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Between Cooptation and Surveillance: Varieties of Civic Monitoring in Spain

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Abstract. Civic monitoring is a democratic practice that allows citizens to hold accountable powerholders and enhance the accountability of democratic systems. To date, democratic theorists and collective action scholars have stressed the relevance of monitoring by NGOs, social movement organizations, and alternative media to increase civil society's watchdog potential, filter publicly relevant information, and ensure the inclusion of new voices and the representation of new instances in democratic arenas. However, little is known about how such diverse collective actors leverage monitoring practices, particularly in interaction with monitored actors and their constituencies. Focusing on the Spanish case (2011-2021), often considered a prominent example of monitory democracy, the study employs Situational Analysis and builds on semi-structured interviews and document analysis to discuss differences within the Spanish monitoring field. The results contribute to ongoing discussions on the hybridization of civic efforts and classifications of civic monitoring initiatives.

Keywords: civic monitoring, civil society organizations, hybridization, Spain, crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the long-debated crisis of liberal democratic models (Canovan 1999; Crouch 2018; Runciman 2018; Schmitter 2015), theorists have put much of their hopes in the emergence and spread of a new form of political participation based on the continuous scrutiny of public powers, developing concepts such as monitory democracy (Keane 2009, 2018) or counter-democracy (Rosanvallon 2008), characterized by the proliferation of multiple sites of control and oversight that aim at constraining the use and abuse of power from below (Trägårdh et al. 2013). Moving from different premises, research on mobilization in times of crisis, such as in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession or during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bosi and Zamponi 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2020; Zajak 2022), has demonstrated that Civil society organizations¹ (CSOs) constitute primary sources of innovation under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change (Della Porta 2012, 2017, 2020b). These strands of literature find their common ground in the study of civic moni-

¹ CSOs here refers to multiple grassroots actors such as NGOs, SMOs, civic groups, alternative media.

toring practices, intended as the ensemble of grassroots efforts to scrutinize power from below, enhancing transparency and accountability, for example, by trying to unveil corrupt deals (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014; Fox 2015; Olken 2007).

Among other cases, Spain is a critical case for investigating the characteristics and evolution of monitoring practices, often described as a textbook case of monitoring democracy (Feenstra and Keane 2014). In particular, scholars underline how the outbreak of the 15-M movement in 2011 and its calls for «Real Democracy Now!» accelerated ongoing dynamics, exploiting opportunities for public scrutiny offered by digital technologies and media to strengthen civic controls over the country's political, financial, and cultural elites (Casero-Ripollés and Feenstra 2012) and hold them accountable to «their own laws» (Flesher Fominaya 2015: 154). Since then, monitoring practices have remained a constant in the anti-corruption and pro-accountability toolkit of CSOs. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic opened new opportunities to monitor powerholders' decisions and actions, with CSOs asking for open data on the pandemic evolution and on the allocation and use of public funds to face its consequences (Pleyers 2020; Villoria and Gómez 2021; Zajak 2022).

However, the internal differentiation of monitoring practices in Spain remains a matter of empirical debate. As Flesher Fominaya and Feenstra (2023) maintain, monitoring «continues to maintain a clear separation between those governing from those governed, raising the question of whether monitoring mechanisms necessarily bring us closer to the “real democracy” ideal and its demand for greater citizen participation in decision-making and deliberation» (*Ibidem*: 286).

Moving from this background, the article explores variations within the Spanish civic monitoring field (2011-2021), looking specifically at how CSOs have exploited monitoring practices to bridge the gap between powerholders and monitoring citizens. The study builds on Situational Analysis (SA) and relies on interviews, documents, and existing literature to i) map the elements characterizing monitoring practices in Spain from 2011 onwards, ii) elucidate the words and arenas involved in monitoring practices, and iii) understand the how civic monitors positioned themselves vis-à-vis monitored actors and their constituencies through these practices. The analysis suggests that these dynamics point to ongoing hybridization processes within the civic field, providing a more nuanced perspective on monitoring practices, ranging from cooptation to surveillance.

