

# Anatomy of the pro-sovereignty discourse: comparative thematic and terminological analysis of texts by EH Bildu and Sinn Féin

## *Anatomía del discurso soberanista: análisis temático y terminológico comparado de los textos de EH Bildu y Sinn Féin*




**Javier Jaspe Nieto** holds a PhD in Journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid and is a professor of Economic History and Consumer Behavior at ESIC University. He is accredited by ANECA as a *Profesor Contratado Doctor* (Tenure-Track Lecturer). He currently serves as the Director of Research at ESIC University. Professor Jaspe specializes in research and teaching in fields related to social anthropology, the history and sociology of communication, as a member of his university's Humanities Department. To date, he has published scientific articles in journals such as *Ilu*, *Pensamiento*, *European Journal of Innovation Management*, *European Public & Social Review*, *Comunicación y Hombre*, and the *Revista de Pensamiento Estratégico y Seguridad*, among other publications indexed in Web of Science and Scopus. In addition, he is the author of numerous contributions to collective volumes published by McGraw Hill and Dykinson, as well as case studies published by ESIC Editorial.

ESIC University, Spain   
javier.jaspe@esic.university  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5406-5692



**César García Muñoz** I am a communication professor at ESIC University. Before, I was a full professor at Central Washington University (CWU). I specialize in teaching and research on public relations and strategic communication. I also have more than a decade of experience in Europe in the public relations industry for international firms such as Edelman and Pleon. I have published more than 55 peer-reviewed articles, mainly as a single author, in relevant public relations and global communication journals such as *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Inquiry*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Public Relations Journal*, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *Journal of International Communication*, and *International Journal of Sport Communication*, among others. A number of these articles analyze the intersection between public relations, culture, politics, and economics. I have participated in three I+D+i projects financed by Spain's Ministry of Science and Innovation. I have written three books: *American Psique* (2011), *Historia de un estereotipo. Intelectuales españoles en Estados Unidos (1885-1936)* (2009) y *La Opinión Pública en Santayana (Public Opinion in Santayana)* (2006). I have authored several chapters as well on the history of communication in several academic books.

ESIC University, Spain   
cesar.garciamunoz@esic.university  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4866-2970

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### Abstract:

The study dissects the discursive architecture of contemporary left-wing sovereigntism through a comparative analysis of 69 texts (389,531 words) published by EH Bildu and Sinn Féin between 2021 and 2024. By integrating NLP techniques (SpaCy, PhraseMatcher) based on a lexicon of 618 political concepts, frequencies, co-occurrences, and time series were mapped to address two questions: (a) which thematic axes underpin their discourses?; (b) what terminological configuration characterizes them? The results reveal a productive asymmetry: Sinn Féin produces three times the Basque output and covers more than twice the number of domains. EH Bildu concentrates on a normative-identity lexicon while excluding housing and healthcare; Sinn Féin privileges an inclusive-technocratic register and downplays the industrial dimension. Both parties share frameworks of crisis, ethics of power, and public action, while omitting terms linked to their terrorist past, suggesting a convergent strategy of image cleansing and political legitimation. The study fills the theoretical gap on post-conflict left-wing sovereigntism, connecting framing, agenda-setting, and lexical priming with corpus analysis. It thus provides a replicable model to monitor the discursive evolution of contemporary nationalist movements and to facilitate future comparative research in European political communication.

### Keywords:

*Left-wing sovereigntism, terrorism, political communication, lexical analysis, framing, agenda-setting.*

### Resumen:

*El estudio disecciona la arquitectura discursiva del soberanismo contemporáneo de izquierdas mediante un análisis comparado de 69 textos (389.531 palabras) publicados por EH Bildu y Sinn Féin entre 2021-2024. Integrando técnicas de NLP (SpaCy, PhraseMatcher) en base a un lexicon compuesto por 618 conceptos políticos, se mapearon frecuencias, coocurrencias y series temporales para responder a dos cuestiones: a) ¿qué ejes temáticos sostienen sus discursos?; b) ¿qué configuración terminológica los caracteriza? Los resultados revelan una asimetría productiva: Sinn Féin triplica el volumen vasco y cubre más del doble de dominios. EH Bildu concentra un léxico normativo-identitario mientras excluye vivienda y sanidad; Sinn Féin privilegia un registro inclusivo-tecnocrático y relega la dimensión industrial. Ambos partidos comparten marcos de crisis, ética del poder y acción pública, omitiendo términos vinculados a su pasado terrorista, lo que sugiere una estrategia convergente de lavado de imagen y legitimación política. El estudio cubre el vacío teórico sobre la izquierda soberanista post-conflicto, conecta framing, agenda-setting e imprimación léxica con análisis de corpus. Se aporta así un modelo replicable para monitorizar la evolución discursiva de movimientos nacionalistas actuales y facilitar investigaciones comparativas futuras en comunicación política europea.*

### Palabras clave:

*Soberanismo de izquierda, terrorismo, comunicación política, análisis léxico, framing, agenda-setting.*

## 1. Introduction

Sovereignty is one of the most pressing topics in public opinion. According to the latest CIS barometer (2025), nationalism now ranks among Spaniards' top concerns, surpassing wars, drugs, pensions, or climate change. In general terms, Europe's shifting demographics and political geography have created a fertile breeding ground for the emergence of identity issues centred on national sentiment. In fact, longitudinal transnational sociological studies, such as those by Coenders, Lubbers, and Scheepers (2020), highlight perceptions of national superiority among various groups across the continent. In countries such as Ireland, where territorial disputes and independence have been constant since its formation as a Nation-State (and even earlier as a dynastic nation), the relationship between national identity and key cultural institutions, such as religion and the family, takes on particular importance (Bourke, 2023).

According to Geertz's anthropological postulates (2017), attitudes towards life and forms of human expression remain inseparable from the inherited conceptions that societies preserve- conceptions often sustained and amplified by political

propaganda disseminated by political parties. In this context, certain left-leaning political groups have come to recognize the causal effectiveness of using signifiers in constructing an idea of a nation aligned with their political values (Dalle et al., 2022). Building on this foundation, it is especially relevant to examine the thematic and terminological underpinnings of left-wing pro-sovereignty parties that have achieved significant parliamentary representation. Currently, in the XV Legislature, EH Bildu holds six seats in the Congress of Deputies in Spain (Congreso de los Diputados, 2025)- a notable figure given that the party originates from the Basque Country, the eighth most populous autonomous community. This is further evidenced by its prominent presence in the Basque parliament, where EH Bildu is the second-largest group, with 27 deputies, accounting for 36% of the total (Gardena, 2025). Sinn Féin holds 39 seats in Dál Éireann (Houses of Oireachtas, 2025)- the lower house- of the Republic of Ireland (22.41%), 27 seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly (30%), and seven seats (1.07%) in the UK House of Commons (Northern Ireland Assembly; UK Parliament, 2025). This reflects a broad and consolidated presence at the local and international levels, from a purely formal standpoint, and underscores the enduring historical and political ties between Ireland and the United Kingdom.

