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Conflict dynamics in Spanish Parliament: Personality traits and attitudes of deputies



Researchers from UAB and UNED have analysed the causes of conflicts in the Spanish Parliament, focusing on the psychological characteristics of the politicians. The study shows that there are relationships between personality traits, such as Machiavellianism, and a greater predisposition to conflict. The results could be useful for political parties when selecting candidates who promote a culture of cooperation in Parliament.

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Around the world, tense and even violent scenes between parliamentarians are not uncommon. However, most research on parliamentary conflict has looked for aggregate causes in national, party or legislative characteristics, rather than in the psychological characteristics of the politicians themselves. Our research focuses on understanding why some members of Parliament (MPs) are more prone to conflict and what role their personality traits play in this behaviour.

We start from the idea that personality influences MPs' tendency to engage in conflict dynamics. Specifically, we examined the relationship between the 'Dark Triad' (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) and the personality dimension known as agreeableness

with attitudes towards conflict. Our analysis shows that Machiavellianism is the "dark" trait most strongly associated with conflictual attitudes among MPs (for example, a tendency to disregard agreements or view opponents as 'evil'), indicating a preference for manipulation and prioritising personal goals over cooperation. On the other hand, we found that MPs who described themselves as more sociable were less likely to engage in hostile behaviour, thus promoting cooperation in their interactions.

To conduct the research, we used data from the third study of political representatives in Spain, collected in 2022. The sample included 547 members of national and regional legislatures, providing a representative view of conflict attitudes within Spanish political institutions. To measure personality traits, we used abbreviated versions of well-known questionnaires, such as the BFI-10 for the "Big Five" and the "Dirty Dozen" for the Dark Triad. The questionnaire also assessed the tendency to seek or avoid confrontation and resistance to compromise, allowing us to create a scale of attitudes towards parliamentary conflict. The results were analysed using multiple regressions, which allowed us to identify significant relationships between traits such as Machiavellianism and a greater predisposition to parliamentary conflict, even after controlling factors such as party, gender, age, or experience.

These findings help us to have a better understanding of the psychological foundations of parliamentary conflict and could be useful for political parties when selecting candidates who promote a culture of cooperation in Parliament.

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References

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