2. CIVIC MONITORING IN SPAIN: EVOLUTION AND CONSEQUENCES

Since the end of the 1970s, the evolution of Spain's political landscape, transitioning from a fully-fledged authoritarian regime to a ‘democracy in the making’, has been strictly intertwined with the history of corruption scandals and opaque relationships between political and economic powers (Heywood 2007; Johnston 2005). However, the influence of the so-called transition syndrome² left corruption scandals at the margins of political debates for a long time (Jiménez 2004). Things started to change in the late 1990s when the revelation of several scandals involving members of Gonzales' socialist government³ (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE) eased the electoral victory of the Partido Popular (PP) and the politicization of debates around corruption (Heywood 2007). However, scandals related to Aznar's government⁴ (PP 1996-2004) indicated that public corruption was widespread across the entire political spectrum. Whereas accusations of corruption remained a constant in the Spanish political debates, growing civic demands and international pressure resulted in timid attempts by Zapatero's government to increase the system's transparency (PSOE 2004-2011). However, little was achieved until the 2010s, when the emergence of scandals related to Rajoy's governments⁵ (PP 2011-2018), coupled with the economic hardship of the Great Recession (Jiménez and Villoria 2018). While in 2013, the PP government tried to re-legitimize its position by passing a new law on transparency and citizens' right to access public information⁶, the consequences of the economic crisis and the rampant distrust in traditional political parties contributed to the profound restructuring of the party system after 2015, favoring the electoral success of political forces that extensively campaigned around public corruption, such as Podemos and Ciudadanos (Gomez Fortes and Urquizu 2015).

Vis-à-vis these long-term political and institutional change processes, significant transformations also interested the civic sphere and citizens' forms of political participation. The traditional role of political parties as primary accountability actors had indeed begun to decline (Przeworski 2006), strengthening the role

² The solid electoral support for the Socialist Party (PSOE), the weakness and internal fragmentation of the Partido Popular (PP), and the unwillingness of the media to publicize potentially destabilizing news removed corruption from public debates (Jiménez 2004).

³ E.g., Guerra's case, cfr. Jiménez (2004).

⁴ E.g., Piqué's case, cfr. Heywood (2007).

⁵ E.g., Gürtel and Bárcenas cases.

⁶ Ley 19/2013, *Ley de transparencia, acceso a la información pública y buen gobierno*.

of CSOs as social watchdogs (Rosanvallon 2008). In Spain, the grassroots mobilizations started on the 15th of May 2011, known as the 15-M movement, articulated new quests for transparency and accountability, bridging them with pro-democratic and anti-austerity claims (Blakeley 2019; Faber and Seguín 2019; Romanos, Sola and Rendueles 2022). Amid a situation of political, financial, and social unrest, CSOs have thus sought to rebuild political trust from below (Feenstra *et al.* 2017), triggering democratic innovations among which civic monitoring practices have occupied a prominent role (Della Porta 2020b; Feenstra *et al.* 2017; Flesher Fominaya 2020, 2022; Romanos 2017).

Civic monitoring⁷ is a democratic practice that exposes power abuses and enhances transparency and accountability in democratic systems (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014). The concept has its roots⁸ in Schudson's work on monitorial citizenship (1998), Keane's notion of monitory democracy (2009, 2018), and Rosanvallon's concept of counter-democracy (2008). With due differences, each of these theories emphasizes the emergence of new participatory practices in liberal democratic systems, based not on the representation or direct expression of interests but on the proliferation of power-scrutinizing sites.

In Spain, as elsewhere, grassroots actors have increasingly resorted to monitoring practices to engage in democratic processes beyond the mere electoral ritual, alongside traditional forms of political participation, such as mobilization, protests, or advocacy (Feenstra *et al.* 2017). This has resulted in the proliferation of diffuse and everyday forms of control, evaluation, and public scrutiny of powerholders from below to discover, unveil, and denounce abuse of power, institutional wrongdoing, corruption, and lack of transparency (Casero-Ripollés 2015). However, the characteristics and consequences of these practices remain to be discussed.

Indeed, existing studies have seldom addressed internal differences within the civic monitoring field, leaving the question of how social movement organizations, NGOs, or alternative media exploit monitoring practices and whether internal differences exist almost unexplored. Indeed, monitoring practices represent a perfect terrain to investigate hybridization processes within the civic sphere (Della Porta 2020a), given the great variety of grassroots actors exploiting them. Movement scholars have pointed to broad NGOization pro-

cesses characterized by a moderation of repertoires, an increasing formalization of organizational structures, and a depoliticization of frames (Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Della Porta 2020a). Pro-accountability and anti-corruption movements, for example, have gone through similar processes, weakening their social watchdog role (Sampson 2015). Similarly, part of the scholarship has underlined how, nowadays, rankings of international NGOs, such as Transparency International's corruption index, have reached an influence comparable to one of the international organizations' ratings for countries' economic development (Rosanvallon 2008). Yet, this increased influence has come with a progressive decline in the representativeness of these social watchdogs, increasingly responding to particularistic and corporatist interests (Przeworski 2006).