On the other hand, there is a powerful common denominator linking these parties, namely their genealogy and evolution as political heirs to paramilitary terrorist groups, in the case of Ireland, the IRA, and in the case of Spain, ETA. While they cannot be considered identical, there is at least a notable equivalence. The relationship between past armed struggle and present political activity has unfolded in a relatively parallel manner, and continues to be a focus of social and political controversy (Cullen, 2024). Given that the now-defunct violent actions of both groups have, one way or another, progressively dissolved into political discourse, it is pertinent to scrutinise the current state of their narrative.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The coercive power of organised violence is undeniable, and is maximised when it takes the form of terrorist acts. The intense capacity of these acts to polarise society has been proven experimentally (Bove et al., 2025). However, neither should we ignore the potential causal efficacy of words in modifying behaviour. According to a weak interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the syntactic structures and semantic fields inherent in a message influence how we perceive and interpret our environment. Consequently, the lines of argument and lexical configuration used by the sender can be subject to empirical investigation (Reynoso, 2015).

The framing of information actively shapes the mental representations through which recipients perceive their environment, particularly in political decision-making, as recently evidenced in the fields of social and language psychology. Strategic lexical choices can shape ideologies that trigger individual and collective action (Schepf et al., 2021). This nexus between language and political orientation has been empirically corroborated by Rim, Berman, and Leong (2023). Their research shows that moral divergence between ideological blocs is encoded not just in the frequency of specific terms, but also in the implicit moral charge carried by shared vocabulary. This finding reveals that even standard terms can function as political identity markers, depending on the contexts of enunciation and the moral communities to which they are addressed.

At its core, this is a process of one-way influence known as framing, where the effects depend entirely on how information is selected and presented. Strategic communication relies on this pillar to redirect thought patterns and, in turn, consolidate

desired behaviour models. Flusberg et al. (2024) categorise framing by its objectives and methods. However, all forms depend on semantic weight- conveyed through rhetorical devices, grammatical structures, and, in particular, word choice (lexical framing). The latter is especially prevalent, as it uses strategic vocabulary to actively reshape context, with specific impact in controversial cases, political scandals, and public image campaigns. A clear example is found in Gruber's (2022) case study of Austrian Vice-Chancellor H.C. Strache's resignation speech. By identifying the deliberate use of mitigating terminology, Gruber shows how lexical framing was employed to justify the circumstances leading to his resignation and align them with the moral worldview of his ideological affiliation.

Following a similar methodological approach, Rivlin-Angert and Mor-Lan (2025) apply analytical computational discourse analysis techniques to examine patterns of political delegitimisation in Israeli rhetoric. Their research illustrates how structures of lexical association are deployed to erode an adversary's credibility while reinforcing in-group cohesion. This quantitative approach underscores the utility of Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods for empirically detecting power-oriented discursive strategies.

Based on current research, political values continue to occupy a stable, highly differentiated, two-dimensional space shaped by social class. According to Romero (2023), the right-wing bloc retains its core ideological positions, defending tradition, opposing decentralisation, expressing varying degrees of scepticism towards immigration, and maintaining sympathy for economic liberalism. Meanwhile, the left remains broadly anchored in the defense of wealth distribution and working-class rights, with the addition of progressive causes such as feminism and the environmental movement (Romero, 2023; Londoño y Guzmán, 2023). In alignment with these broader tendencies, EH Bildu defines itself as a party committed to justice, equality, feminism, environmentalism, transparency and dialogue, respect, and a fair economy. It further emphasises its commitment to *euskaldunización*- the advancement of the Basque language and culture- across all spheres of public life in the Basque Country (EH Bildu, 2025). Similarly, Sinn Féin advocates for national Irish unity, Irish Gaelic education, environmentalism, LGBTIQ+ rights, wealth redistribution, investment in public services, and international solidarity with sovereigntist movements (Sinn Féin, 2025).

Within this dynamic interplay of party politics, language, ideology, and social engineering. Hoey's (2005) theory of lexical priming becomes particularly relevant. Its central thesis holds that frequent co-occurrences and lexicographical colligations establish deep-seated patterns of meaning, which, through repetition, prime the recipient to favour their use. Consequently, they condition the perception and reproduction of information, enabling it to be adapted to preconceived ideas (Williams, 2006). These word-word and word-category links are sensitive aspects in the design of a paragraph, and by extension, an entire text. They must be carefully considered when modulating literary genre (Martínez, 2024) and, by analogy, a political line of argument.

According to Chevalier and Itçaina (2024), the abertzale (Basque nationalist) left, to which EH Bildu belongs, has successfully expanded its public image beyond that of a nationalist platform linked to terrorism. This transformation has been achieved through consistent agenda-setting in its political discourse, which regularly highlights a cluster of issues related to peace struggles, cross-border cooperation, linguistic rights, participatory democracy, sustainability, housing access, and environmentalism. In the author's words, the party has constructed a "culture of civic opposition," allowing it to shed the

burden of its detrimental past reputation. Sinn Féin has employed similar mechanisms of thematic construction, but has tailored them to the distinct socioeconomic contexts of the jurisdictions in which it operates. In Northern Ireland, the party's discourse tends to emphasize identity issues, constitutional rights, and relations with the south; in the Republic, it focuses more on the nexus of health, housing, and the economy. This bifurcated communication strategy reflects a pragmatic adaptation to electoral necessities (Arlow, 2024).

Prolonged political conflicts are invariably accompanied by a parallel evolution in narrative, as evidenced by shifts in how Spain's major newspapers have editorially framed the Catalan independence process over time. The press, according to its variable ideological leanings, generates fluctuating informational packages- shifting stances that can occur even within the same outlet across different periods (Pérez-López and Martín, 2022). This editorial activity does more than report events; it establishes interpretative frames that actively shape public opinion. Consequently, it heightens the need for involved actors to produce their own textual content. The aim is to exert greater control over their informational environment, countering the framing power of alternative agents (Wooley, 2022).

Regarding the intensity of political messaging, authors such as Davies (2021) have asserted that "propaganda repetitions came to define political existence". Along a parallel track, research such as that by Losada and Maneiro (2025) underscores that communicative intensity not only signals the level of attention elites pay to an organization, but also conditions the impact- whether positive or negative- of elite judgements on public perceptions of legitimacy. However, agent-based modelling work by Ding and Xie (2024) introduces a crucial nuance, cautioning that intensity and legitimisation do not necessarily imply a straightforward, positive correlation. Instead, intensity acts as a critical moderator, whose optimal value depends on audience psychology and the specific stage of the conflict of opinion.

