattered the coalition in Catalonia and Galicia. Many critics chose to leave the party or were expelled.

The coronary problems of Anguita and the increasing internal opposition to his electoral strategies made him renounce to active politics in 1999. In the 2000 elections, the candidate to the presidency of the government was Francisco Frutos but that was a temporary solution until a new leader would occupy the position of general coordinator.

After Anguita, Gaspar Llamazares was elected general coordinator of IU in 2000. The Popular Party was in government and had an absolute majority in the parliament. Llamazares is going to alter the strategy towards the rest of the political forces. Instead of promoting negotiations carried out ad-hoc after the elections and discussing the compatibilities between the programs, he talks about alliances of the progressive forces. In one of the first interviews after his election as general coordinator he maintained that to offer a hand to the PSOE 'is what a leftist force has to do; to propose a coalition against the PP. Now is time to see if the PSOE wants to stay in the centre or if it prefers to move

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<sup>38</sup> Anguita make very popular the expression "programa, programa, programa". He referred to the fact that if someone wanted a pact with IU, the boundaries of the negotiation were clear: the electoral programs of the coalition.

<sup>39</sup> 'One of the leaders of Nueva Izquierda maintained in 1996 that ' in IU the idea that either we choose to dialogue or we will be permanently in the opposition has slowly spread. People want us [PSOE and IU] united in government [...]. Now the possibility to sit down to discuss what can we do together exists. We must talk with the PSOE', Juan Altable, 'Entrevista con Cristina Almeida', El País, 15 February 1996, electronic version, [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/ALMEIDA/\\_CRISTINA/MADRID/ESPANA/IZQUIERDA\\_UNIDA\\_/IU/ELECCIONES\\_LEGISLATIVAS\\_1996\\_/3-3-1996/Hay/hablar/PSOE/elpepiesp/19960215elpepinac\\_16/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/ALMEIDA/_CRISTINA/MADRID/ESPANA/IZQUIERDA_UNIDA_/IU/ELECCIONES_LEGISLATIVAS_1996_/3-3-1996/Hay/hablar/PSOE/elpepiesp/19960215elpepinac_16/Tes), accessed 5 December 2007 [own translation].

to the left. IU will always search alliances in the left<sup>40</sup> This turn implied a different scenario in Spanish politics with a PP isolated in the right (especially if it was not able to pact reforms or programs with nationalist/regionalist parties) and a converging left that united moderates and radicals with a common goal: to erode the PP and create as many leftist majorities at the different levels of the Spanish political-administrative structure as possible.

This union is explicit in the parliament where IU has voted with the government in the most important legislative proposals<sup>41</sup> sponsored by the government. In fact, since 2004 IU has acted more as an opposition to the opposition than an opposition to the government.

The strategy was only partially successful for IU. Successful because the PP lost the elections of 2004 and in 2008, so the PSOE could form a government, that meant a return to a progressive majority.<sup>42</sup> However, the results for IU were not so positive. In the municipal elections in 2003 continues in the levels of 1999 and in the general elections of 2004 it sinks below 5% as in the European Parliament elections of 2004. In the 2007 municipals again the results were very negative, being far from the 8% of the last two elections. In the last elections, in March 2008, the results confirm this trend: 3.80% of the votes and only 2 seats. The crisis is so deep that some voices talk about the need of dissolving IU and creating a new party that could represent with success the leftist sectors of the Spanish society.

There one element more to add when analysing the effects of the behaviour of elites in the electoral performance of the coalition: the internal unity. Due to the "federal" character of IU, the relation between the federation and the parts that make it up has not been always easy. The internal disunity tends to decrease the chances of success in the elections. In fact, in the early 1980s, the bad results of the PCE were clearly related with the internal fragmentation. IU was still not consolidated as a party from 1986 until 1989 and that somehow exerted a strong influence on the electoral performance in the election

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<sup>40</sup> 'Ahora Hay que Contar con Todos', El País, 30 October 2000, electronic edition, [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/LLAMAZARES/\\_GASPAR\\_/IZQUIERDA\\_UNIDA/Ahora/hay/contar/todos/elpepiesp/20001030elpepinac\\_13/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/LLAMAZARES/_GASPAR_/IZQUIERDA_UNIDA/Ahora/hay/contar/todos/elpepiesp/20001030elpepinac_13/Tes), accessed 5 December 2005 [own translation].