Investigating the Spanish case, Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés found that grassroots monitoring practices have strengthened some of the functions traditionally associated with the mobilization of social movements and civil society groups, expanding the range of voices represented in public arenas and extending the representation of groups and interests beyond the parliamentary arena (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014). At the same time, they found that the reliance on monitoring practices has allowed collective actors to expand their watchdog and information filtering functions, traditionally associated with the media, individual whistleblowers, or hacker collectives (*Ibidem*).

However, few works have investigated internal differentiations within the civic monitoring field, particularly concerning the interactions between monitoring actors, monitored elites, and their constituencies. This appears particularly relevant to understanding the pro-accountability consequences of civic monitoring. The relatively scant literature on the theme has indeed demonstrated that monitoring practices seem less impactful when relying on open confrontations with elite circles, while cooperation between monitoring actors and monitored institutions is more likely to result in accountability gains (Buttiglione and Reggi 2015; Fox 2015; Olken 2007). On the other hand, the risk is that monitoring practices will result in mere top-down concessions (Fox 2016; Sampson 2015), which answer the needs of institutional actors rather than serving the interests of the constituencies that civic monitors should serve (Peruzzotti 2011). Investigating the relationship between civic monitors, monitored elites, and their constituencies seems thus critical to assess whether and how these practices pursue their accountability goals, that is, to what extent they work as effective centers to scrutinize powerholders and include citizens in these oversight practices.

⁷ So far, studies have differentiated monitoring practices based on the nature of the monitoring actors, distinguishing between institutional, shared, and civic monitoring (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014).

⁸ Concepts such as the politics of disclosure (Olesen 2021), transparency movements (Nolin 2018), or the transparency era (Schudson 2015).

If the 15-M movement's legacy and effects are still debated⁹, this is even more true when looking at the monitoring practices that emerged over those years. Analyses have indeed rarely assessed their evolution. For this reason, the rest of the article analyses the characteristics of monitoring practices in Spain in the aftermath of the 2011 mobilization until the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis maps the elements characterizing the Spanish monitoring field, the arenas involved, and the positions of monitoring actors vis-à-vis monitored elites and their constituencies.

3. DATA AND METHODS

The article investigates civic monitoring practices focusing on the case of Spain (2011-2021), relying on Situational Analysis. Developed by Adele Clarke and colleagues (Clarke 2003, 2021; Clarke *et al.* 2016), SA integrates Glaser's and Strauss' classic version of Grounded Theory and its constructivist declinations (Charmaz 2006), having situations as its fundamental units of analysis.

Recent research on data-enabled anti-corruption activism, which comprises civic monitoring initiatives, has openly advocated for using SA, given its focus on ecologies of relations between collective, individual, institutional, and extra-institutional actors (Mattoni 2020). SA appears indeed particularly promising when applied to the study of civic monitoring initiatives. First, it foresees using different materials, such as interviews, documents, or digital platforms, in a coherent research design. Second, it explicitly considers the role of non-human actors as defining elements in any situation, for example, considering ICTs' role in the case of monitoring practices. Third, it uses different analytical maps to help researchers generate new questions along the research process, producing grounded and situated knowledge for theory-building purposes.

SA uses four analytical maps as its main analytical tools (Clarke 2021; Mattoni 2020). First, situational maps allow researchers to single out all the relevant elements characterizing the situation under investigation, for example, the civil society organizations carrying out monitoring activities and the monitored institutional actors. Second, relational maps help visualize the relationships between all the elements characterizing the situation, such as the interactions between monitoring organizations and institutions via monitoring technologies. Third, social worlds/arenas maps serve to

understand the ongoing negotiations among all the elements in a situation and their arenas of commitment, for example, singling out the arenas in which institutional and non-institutional actors negotiate the goals of monitoring initiatives. These three maps are generally drawn and used at earlier stages of research projects, informing data collection, coding, and interpretation (Clarke 2021). Lastly, positional maps allow researchers to understand actors' positions along specific axes of interest (Clarke 2003; Hayati *et al.* 2014). The article builds on situational, social worlds/arena, and positional maps to describe the Spanish civic monitoring field and the positions taken by different civic monitors vis-à-vis institutional monitored actors and their constituencies.

The data was collected in the framework of a previous project on anti-corruption in Spain, including six semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 CSO members and spokespersons, organizational and institutional documents, and secondary literature. Interviews were collected online and in person between May and September 2021 and lasted 60 to 110 minutes. The sample selection aims to represent a wide array of Spanish monitoring actors at different times. It includes two NGOs that have been campaigning on transparency and accountability since before the beginning of the 15-M and participated in monitoring coalitions and campaigns: Access Info and Transparency International Spain; one social movement organization that was among the 15-M movement organizers in Barcelona and the leading subject of the monitoring campaign 15MpaRato, X-Net; three alternative media, and organizations committed to data-driven journalism and fact-checking created after the beginning of the 15-M mobilization, Civio, Maldita, and Political Watch¹⁰. The data are triangulated with documents produced by these organizations and the analysis of their website and monitoring campaigns such as OpenGenerationEU.