### 3. Method

Our research adopts a linguistically relativist perspective. The work's scope does not extend beyond the senders of communication, firmly situating it within the disciplinary field of political communication. Nevertheless, we aim to delineate the composition of left-wing sovereignist discourse across two fundamental levels of complexity: the issues addressed and the vocabulary employed. Two research questions guide our inquiry:

- a) What are the core thematic axes underpinning the political discourse of left-sovereignist nationalist parties?
- b) What terminological patterns characterise this discourse?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To identify the most salient semantic components in the textual propagandistic output of EH Bildu and Sinn Féin: two parties of homologous origin and trajectory operating within distinct sociohistorical contexts.
2. To uncover patterns of consistency or variation across their discourses once the first objective has been met.
3. To interpret the pragmatic nuances of the analysed materials by engaging with the theoretical framework established in the literature.

All of this is undertaken to address a theoretical gap identified in the literature review, determined by the absence of comparative analyses of the post-conflict sovereignist left; the insufficient integration of framing theory, agenda-setting research, and corpus linguistics; the lack of longitudinal data connecting discursive volume, themes, and intensity; and the limited dialogue between linguistic relativism and strategic political communication.

### 3.1. Research Design

Our research employed a mixed-methods approach that integrates frequency analysis with lexical pattern detection, leveraging Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques. To this end, a lexicon of 618 political concepts was compiled (hereafter, A). This lexicon was constructed by extracting, integrating, and, where necessary, translating into Spanish and English all entries from the *International Encyclopedia of Moral and Political Sciences for the 21st Century* (Pendás, 2020). The selection of this source is grounded in its established status as a reference work within contemporary political science, a position substantiated by its use in recent peer-reviewed studies such as those by Dahlström and Lapuente (2022), Bailly and Dubrion (2024), Wajzer and Dragan (2021), Sánchez (2024), Sarmiento (2021) and Rodrigues, Medina and Ribeiro (2025).

Subsequently, all textual documents from the period 2021-2024 were collected from the Dokumentuak (EH Bildu) and Policies (Sinn Féin) sections of each party's official website. This specific timeframe was selected based on two key criteria: first, to ensure the analysis encompassed a sufficiently broad period for robust conclusions, and, at the same time, to align with the practical availability of comparable materials. The cut-off at 2024 was necessary because EH Bildu had not yet published anything else in 2025, and Sinn Féin lacked a sufficient volume of 2025 policy documents to support a meaningful periodic analysis.

The aforementioned website sections function as documentary repositories for texts outlining the political plans and programmes of both parties. The sample comprises 389,531 words from 69 documents published by each political party (410 pages from EH Bildu and 737 pages from Sinn Féin). Within the specified timeframe, 17 papers (164,165 words) correspond to EH Bildu, while 52 papers (225, 366) correspond to Sinn Féin. Every effort was made to compile the most robust sample possible, one that exceeds the established thresholds for documentary reliability and lexical saturation outlined by recent methodological standards in content analysis (Neuendorf, 2022; Krippendorff, 2024).

Once all the analysis material was compiled, it was categorised. First, according to its alignment with the political domain taxonomy developed by Baumer and Van Horn (2017). Second, content was further organised by area of application, following the governmental structures of the Government of Spain, the Government of the Republic of Ireland, the Autonomous Government of the Basque Country, and the *Dublin City Council*. To standardize the categories, the principle of administrative department equivalence was applied. This involved identifying which governmental departments were thematically represented in our study materials and explicitly noting those that were absent, namely: Defense, Public Expenditure, Digitalization, Culture, Tax Office, and Justice. Furthermore, each element within the sample was assigned a unique alphanumeric code based on its origin, order of appearance, and thematic category.

Subsequently, the documentary materials from each party were merged in Adobe Acrobat Pro, preserving their publication order. This process yielded two unified text corpora:

- B → EH Bildu
- C → Sinn Féin

Both B and C then underwent a refinement process to remove units lacking independent meaning, filtering exclusively for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (tokens) for subsequent analysis via automated part-of-speech (POS) tagging. Normalization of Corpora B and C was performed by inserting each into a Python code block executed in Google Colab. This script used the SpaCy library, a widely adopted tool in contemporary textual analysis (Parks & Peters, 2022; Okhapkin et al., 2021). The same code block integrated A into both its English and Spanish versions.

The pretrained workflow in SpaCy incorporated the following procedures:

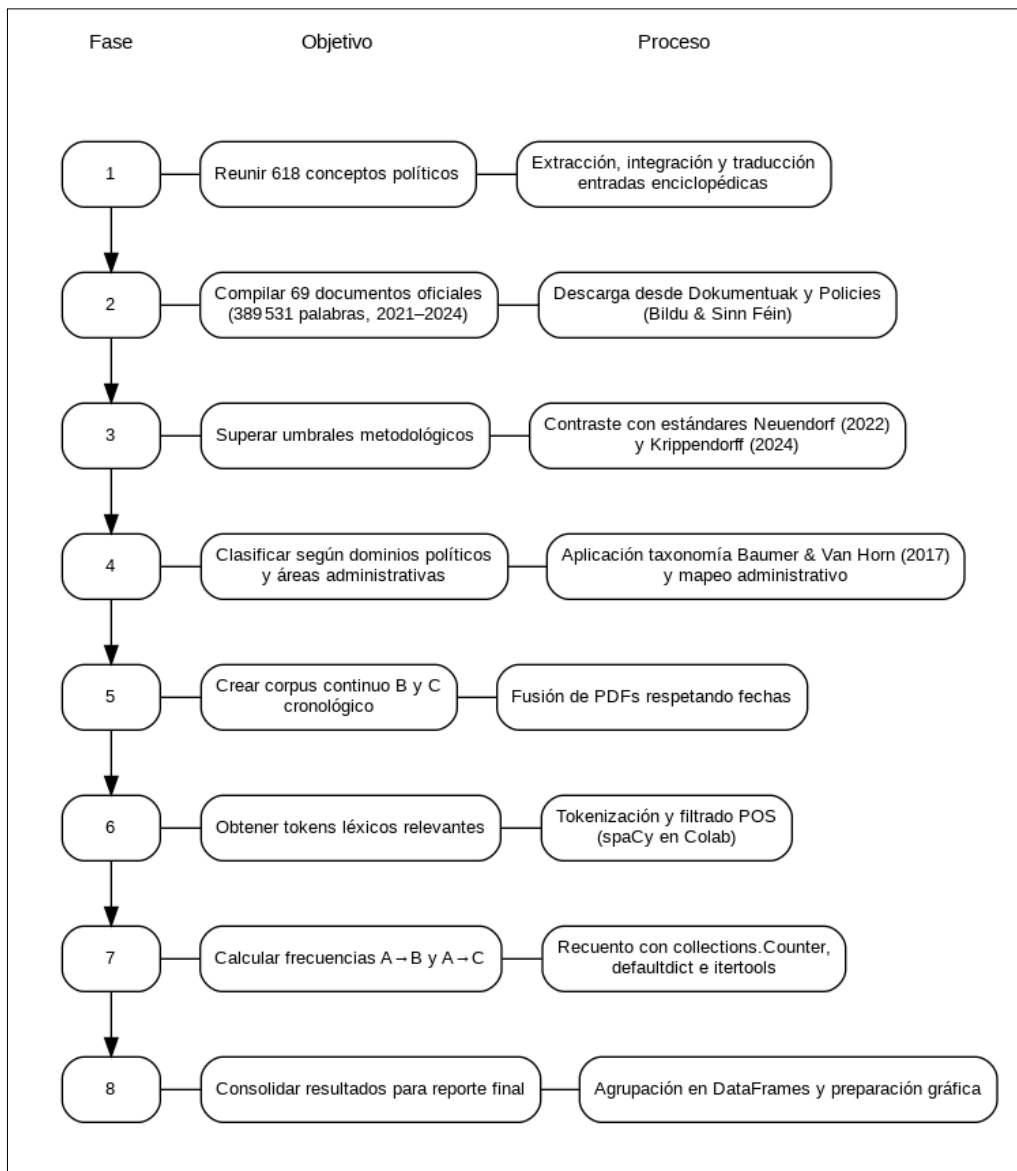
1. Tokenization, respecting signs and multi-word expressions
2. Lemmatization of inflected forms presented in A.
3. Match detections using the PhraseMatcher tool.
4. Position extraction for all matches to calculate frequencies and average co-occurrence distances. In these calculations,  $d$  represents the average distance;  $k$  is the total number of co-occurrences of a concept with a neighbouring term across the entire corpus.  $i$  is the *token* index where the concept emerges in one of its appearances  $j_k$ ;  $j_k$  is the token index of the  $k$ -th appearance of the neighbouring term associated with the concept  $j_k$ ;  $i$  is the absolute distance, in tokens, between the neighbour's position and the concept's position  $\frac{i}{K}$ ; averages the distances to obtain  $d$ .

In a subsequent analytical phase, the following data group comparisons were conducted simultaneously:

- A → B
- A → C

These operations, designed to detect the presence of elements from A and B by C, respectively, also enabled the pairing of each matched concept with its most frequently co-occurring terms, ranked by distance. The tasks were supported by the *collections*, *Counter*, *defaultdict*, and *intertools* modules, which were configured for element counting, frequency definition, and structural pattern identification. Finally, the synthesis and organisation of results were facilitated by the Pandas library.

**Figure 1. Research Process Flow Diagram**



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#### 4. Results

As illustrated in Figure 2, the aggregate volume of content produced by Sinn Féin nearly triples that of EH Bildu. The Basque party maintains a steady publication output, averaging 4-5 documents per year, except in 2023. In contrast, the Irish party shows an initial peak in 2021, followed by a period of reduced output in 2022-2023, and a partial recovery in production volume in 2024.

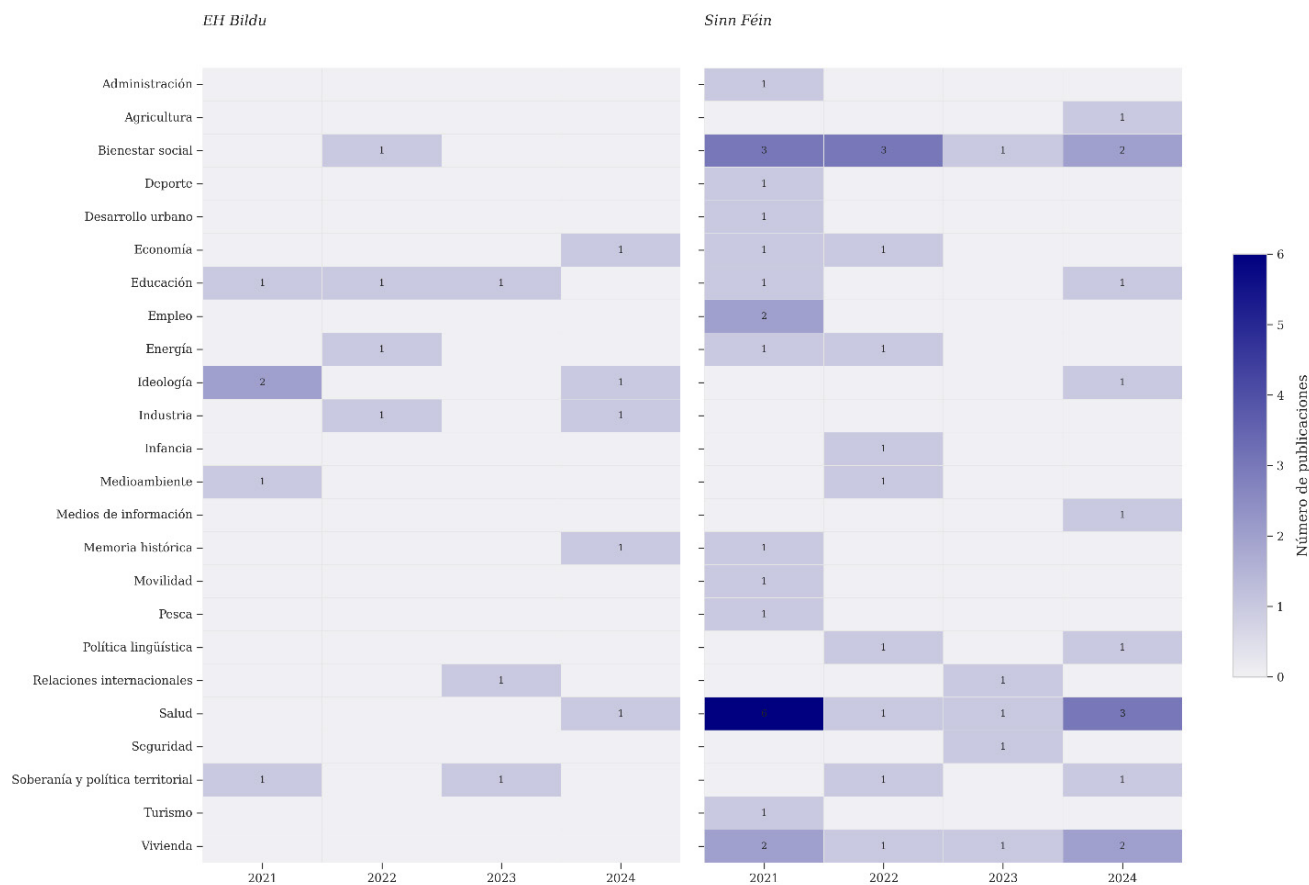
The thematic structure of EH Bildu's discourse is organised around four core themes: education, ideology, sovereignty, and industry. Notably, despite its left-wing orientation, the party's texts lack any substantive references to housing or healthcare. In contrast, Sinn Féin clearly prioritizes public services, with a strong emphasis on health, social welfare, and housing. Other policy domains- such as industry or energy policy- receive comparatively marginal attention in their published materials.

