



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Spanish Indignados protest austerity measures, 2011

**Time period notes:** *This protest happened after earlier strikes, but both this protest and the strikes almost a year earlier were responding to the same phenomenon of austerity (spending cuts, welfare cuts, etc.). The political and economic stagnation that inspired the Strikes of 2010 continued through the year, providing only platitudes to campaigners with no action. The 15M Movement is a response to that inaction and disrespect.*

13 May

2011

to: 4 August

2011

**Country:** Spain

**Location Description:** *National movement in Spain, centered in urban areas - Madrid, Barcelona*

### Goals:

The goals of this campaign were many and varied. They demanded new solutions to unemployment and welfare, but also rejected Spain's political system and capitalism as an economic model. Additionally, they called for an end to perceived corruption in politics and finance. Below is a quote, translated from Democracia Real YA, which reflects the diverse and inclusive nature of these protests.

“... Rejection [of government solutions] for unemployment, welfare cuts, Spanish politicians, the current two-party system in Spain between the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party and the People's Party. This also includes the rejection of the current political system, capitalism, banks and political corruption. Many call for basic rights, which consist of home, work, culture, health and education rights.”

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

- 048. Protest meetings
- 162. Sit-in

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 038. Marches › Eight column march from all over Spain, meeting after a month in the capital city of Madrid.

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 038. Marches › Eight column march from all over Spain, meeting after a month in the capital city of Madrid.

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 026. Paint as protest
- 038. Marches › Eight column march from all over Spain, meeting after a month in the capital city of Madrid.

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 038. Marches › Attempted occupation of a central plaza, stopped by police
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- Too Broad to Characterize

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

None

**Partners:**

Democracia real YA, Acampadabcn

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

A note about leadership & partnership: the groups Acampadabcn and Democracia Real YA are listed as Partners, because they were not single individuals who directed the action. Instead, they are loosely organized social media entities that served as a hub for communication. Direction for action seemed improvised and decided upon by rough consensus in the ephemeral web of online social media. The loose coalition of groups of all types makes it impossible to characterize who joined when or for what reason. Most distinct groups of the coalition joined via Democracia real YA, before 15 May, 2011. More than 500 groups did so.

**Segment Length:** 2 weeks

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Government, banks and other capitalist institutions. Many participants also considered labor unions and the United Left political coalition to be their opponents because of their links to the ongoing political and economic system.

**Campaigner violence:**

On 15 June, 2011, campaigners responded to violent police intervention with thrown rocks & bottles, injuring 12 police officers. This violence was condemned by the organizing bodies, Acampadabcn & Democracia real YA.

**Repressive Violence:**

Riot police used violent means to repress the campaigners during all of their attempted occupations of prominent public spaces. Many injuries were reported, though most of them did not require serious medical attention.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

0 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

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The economic crisis which began in 2008 hit Spain harder than any other country in the European Union. They set eurozone records in 2011 with 21.3% unemployment and 43.5% youth unemployment. In an attempt to put a stop to the rapid collapse of the Spanish economy, the government passed sweeping employment changes in 2010. These changes made it easier for employers to hire and fire workers and increased the retirement age from 65 to 67.

Workers responded to the legislation by participating in Spain's first general strikes in more than ten years, led by Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, in English, the General Workers' Union). Smaller unions throughout the country also participated. The strikes did not change the government's course.

In January 2011, activists created the website and online group Democracia real YA. It spread quickly on Spanish social media. It gained the support of more than 500 distinct groups, forming a powerful coalition. The group actively rejected attempts of any political party or labor union to join their struggle, maintaining an identity separate from institutional political processes.

On 13 May 2011 Democr7acia real YA nonviolently occupied the Bank of Murcia to disrupt their services, a symbolic act designed to build energy for their cause. It used Facebook and Twitter, calling for "the unemployed, poorly paid, the

subcontractors, the precarious, young people..." to act collectively in dozens of Spanish cities on 15 May. The campaigners called for a totally reworked political system, an abandonment of capitalist modes of production, increased welfare benefits, and programs for the unemployed.