The analytical procedure has proceeded as follows. At first, interviews, documents, and secondary literature were scrutinized to draw a situational map containing all the relevant elements characterizing the Spanish civic monitoring arena (cfr. *infra* Table 1). Secondly, the analysis focused on the human collective actors characterizing the monitoring situation in Spain to draw a social worlds/arena map (Fig. 1). Lastly, the whole dataset was coded to produce the positional map (Fig. 2). The following section presents the ordered situational map (cfr. *infra* Table 1) to illustrate the Spanish monitoring field before moving to the discussion of the social worlds/arena map and discuss ongoing hybridization processes.

⁹ For an overview, see Fominaya and Feenstra (2024) and Wilhelmi (2023).

¹⁰ Political Watch was previously known as CIECODE.

4. SITUATING CIVIC MONITORING IN SPAIN

In Spain, the emergence of the 15-M movement in 2011 and its call for «real democracy» went hand in hand with the multiplication of grassroots monitoring practices in the form of dedicated social movement campaigns (e.g., 15MpaRato), alternative media (e.g., Civio), NGO lobbying (e.g., Access Info), and advocacy coalitions (e.g., ProAcceso coalition), which enhanced society's watchdog functions, used filtrations to unveil powerholders' wrongdoings, included new voices in the political arena, and expanded representation (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014; Feenstra and Keane 2014).

At first, whistleblowers were fundamental to translating the anti-corruption and pro-accountability grievances expressed by the 15-M into coherent monitoring initiatives. Leaks from informants accrued to central actors in the movement, such as X-Net¹¹, and became the basis for grassroots campaigns such as 15MpaRato, which collected leaks from whistleblowers to build a popular lawsuit against Rodrigo Rato, former director of the IMF, Minister of the Economy, vice president of the Spanish government, and president of Caja Madrid – then Bankia. The campaign was supported by a sizeable civic network, which reflected the heterogeneous composition of the 15-M and succeeded in bringing Rato to court and recovering the assets of 44 small investors (Flesher Fominaya 2020; Monterde *et al.* 2015). Monitoring through whistleblowers' filtrations was thus regarded as a counter-democratic tool to curb public corruption and hold power accountable (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014).

Contextually, the requests moved by the 15-M and the corruption scandals hitting the governing party (PP) gave a new impulse to old struggles. The pro-transparency campaign led by the ProAcceso coalition and the NGO Access Info found a fertile terrain to influence the passage of the transparency law in 2013. While CSOs variously attempted to pass a transparency law during Zapateros' governments, it was only with the eruption of the 15-M protests that transparency issues gained salience in the public debate. Law 19/2013 introduced new standards of proactive publications for institutional actors and the right for citizens to access public information, granting CSOs new monitoring opportunities and resources (e.g., open data for alternative media) and triggering the creation of monitoring actors on the institutional side (e.g., Transparency and Good Governance Council).

Most notably, monitoring practices have spread thanks to the development of ad-hoc information and communication technologies (ITCs). Alternative media have elaborated civic platforms such as Quien Manda¹² to analyze the connections between political and financial elites or Qué hacen los diputados¹³ to keep track of MPs' work, and social movement organizations have developed collaborative platforms to monitor political parties' funding, such as Cuentas Claras.

Concurrently, global monitoring initiatives found resonance in the Spanish context. A notable example is the incorporation of Transparency International Integrity Pacts, a fundamental anti-corruption tool wherein CSOs serve as monitoring authorities in public tendering, into the Spanish context. Over time, Transparency Spain has signed multiple pacts with public authorities, aiming to increase the transparency and integrity of public contracting.

All these practices have come at hand during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, with CSOs exploiting their platforms, coalitions, and tools to oversee the elites' actions and decisions regarding the health, social, and economic crisis. Alternative media and data-driven initiatives such as Maldita have used their years-long experience to open and publish data on contagion rates and decision-making; NGOs such as FIBGAR have set up ad-hoc whistleblowing channels to collect COVID-related filtrations, and long-lasting networks as the ProAcceso coalition has mobilized against institutional opacity. At the same time, new actors have explicitly emerged to monitor pandemic-related issues, such as OpenGenerationEU, a civic coalition born to scrutinize the allocation and use of the Next Generation EU funds.