Regarding discursive dynamics, Sinn Féin maintains a consistent narrative strategy centred on social rights, producing at least one significant annual contribution on each of the core themes of health, social welfare, and housing. In contrast, EH Bildu is the sole publisher of content on industrial policy, while omitting other themes present in Sinn Féin's discourse, such as administrative policies, agriculture, and citizen safety. Both organisations integrate the themes of international relations and historical memory into their respective narratives.

Sinn Féin addresses more than twice as many distinct topics as EH Bildu, with its publishing activity heavily concentrated on healthcare. In contrast, EH Bildu's thematic focus over the same period is more horizontal and diffuse. It is notably marked by strategic omissions in areas typically central to left-wing discourse- such as housing and welfare.

In summary, each organisation exhibits a distinct programmatic profile. EH Bildu concentrates its discursive efforts on ideology, sovereignty, education, and industry, maintaining a moderate yet stable annual output. In contrast, Sinn Féin deploys a far more prolific and consistent social welfare discourse (health, welfare, housing), alongside a high degree of thematic diversification.

**Figure 2. Temporal Distribution of Thematic Intensity Across Political Domains in EH Bildu and Sinn Féin Plans and Programmes (2021-2024)**



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As indicated in Table 1, EH Bildu constructs and disseminates a normative conception of work that directly links labour rights to civic duties, eliminating any margin of interpretative ambiguity regarding the demand for decent working conditions. This approach is reinforced by the centrality of the Church-State Relations, whose semantic field, such as *Euskera* (the Basque language), *alimentar* (to nourish/feed), and *profesional* (professional), points to the enduring influence of Catholic social values in daily Basque life and the defense of linguistic rights in specific domains such as nutrition and professional practice.

The thematic axes of Participation and Territory introduce, respectively, the expansion of deliberative channels (increase, moreover, extensive) and the overcoming of existing spatial restrictions (limitations, undertake, present), aligning both vectors with a sovereigntist strategy. Against this backdrop, Crisis, qualified as economic-financial and deepening, functions as a legitimising device: diagnosing the widening of social fractures. In this context, the node Collaboration (foster, agreement, public-private) explicitly advocates for the joint mobilisation of resources, while the invocation of the People (show, existence, educator) configures a visible collective subject endowed with its own historicity and a national pedagogical role. Concepts such as Responsibility (assume, shared, time) and Power (share, influence, question) introduce a style of prudent, participatory leadership oriented toward democratising decision-making.

The moral solidity of the project rests on Values (added, principle, high), which refer to demanding ethical principles. It is projected critically toward the Party System (its composition, detriment, and structure), which is called upon to reconfigure itself to avoid structural dysfunctions. In the administrative sphere, Administration (part, share, correspond) emphasises the equitable distribution of responsibilities, while Networks (member, solid, web) underscores the need for robust social and digital frameworks.

The technopolitical component of the discourse is materialised in the concept of Cost-Benefit Analysis (provide, relevant, based on), which legitimizes evidence-based prioritization, and in Planning (responsible, indicative, unified), which demands accountable bodies and coherent plans. This conceptual architecture culminates in Governance (share, multi-level, sphere), conceived as a distributed multi-level decision-making system, and in Government (versus, right-wing, framework), which delineates the ideological confrontation with the right within a clearly defined framework. Finally, Equality (equity, real, foster) signals a commitment to translating formal equality into tangible outcomes through active policies and precisely distributed criteria.

**Table 1. Analysis of the network of 20 principal political concepts in EH Bildu’s discourse and their most frequent co-occurring terms**

Concept	Frequency	Prox1 (f,d)	Prox2 (f,d)	Prox3 (f,d)
Rights	216	duty (6,1.0)	respect (5,1.0)	labor (4,1.0)
Church-State Relations	134	euskera (2,1.0)	feed (2,1.0)	professional (2,1.0)
Participation	122	increase (3,1.0)	furthermore (2,1.0)	broad (2,1.0)
Territory	114	limitation (3,1.0)	take on (2,1.0)	present (2,1.0)
Crisis	105	deepening (3,1.0)	economic-financial (2,1.0)	account (2,1.0)
Collaboration	102	foster (3,1.0)	agreement (3,1.0)	public-private (3,1.0)
People	96	show (3,1.0)	existence (2,1.0)	educator (2,1.0)

Sovereignty	91	favour (5,1.0)	achieve (3,1.0)	level (3,1.0)
Responsibility	87	assume (7,1.0)	shared (4,1.0)	time (4,1.0)
Power	84	share (3,1.0)	influence (3,1.0)	issue (2,1.0)
Values	82	added (17,1.0)	principle (7,1.0)	high (6,1.0)
Parties	82	composed (2,1.0)	detriment (2,1.0)	structure (2,1.0)
Administration	77	part (3,1.0)	shared (3,1.0)	correspond (2,1.0)
Social media	75	member (2,1.0)	solid (2,1.0)	web (2,1.0)
Cost-Benefit Analysis	58	provide (3,1.0)	relevant (3,1.0)	starting from (2,1.0)
Planning	52	responsible (2,1.0)	indicative (2,1.0)	unified (1,1.0)
Governance	46	shared (2,1.0)	multi-level (2,1.0)	sphere (2,1.0)
Government	45	versus (2,1.0)	right-wing (2,1.0)	framework (2,1.0)
Equality	40	equity (5,1.0)	real (2,1.0)	promote (2,1.0)

**Note: The values associated with cooccurrence terms (columns: Prox 1, Prox 2, and Prox 3) indicate, respectively, the frequency (f) with which they appear together with the identified political concept and the average distance (d), measured in number of tokens, between the term and the concept**

As Table 2 reveals, Sinn Féin positions People (represent, transgender, percentage) at the core of its political syntax, blending democratic legitimacy, the visibility of sexual-identity minorities, and empirical validation through demographic metrics. Within this same programmatic openness, Planning (invest, change, none) outlines a roadmap grounded in resource mobilisation and a rejection of stagnation. In tandem, the party projects an idea of Government (accept, implement, goal) that assumes executive initiative, implements concrete measures, and sets verifiable objectives. Simultaneously, the State (brand, neutral, shortage) is redefined through the construction of a new national brand, an aspiration toward neutrality, and the correction of structural deficiencies.