<sup>41</sup> It has voted for the budget two times, and has supported laws the Statute of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, laws in favor of the gay marriages, historical memory, educational reform. See 'Balance del Trabajo del Grupo Parlamentario', Izquierda Unida Website, <http://www1.izquierda-unida.es/doc/1178822043554.pdf>, accessed 5 December 2007.

<sup>42</sup> But just a minority government because IU and the Catalanian Republicans (ERC) did not participate formally in it but they tend to give their parliamentary support for most of the governmental initiatives.

in that period. The coalition was more cohesive from 1989 until 1996, achieving good results. Since 1996 again internal fractionalisation increased, reducing the capacity of the coalition to promote an image of unity. With the election of Llamazares in the troubled assembly of 2000 the situation has not improved much since the coalition has been divided between the those a that "loyal to the traditions of the PCE" and those that are in favor of a new left, less linked to the PCE and closer to the new social movements and more open to collaboration with the PSOE. This fact has been latent since 2000, and its best expressions are existence of candidates that are able to collect a significant number of votes in the IU general assemblies.

To summarize, we can conclude that Izquierda Unida was able to do better in elections when it combined internal unity with an alternative and distinguishable political program. On the contrary, analysing the electoral data, one can state that when approaching to other moderate political families in the left, the transaction of votes from IU to those moderate forces implied a clear decline in the electoral support of the coalition.

### **Conclusion: Electoral Systems, Alliances, Programs and the Dilemma of IU**

We initiated this paper with a quotation from the a internal document of IU in which they admitted the existence of a clear crisis for the coalition and the need of reinvigorating the movement in order to be able to continue existing as a relevant political force. However, in their analysis they tend to consider that source of the their problems in an unfair electoral legislation that pushes IU, as the third national electoral force, outside of the parliament in favor of the two main Spanish political parties. In this paper, we have tried to analyse if this claim, describes well reality of if in the contrary, the electoral dimension is only one of the causes of the crisis of IU.

In order to assess the weight of the electoral system in the crisis of IU we have researched the classic literature on the effects electoral systems over the party system in democratic countries. We have taken into consideration the classic works of Duverger, Rae, Sartori, Rokkan among others and tried to apply them to the Spanish post-1978 case.

On the one hand, we have assessed the most purely electoral dimension. We analysed the Spanish electoral legislation and we looked for the reductive effect in the party system and parliamentary representation.

Secondly, we also examined the strategic voting that could imply that voters would elect not their most favorite force but a political force that had possibilities to win the elections. The existence of sophisticated voting strategies among leftist electors (the "voto

útil" concept) that "steals" electoral support from IU is one of traditional claims of the leaders of this coalition.

We analysed electoral results and confronted them with these two dimensions that we have sketched here. The result is that electoral performance of IU challenges this claims. Electoral results from 1989 until 2000 would contradict the hypothesis that IU is cornered by the electoral system and the psychological effects that it induces among the potential voters of this party.

Thus, it was necessary to introduce another variable in our analysis to enhance the explanatory power of our model. And that element that contributes to unmask the paradoxes of the electoral successes in the 1990s is the elite behaviour, the post-electoral strategies and discourse and the system of alliances. Analysing these new dimension, it can be argued that IU was able to neutralise the "damage" inflicted by the electoral system dynamics if it was able to present itself as a clear distinguishable party that was able to represent their electors' preferences and interests. If, on the contrary, IU was not able to differentiate itself from other political forces, it was then when IU suffered from all the effects associated with the mechanical and psychological effects of the electoral system. Another element that contributed to the collapse was the internal disunity, when IU is fractionalised is when the results tend to be poor.

To conclude then, we can say, that the electoral dimension is vital to understand the electoral crisis of IU, however, it is not enough to explain it entirely. In order to be able to give an interpretation to the rise of the electoral support of the coalition in the elections from 1989 until 1996 it is necessary to introduce the variable of the elite behaviour and the policy choices. Only if we introduce this non-electoral dimension too, we can explain the reality.

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