In line with previous works (Casero-Ripollés and López-Meri 2015; Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014; Feenstra and Keane 2014), the situational map helps single out how, over time, the reliance on monitoring practices has crosscut the Spanish civic field, being deployed by alternative media (e.g., Civio, Political Watch), coalitions (e.g., ProAcceso, Open Generation EU), NGOs (e.g., Transparency Spain, Access Info), and social movement organizations (e.g., X-Net). However, whereas at first, monitoring appeared to be strictly intertwined with the anti-corruption and pro-transparency claims expressed by the 15-M movement, over time, these practices have progressively lost their representative functions to answer more technical needs.

CSOs have thus recurred to monitoring practices for several purposes, from intervening in law enforcement (courts) to protesting (denouncing elites, calling

¹¹ X-Net opened an ad-hoc platform for safe and anonymous whistleblowing, Buzon X.

¹² Powered by Civio

¹³ An initiative by Political Watch

Table 1. Table version of the ordered situational map.

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Type of actors/actants</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Human Collective Actors	Social movement campaigns Coalitions NGOs Alternative Media Mainstream Media Institutional Actors	e.g., 15-MpaRato, X-Net e.g., ProAcceso, Abre e.g., Access Info, Transparency Spain e.g., Civio, Maldita, Political Watch e.g., ElDiario.es, El Mundo, InfoLibre e.g., government forces: national (PP), regional, and local governments; opposition forces: e.g., Podemos, Vox, Ciudadanos; administrative and enforcement institutions, e.g., Transparency and Good Governance Council, Antifraud Agency Valencia; international actors, e.g., EU
Human Individual Actors	Whistleblowers Elites' members Political leaders Head of administrative institutions, Heads of local institutions Spokespersons of CSOs CSO members and activists	e.g., Rodrigo Rato e.g., President of the Transparency and Good Governance Council e.g., Transparency and Good Governance Office, Barcelona e.g., X-Net, Access Info, TI-ES's President
Non-human Elements	Leaking Platforms Popular lawsuits Monitoring Platforms	BuzonX, Globaleaks Que hacen los diputados, Quien manda
Temporal Elements	2008 2011 2020	Financial Crisis Austerity measures and anti-austerity protests Covid-related restrictions
Socio-Political Elements	Financial Crisis Mass Protests Laws Covid-19	Great Recession, Austerity Measures, 15 M/Indignados Transparency Law, European Directive on Whistleblowing, Lockdown measures, 2020 Royal Decree 463/2020 suspended access to information, Next Generation EU

Source: Author's own elaboration.

for e-mobilizations), informing, exposing, and raising awareness (through alternative and mainstream media), or participating in policy-making (at the locale, national, and international level).

The 15Mparato campaign, for example, was launched in 2012 by a group of activists that animated the 15Mparato land Rodrigo Rato in prison (Flesher Fominaya 2020). A group of SMOs led by X-Net asked citizens to leak information to build the case, filing the lawsuit in weeks. The campaign used whistleblower leaks, bringing Rato to court, recovering small investors' assets, and attracting the Spanish media's attention. Its success led to several similar investigations based on whistleblowers' leaks¹⁴. Hence, 15MpaRato and X-Net monitoring worked mainly in the enforcement (courts), media (alternative and mainstream), and protest worlds. However, when the attention around whistleblowing started to grow, nationally and internationally, other

CSOs and incumbent parties such as Ciudadanos and Vox started to work on the legislative regulation of whistleblowers' protection. Following some relevant losses in court¹⁵, X-Net partly moderated its contentious repertoires to enter the policy arena, for example, joining the ABRE coalition, which grouped Spanish CSOs advocating for a national law protecting whistleblowers.

On the contrary, NGOs such as Access Info – which forged the Pro Acceso coalition – started mobilizing on transparency and the right to know through traditional advocacy repertoires. However, over time, the organization exploited the 15-M discourses and requests to strengthen its position vis-à-vis political elites and obtain the passage of the transparency law in 2013. Over the years, Access Info kept overseeing the law's enforcement, recurring to confrontational repertoires as strategic litigations or e-mobilizations, like tweet bombing,

¹⁴ E.g., the Tarjetas Negras and Castor's cases.

¹⁵ Rato was absolved in 2020 for Bankia's case but entered prison in 2018 for the Tarjetas Negras' one.



Figure 1. Social worlds/arena map. *Source:* Author's own work, based on template by Clarke, Friese and Washburn (2015: 201).

when necessary. Other NGOs have instead preferred less confrontational forms of monitoring. Transparency International Spain – for example – has always sought to maintain quite cooperative stances towards institutional actors, reclaiming its *super partes* identity. Transparency's monitoring work, particularly through the Integrity Pacts initiatives, has remained mainly anchored to the legislative and enforcement worlds, avoiding mediatization and protest.