In constructing its narrative, Sinn Féin reflects a dissident attitude through the concept of Reform (component, sectorial, distance), proposing targeted interventions for specific productive sectors- presumably aimed at reducing territorial and socioeconomic disparities. In parallel, its defense of Rights (entry, withdraw, consumer) articulates a dialectic of access and protection for the citizen-consumer within a regulated market. The housing issue is crystallised in the concept of Property (low, therefore, accelerate), which emphasises the urgency of affordable solutions and the need to expedite regulatory reforms. All

of this is legitimised through the framing of Crisis (hour, grant, now), whose semantics lend immediacy and moral authority to the party's action agenda.

Next, emerging with notable intensity in its texts, is the notion of Intervention (key, opportunity, spirit), presented through its lexical associations as essential for reviving the economy and collective morale. Meanwhile, Regulation (via, affect, oversight) is positioned as an instrument to restrain private interests and strengthen public supervision. The axiological dimension surfaces with Values (average, less, volume), which may signal a critique of ethical erosion amid a dominance of quantitative metrics. It demands an Escalation (pace, efficiency, product) of policies that multiply their social impact. The executive phase is reinforced by Implementation (proposal, inconsistent, provide), which criticises the uneven application of measures and calls for stable, reliable mechanisms.

A public ethic is projected through the concepts of Responsibility (primary, specialist, safeguard) and Power (safeguard, application, regulator), understood as the capacity to protect rights through the firm application of regulatory frameworks. Collective welfare is further supported by the concept of Networks (health, redistribute, function), which calls for health infrastructures capable of redistributing resources and fulfilling their essential social function.

The ideal of Progress (instead, hiring, note) is defined by the creation of public employment and the rigorous evaluation of results. Meanwhile, Parties (also, culpable, actively) introduce an element of political self-criticism and call for a shared commitment from all political forces to solving public problems. Participation (recognition, woman, tenant) broadens the representation to include traditionally subordinate groups, and Accountability (training, little, not at all) denounces insufficient institutional oversight. This concludes the discourse with an apparent demand for strengthened transparency.

**Table 2. Network Analysis of the Top 20 Political Concepts in Sinn Féin's Discourse and Their Most Frequent Co-occurring Terms**

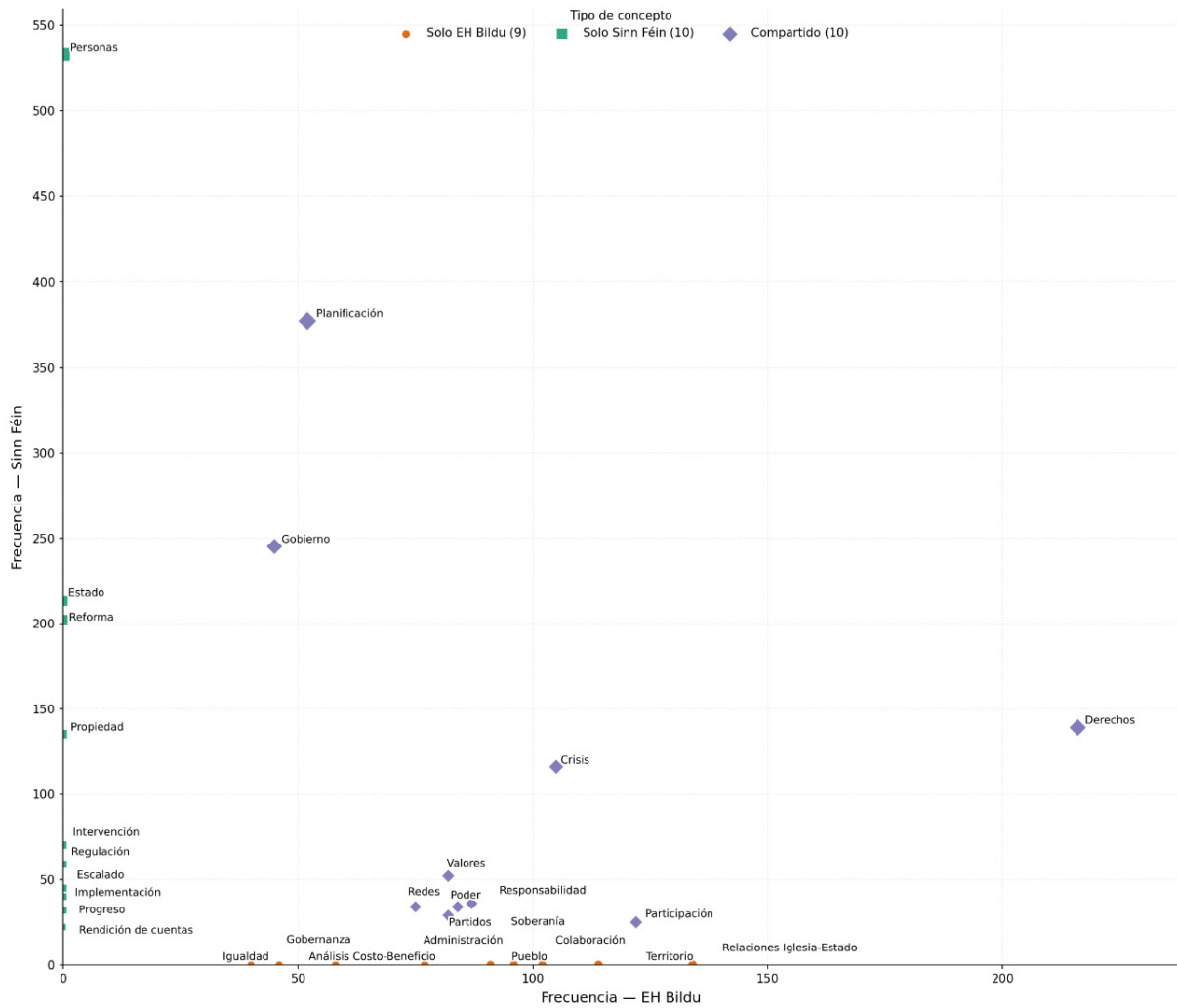
Concept	Frecuencia	Prox1 (f,d)	Prox2 (f,d)	Prox3 (f,d)
People	533	represent (4, 1.0)	transgender (3, 1.0)	percentage (2, 1.0)
Planning	377	invest (4, 1.0)	change (3, 1.0)	none (3, 1.0)
Government	245	accept (3, 1.0)	Put (3, 1.0)	objective (2, 1.0)
State	213	brand (2, 1.0)	neutral (2, 1.0)	shortage(2, 1.0)
Reform	202	component (3, 1.0)	sectorial (3, 1.0)	distance (3, 1.0)
Rights	139	entry (4, 1.0)	withdraw (3, 1.0)	consumer (3, 1.0)
Property	135	low (5, 1.0)	so (4, 1.0)	accelerate(2, 1.0)
Crisis	116	hour (4, 1.0)	concede (3, 1.0)	now (2, 1.0)