The reliance of some CSOs on protest repertoires (e.g., tweet bombing and e-mobilizations) and formal confrontation (e.g., strategic litigation) created tensions with more moderate coalition members. Coalitions such as Pro Acceso or Abre sometimes struggled to conduct monitoring functions jointly, preferring to act independently.

Other telling insights come from monitoring by alternative media, data journalism, and open data initiatives, which have grown significantly in Spain over the last decade (Casero-Ripollés and López-Meri 2015). Actors such as Civio, Maldita, or Political Watch tried to carry out some of the 15 M pro-transparency and pro-accountability claims by retrieving, opening, and circulating public information to put decision-makers' choices and actions under the public spotlight. While operating mainly within the media world, these actors have often resorted to confrontational repertoires to have their rights recognized (e.g., using lawsuits to access information) and joined forces with other CSOs to intervene in

the legislative process (e.g., being part of the ProAcceso coalition) and scrutinize the use of public resources (e.g., OpenGenerationEU).

Visualizing the dynamics of the Spanish monitoring arena through the social worlds/arenas map offers (Fig. 1) some clues on ongoing hybridization processes, with diverse actors relying on the same practice with or without resorting to confrontational repertoires (Clarke A.E, Friese C. and Washburn R.S 2017). However, to elucidate differences within the Spanish monitoring field, the following section investigates how civic monitors have positioned themselves vis-à-vis monitored actors and the constituencies they intend to serve.

5. POSITIONING CIVIC MONITORING

Besides differences in repertoires and arenas, the Spanish monitoring actors seem to differ according to their positions vis-à-vis the elites and constituencies.

On one extreme, one can find Transparency Spain's Integrity Pacts, where monitoring results in cooptation within the elites' circles and the citizens' inclusion in public scrutiny is minimal. The Integrity Pacts, for example, aim to increase transparency and efficacy in public contracting via agreements between the contracting authority and service providers under the scrutiny of a third civic party. Transparency has signed several pacts with Spanish local authorities, e.g., Madrid City Council. Here, the focus is ameliorating administrative procedures, which resembles more a logic of service delivery rather than bottom-up surveillance. Conflictual stances are hardly part of these monitoring practices that, as reminded by Transparency Spain:

Wholly depended on political will [...] it's extra-legal because it is not in the law; it is a political will, a good practice. (INT 4)

In this case, monitoring takes the form of a top-down concession built around the needs and interests of monitored authorities. When present, citizens' inclusion is minimal and dependent on resource availability:

We signed those pacts, some workshops were held for all citizens, and for monitors [...] What happens is that when that project ended, we could only give it a minimal follow-up without resources and people to continue signing more pacts, doing events, or raising awareness. (INT 4)

On the opposite extreme, one can find instances of civic monitoring that reject integration and dialogue with elites and aim to make the citizenry the leading

actor of public scrutiny. 15MPaRato constitutes a perfect example of this type of civic monitoring based on citizens' surveillance of public powers. The leaks-based campaign drew on whistleblowers' information and grassroots lawsuits because:

As citizens, we do not perceive the parties and the judicial system as allies against corruption and abuses but as part of the problem. It is evident to any observer that a large part of the victories in the fight against systemic corruption come from the citizens or thanks to citizen support. (DOC 1)

The campaign framed the post-2008 situation as a systemic crisis that could only be solved from below. However, over the years, some of its leading members partly revised their approach and engaged in the legislative and enforcement worlds (Fig.1). For example, X-Net cooperated with Barcelona's city council to set up an institutional whistleblowing platform. Such a decision was framed as coherent with X-Net's monitoring goals. The group thus reclaimed its role as an external watchdog and its suspicious attitudes toward the institutional world, affirming that:

We must once again be external elements to fulfill the role of watchdogs. The institutions must do most of the work because that is where the resources are. The citizen devices must replace the institutions only when they neglect their functions. The recommended methodology advises the leaker to send the information only to the administration's mailbox with the resources to act. But, after the time indicated by the administration, the citizen who considers the action ineffective can denounce this oversight through citizen self-organization, such as the Xnet Mailbox. (DOC 1)

Between these two poles, one can find more blurred instances of civic monitoring, which struggle to balance integration within elites' circles and citizens' inclusion. The tension is evident when considering monitoring coalitions that, by definition, put together groups with different goals and monitoring styles. The ProAcceso coalition, for example, has existed for more than a decade and managed to achieve important goals, such as the approval of the transparency law in 2013. However, monitoring the elites' work has sometimes been the source of tensions between its members. As recalled by Access Info's President, who founded the coalition, some CSs refused to participate in monitoring activities, which were thus carried out independently:

The first time I proposed to the coalition Pro Acceso to jointly analyze the political party programs and manifestos to see what they were saying about transparency, everyone said there was "Absolutely not" because they never followed

those programs anyway. And so, at Access Info, we did it on our own. (INT 2)

The tension between confrontational and cooperative stances characterized coalitional monitoring even during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the Pro-Aceso coalition confronted the Spanish government for suspending the citizens' right to access public information during the first lockdown. On the other hand, it seized the opportunity to propose reforming the transparency law. The need to combine conflict and cooperation in monitoring is well-explained by Access Info's president when stating that:

If we, the civil society, are sort of outsiders to the administration, if we're not sympathetic to how they work, if we don't try to understand the challenges they have, we can't have the same impact because that becomes confrontational, you know, and I think that again, in a more kind of mature civil society context, you would have civil society organizations who are critical who will challenge, who will litigate, but who understand as well and you are ready to kind of brainstorm solutions with the people in the public administration who are trying to do the right thing. (INT 2)

However, monitoring coalitions have struggled to include citizens in scrutinizing processes so far. Their occasional reliance on confrontational repertoires has not come with ad hoc strategies to foster citizens' par-

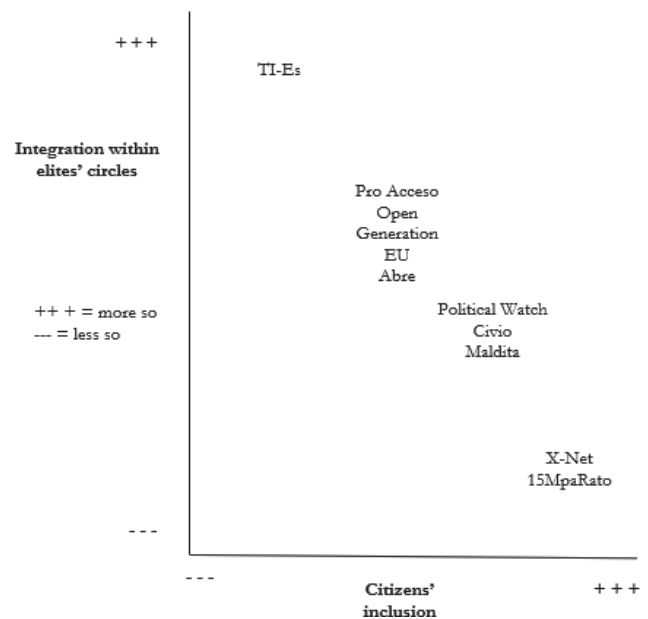


Figure 2. Positional map. Civic monitoring, elites' integration, and citizens' inclusion. Source: Author's own work, based on template by Clarke, Friese and Washburn (2015: 231).

ticipation in monitoring practices. Even the more citizens-oriented initiative, Open Generation EU, seems to lack instruments to directly realize people's inclusion in monitoring the use of the Next Generation EU funds, presenting itself as a group of: «civil society actors, experts, and journalists to demand transparent and accessible management of Next Generation EU funds and the Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan, embodied in the 'España Puede' plan¹⁶».

Monitoring by alternative media seems characterized by similar tensions. Citizens' inclusion in monitoring practices is rooted in the idea that public information belongs to the people and that opening and distributing it is a service to the community. As recalled by an interviewee from Maldita:

What we do is ask for databases, we ask the government, the administration, or whoever, [...] and from there we tell a story. What we also always try to do is open those databases, which is like, "We have achieved this, we have requested it, and we believe that it is data that has to be public. They must be public; they are government data; therefore, they are public data, and they belong to all of us and beyond our use and telling what is interesting, here is the database and whoever wants to use it, redistribute it or whatever. (INT 6)

However, including citizens in monitoring processes is often a challenging task. Whereas monitoring, transparency, and accountability have become salient in the Spanish public debate, civic monitors such as Civio recognize that data-enabled monitoring is still something ordinary citizens can hardly carry out autonomously. According to Civio's spokesperson, whereas citizens are increasingly interested in monitoring practices, they still need to outsource this work to trustable CSOs:

People want to monitor institutions. In other words, people still trust social organizations that do this work more than doing it themselves. (INT 6)

Data-driven initiatives have tried to address this need, favoring the use and re-use of information by specialized CSOs. As reported by Political Watch:

Typically, our tools are more oriented to people who carry out political surveillance for their work, for example, the advocacy department of a civic organization, which needs to know what happens in the details of politics, for example. (INT 8)

However, besides supplying other actors with information, alternative media can directly use their bulk of data in more confrontational ways, for example, restoring to naming and shaming strategies to exert pressure on the institutional realm. As maintained by Civio:

We often go to court, sometimes with the administration, when they deny us the information [...] we believe citizens should have a right to. Ultimately, we investigate and press to generate the necessary jurisprudence so that if we win a particular trial, information that is not available right now, we can make it possible for any citizen to request it now. (INT 3)

However, alternative media see the need to dialogue with the institutional world while avoiding cooptation. As reported by Civio, it is necessary to fulfill one of the main goals of scrutinizing powerholders, which is ultimately to unveil problems and find solutions:

We investigate areas where we believe there is insufficient information on transparency. And what we do afterward is, with what we have learned, what we bring to light, especially if they are bad practices, abuses or errors, or bad faith on the part of the administrations, we try to provide solutions [...] If, as an institution, you are not being transparent enough by bringing your problem to light, we are trying to get you to correct that, let's say, that immoral practice. (INT 6)

This succinct overview proves that civic monitoring initiatives differ according to their positions vis-à-vis monitored actors and the general public. Monitoring from below can indeed take the form of cooptation when prioritizing the integration within elite circles over citizens' inclusion, as in the case of Transparency's Integrity Pacts, or resemble surveillance when struggling to enhance the people's scrutinizing power and rejecting cooperation with political elites, as it in the case of 15MpaRato. In between, NGOs, coalitions, and alternative media often struggle to find a balance between these two poles, trying to enhance citizens' participation and improve institutions' work through monitoring practices.

6. CONCLUSION

The article has investigated the crosscutting reliance on civic monitoring practices by Spanish CSOs over the last decade. Analyzing interviews and documents through SA has helped single out hybridization processes within the civic arena. The situational map has elucidated the main elements characterizing monitoring from below. The social worlds/arena map has

¹⁶ Description accessible at <https://opengenerationeu.net/quienes-somos/>

shown how different actors such as NGOs, social movement organizations, coalitions, and alternative media have equally resorted to monitoring practices to intervene in the legislative, enforcement, media, or protest words. Exceptions regarded some NGOs such as Transparency Spain or campaigns such as 15MPaRato, which alternatively avoid engaging in protest or legislative work in their monitoring functions. Finally, the positional map has elucidated different integration logics between civic monitors, monitored elites, and the public. SMOs and movement campaigns such as X-Net and 15MpaRato have mainly sought to include citizens (e.g., whistleblowers) in monitoring practices while surveilling institutions' work. Conversely, NGOs such as Transparency Spain have used their monitoring role to enhance their integration with monitored institutions, sometimes resulting in cooptation within the elites' circles. In between, monitoring coalitions have tried to increase their leverage towards legislative and enforcement actors, balancing confrontation and dialogue. Similarly, alternative media have moved between conflict and cooperation, trying to sustain institutional work while creating monitoring ecosystems and mediating the relationship between monitored elites and the public.

The evidence aligns with ongoing discussions on hybridization processes in the civic field and well-documented tendencies in the Spanish case (Della Porta 2020a; Feenstra 2018). Furthermore, the study sheds new light on differences within the civic monitoring field beyond distinctions based on the functions of monitoring practices (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés 2014; Feenstra and Keane 2014). The study shows how monitoring practices deployed by different CSOs represent new forms of political participation, which become particularly relevant in multiple crises, such as in the aftermath of the Great Recession or during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Significant limitations relate to the data collected and the method applied. Whereas the data collection stopped in 2021, new evidence on post-pandemic times would be necessary to understand the current relevance of monitoring practices further. Moreover, SA's potentialities have not been exploited fully here. Whereas the study has focused mainly on human collective actors and three types of maps, new investigations could benefit from moving the attention to the roles of other defining elements. For example, new evidence could come from a fine-grained analysis of the role of non-human actants, given the crucial role of ICTs in monitoring practices (Keane 2009; Mattoni 2020). Understanding whether and how different monitoring technologies

shape or are shaped by different CSOs could enhance our understanding of varieties of civic monitoring.

Lastly, replicating the study beyond the Spanish context would corroborate the presented evidence. Whereas Spain has been considered a critical case for democratic innovation, monitory democracy, and hybridization processes, monitoring, NGOization, and SMOization seem to be on the rise worldwide (Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Della Porta 2020a). New comparative studies will reduce the risk of ending up in a «Spanish exceptionalism» type of argument and will enrich our understanding of the tension between monitory democracy and counter-democracy, which to date remains largely undebated.

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APPENDIX

Interviewees

1. X-Net, online, May 2021
2. Access Info, offline, May 2021
3. Civio, online, June 2021
4. Transparency International Spain, online, July 2021
5. Political Watch, online, June 2021
6. Maldita, online, July 2021