Intervention	70	key (4, 1.0)	opportunity (3, 1.0)	mood (2, 1.0)
Regulation	59	via (3, 1.0)	touch (2, 1.0)	supervision (2, 1.0)
Values	52	average (2, 1.0)	less (2, 1.0)	volume (1, 1.0)
Escalation	45	pace (6, 1.0)	efficiency (5, 1.0)	product (1, 1.0)
Implementation	40	proposal (2, 1.0)	inconsistent (2, 1.0)	to provide (2, 1.0)
Responsibility	36	primary (2, 1.0)	specialist (2, 1.0)	safeguard (2, 1.0)
Power	34	safeguard (3, 1.0)	application (2, 1.0)	regulatory (2, 1.0)
Social Media	34	healthcare (3, 1.0)	redistribute (2, 1.0)	function (2, 1.0)
Progress	32	on the other hand (5, 1.0)	hiring (5, 1.0)	note (2, 1.0)
Parties	29	also (2, 1.0)	culpable (2, 1.0)	actively (2, 1.0)
Participation	25	recognition (5, 1.0)	woman (5, 1.0)	tenant (2, 1.0)
Accountability	22	training (1, 1.0)	little (1, 1.0)	at all (1, 1.0)

**Note:** The values associated with the co-occurring terms (columns: Prox 1, Prox 2, and Prox 3) indicate, respectively, the frequency (f) with which they appear together with the identified political concept and the average distance (d), measured in tokens, between the term and that concept

At a more synthetic-analytical level, as seen in Figure 3, EH Bildu's texts are characterised by concepts linked to cultural identity, territorial distinction, community governance, and social justice. In contrast, Sinn Féin's conceptual configuration foregrounds a narrative centred on demography and the State-technocracy nexus. Nevertheless, both political organisations share specific discursive categories, evident in their overlapping emphasis on concepts concerning public action, the ethics of power, and crisis narratives, through each party assigns these elements a distinct focus and weight within its overall discourse.

**Figure 3. Comparative Distribution of Lexical Frequency for Principal Political Concepts in EH Bildu and Sinn Féin Discourses**



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**Note: Each point in the diagram corresponds to an identified political concept from A in EH Bildu's discourses (X axis) and Sinn Féin (Y axis). The size of the marker is proportional to the total mentions (sum of both frequencies)**

## 5. Discussion

As noted at the outset of this work, the latest sociological data (CIS, 2025) ranks nationalism among Spaniards' central concerns. In light of our results, we can see that EH Bildu is not overlooking this reality, as a third of its core lexicon revolves around the conceptual triad of Sovereignty-Territory-People. In the absence of an analogous barometer in the Irish case, which would allow for a direct comparison, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Sinn Féin constructs the pairing People-State as the spearhead of its narrative. Despite the qualitative difference, both organisations emphasise, through their conceptual selection, the uniqueness of their respective communities. They consistently invoke themes that denote distinction, suggesting a self-perceived national superiority that aligns with Coenders, Lubbers, and Scheepers' (2020) theory.

The nation, understood as the totality of shared social institutions, permeates-whether more explicitly in EH Bildu's case or more subtly in Sinn Féin's- the discourse of both parties. Basque and Irish nationalists alike remain anchored in mobilising concepts that are tied to religion, politics, society, housing, and property. While there is accidental variation, the two parties share a discourse with traditional undertones across numerous core dimensions. This, despite its apparent ideological inconsistency, reinforces Bourke's thesis (2023) that the weight of historical cultural institutions endures through social changes that affect processes of political evolution. While EH Bildu and Sinn Féin are recognisably progressive parties and occupy that stable position on the political spectrum (Romero 2023; Londoño & Guzmán 2023), the inherited conceptions embedded in their foundational tenets- as theorised by Geertz (2017)- continue to shape the very expression of their lexicon.

Nevertheless, both parties channel the sovereigntist narrative in ways aligned with contemporary left-wing values. They reframe Participation and Territory as expressions of democratic sovereignty (EH Bildu) and link People and Planning through the lens of social welfare discourse. In doing so, a leftist reimagining of the idea of nation becomes evident- one that remains rooted in traditional notions of sovereignty and communal distinctiveness while adapting to the ideological elements theorised by Dalle Mulle and Kernalegenn (2022).

At the level of communication output, both similarities and instructive variations emerge. Although EH Bildu and Sinn Féin maintain consistent publishing practices, suggesting a deliberate effort to shape their public image and counter alternative narratives (Wooley, 2022; Pérez-López & Martín, 2022), a notable quantitative difference exists. This gap is explained by Sinn Féin's multi-level presence across local, regional, and national institutions, in contrast to EH Bildu's primary confinement to the Basque regional sphere and its limited extension to the Spanish national parliament. Accordingly, Sinn Féin's output triples EH Bildu's and spans more than twice as many thematic domains, reflecting its broader institutional footprint. Nevertheless, the two parties operate in parallel when it comes to omitting even remote references to their armed past. There is a marked absence of conceptual clusters around relevant and contentious themes, such as Security or Defense (Cullen, 2024). These are instead replaced by levers of discursive polarisation (Bove et al., 2025), such as the term "Crisis," followed by socially resonant triggers like "Deepening" (EH Bildu) and "Now" (Sinn Féin).

The absence of belligerent language in favour of a restrained yet assertive discourse underscores the influence of lexical choice on audience perception (Reynoso, 2015). The contrast between a marked militant past and a present narrative hardly distinguishable from other sovereigntist parties- free of such burden- points to a deliberate reconstruction of image through lexical framing tactics (Schepf, Christmann, and Groeben, 2021; Flusberg, 2024). In this sense, our findings support Gruber's

(2022) postulates: not so much through presence as through absence, strategic lexical discrimination can foster mitigating effects in the face of controversy, with corresponding benefits in electoral and public opinion terms. Within this hypothetical strategy, the series of repeated lexical pairs we identified would align. Even if unintentional, they prove effective in consolidating cognitive associations, as predicted by Hoey (2005), Williams (2006), and Martínez (2024) across various spheres of linguistic influence. Particularly significant are the binomials “Responsibility-sharing” (EH Bildu) and “Planning-investing” (Sinn Féin), which, together, evoke the collectivist orientation of both organisations. This terminological architecture is compatible with an agenda design (Chevalier and Itçana, 2024) tailored to the electoral interests of the moment (Arlow, 2024).

On the other hand, the pattern of thematic reiteration appears to confirm Davies’s (2021) observation. Judging by its text-based publications, Sinn Féin is invested in a political identity anchored in the triad of Health, housing, and welfare. At the same time, EH Bildu focuses on the axis of Sovereignty-Industry-Education. The repeated invocation of these core themes and the persistent use of their associated vocabulary reinforces the idea that both parties seek to publicly legitimise themselves (Losada and Maneiro, 2025) as guarantors of citizen well-being (in the Irish case) and of independence- in a broad sense- and effective management (in the Basque case). Notably, however, the volume of output does not grow uncontrollably but is maintained at a plausible optimum of intensity (Ding and Xie, 2024). After a peak in 2021, Sinn Féin deliberately reduced its output in 2022-2023, resuming at a moderate level in 2024. While EH Bildu never exceeds six major texts per year. Both trajectories suggest a strategic effort to balance visibility against the risk of negative saturation.

## 6. Conclusions

By distilling the narrative output of the analyzed parties, we can map their terminological-conceptual composition. Our research has identified a set of stable patterns and strategic variations at the discursive level in both parties. The findings carry several practical implications worth emphasizing. First, the uncovered thematic matrix can serve as a diagnostic tool for political positioning, offering various actors a roadmap to address discursive gaps and calibrate the intensity of their published communication. Conversely, both civil society and the media can benefit from our contribution by accessing the specific framing techniques of left-wing sovereigntist discourse, enabling more precise accountability, the production of informed counter-frames, and a richer civic debate. Furthermore, our work reinforces broader explanatory frameworks in political communication, highlighting, in this case, specific mechanisms such as reframing post-terrorist identity, the reimagining of the nation, and agenda-setting through the tactical use of recurring, strategically weighted key vocabulary.

By way of synthesis, we have identified the following thematic axes within left-wing sovereigntist discourse:

### **EH Bildu**

- Sovereignty and cultural and territorial identity
- Ideology and values
- Education and citizen participation
- Industry and public-private collaboration

### **Sinn Féin**

- Public services
- Planning and governance
- Reforms. Regulations and interventions.
- Demography and inclusion
- State and national branding

Furthermore, both formations asymmetrically share framing related to crisis, the ethics of power, and public action. Analysis of co-occurrence networks and longitudinal thematic frequencies further reveals a series of distinctive communicative traits summarised below:

EH Bildu employs a normative civic lexicon, densely linking concepts of duty, participation, and cultural sovereignty, which is further legitimised through a technical discourse of planning and governance. Its distinctive profile on the left is marked by a Catholic-linguistic (Basque) cultural imprint and a notable absence of social welfare vocabulary.

Sinn Féin develops an inclusive-technocratic lexicon centering its discourse on people, social rights, and executive planning. Verbs of immediate action and frameworks of state intervention and regulation characterise this. Its terminological signature is completed by a strong reiteration of demographic and inclusive terms, alongside a deliberate relativisation of the industrial dimension.

Both parties appear to employ intentional lexical framing: EH Bildu combines institutional nouns with verbs of reciprocity (e.g., share, assume), while Sinn Féin associates public policy with verbs of executive action (e.g., implement, accelerate). The intensive repetition of these co-occurrences suggests deliberate reinforcement of a priori-defined cognitive frames. In summary, despite their distinct profiles, both parties share a common lexicon of normative legitimisation and public action, anchored in the conceptual pillars of rights, values, crisis, and government. Moreover, their discourse employs verbs of collective agency, avoids any reference to a violent past, and deploys a technical, managerial style that relegates political and moral dimensions to the background. These shared traits underpin a broader strategic convergence within post-conflict nationalist leftism- namely, the replacement of armed confrontation with a new form of discursive authority, grounded in civic ethics and governmental efficacy.

Beyond the specific findings concerning lexical distribution and discursive structure, this study makes a substantial contribution to political communication by demonstrating how content analysis of electoral materials can illuminate the mechanisms of public perception and electoral strategy in parties emerging from violent contexts, such as Sinn Féin and EH Bildu. By highlighting the systematic replacement of a confrontational, militant repertoire with a language of management, ethics, and technocracy, the article reveals how left-wing sovereignist parties reconfigure their political identity to broaden their social and electoral appeal. This process, empirically traceable through their conceptual choices, suggests that post-conflict managerial communication functions as a mechanism for moral legitimation and institutional accession to power. In this regard, the study advances the theoretical understanding of the link between discourse, reputation, and voting. It also

provides a methodological foundation for future research into the impact of lexical framing on public-image transformation and the electoral competitiveness of European nationalist actors.

## 7. Limitations

The present study acknowledges several limitations, which are outlined below:

The quantitative imbalance between materials derived from the primary sources used could be interpreted as potentially leading to a coverage bias. However, this is a circumstantial constraint, as every effort was made to compile all available materials for both parties within a consistent thematic and temporal scope.

The asymmetry in the analysed corpus for both political formations (52 documents from Sinn Féin compared to 17 from EH Bildu) may influence the comparability of results. Future research should address this by extending the temporal scope, incorporating complementary materials, or applying statistical normalisation techniques to better account for differences in textual volume.

The study's timeframe restricts the ability to draw long-term conclusions, which would require a broader and currently unavailable data set, given that the earliest downloadable records for EH Bildu date from 2021, unlike Sinn Féin's more extensive historical repository.

As this research is primarily focused on lexical and conceptual components, it does not capture pragmatic nuances and other linguistic and discursive markers. Moreover, by relying on written materials, visual elements- potentially present in the documents with their corresponding semiotic significance were not considered. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such materials is noted as a valuable avenue for subsequent expansions of this work, given the inherent complexity of the phenomenon under study.

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## 9. Specific contributions from each author

	Nombre y apellidos
Conception and design of work	Javier Jaspe / César García Muñoz
Methodology	Javier Jaspe
Data collection and análisis	Javier Jaspe
Discussion and conclusions	César García Muñoz / Javier Jaspe
Drafting, formatting, review and approval of versions	César García Muñoz / Javier Jaspe

## 10. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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