People formed demonstrations in at least seven cities. Between 20,000-50,000 people gathered in Madrid. Approximately 15,000 protesters gathered in Barcelona, while smaller cities such as Granada garnered upwards of 5,000 demonstrators. Throughout Spain, there were an estimated 130,000 protesters total.

Meanwhile, in Santiago de Compostela, eight hooded individuals smashed storefronts and banks.

In Madrid, protesters blocked the Gran Vía and Callao streets. Police responded by beating demonstrators with truncheons. The clashes left storefronts smashed and trashcans burnt. 24 protesters were arrested in Madrid and 5 police officers were injured. The government did not report any injuries among the protesters. 100 protesters resolved to camp out in la Puerta del Sol that night, which initiated protests on the next day.

On 16 May, protesters in la Puerta del Sol decided to camp there until the elections on 22 May. 200 people made a similar decision in Barcelona's Plaça Catalunya. The Twitter hashtag #spanishrevolution began trending.

Police attempted to clear la Puerta del Sol in Madrid early in the morning of 17 May. Two protesters were arrested and one was injured. In response, protesters – now acting without the guidance of Democracia real YA gathered in the squares of 30 Spanish cities. In Madrid, 12,000 individuals created practical committees to sustain the protests. Dozens gathered outside the Madrid courthouse where the authorities held the detainees from 15 May; all were released shortly.

Between 18 May and 20 May, the protesters became more organized and improved their communications. Demonstrators gave speeches at camps in all occupied cities and organizers used an internet TV service to stream video from the camps. Committees met every day at 13:00 and assemblies were held at 20:00. Media in foreign countries began reporting seriously on the protests and compared them to the Arab Spring, specifically actions in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

The leftist electoral coalition – the United Left -- became concerned about participation in the 22 May election if disorder continued to grow. On 20 May, United Left (IU) asked the Supreme Court to ban rallies and demonstrations. The Supreme Court granted the ban, but a body called the Tribunal Council appealed it. The IU made an attempt to appeal to the Tribunal Council, but they had only until midnight to make their arguments and find a ruling. Meanwhile, between 16,000 and 19,000 gathered around la Puerta del Sol, continuing the protests.

21 May started at 00:01, with protesters unleashing a primal scream in response to failed attempts by IU to ban their demonstrations. Protesters continued on despite the ban on rallies on the day before elections, growing to thousands of protesters in 17 cities.

On 22 May, election day, protesters – now known as los Indignados – announced that they would remain in their camps for at least another week. Election results showed that the ruling party, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE, center-left) had lost many Congressional seats to the People's Party (PP, Center Right), but that split votes and blank votes were at record levels.

On 24 May, protesters gained access to Channel 7 of Murcia and managed to avoid security staff long enough to broadcast a manifesto against media manipulation. On 27 May, riot police attempted to clear several Spanish squares, including the Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona. This action resulted in 121 injuries from police violence, including one broken arm.

Between 1 June to 15 June, protests continued on a somewhat smaller scale. Campaigners continued to occupy public squares in the cities although their numbers shrank. Around a dozen or so small actions occurred with about fifty Indignados per event.

On 15 June, protesters blockaded the Catalan Parliament in Barcelona using dumpsters. Police fired rubber bullets into the crowd while legislators used back entrances and helicopters to enter the meeting. Protesters responded to the police action with violence – thrown rocks and bottles resulted in 12 police casualties. There were also 24 civilian casualties and police made 6

arrests.

Discussion about the potential use of secret police infiltrators to instigate violence took place via Twitter. Democracia real YA, and another online organizing group Acampadabcn, “rejected” the violence, indicating that violent action was not supported by the organizing groups.

On 19 June, approximately three million people rallied in 80 cities throughout Spain, answering the call to action from social media and inspired by the actions of protesters in Barcelona.

Between the 20th and 25th of June the Indignant People’s March through Spain to Madrid began. The goals of this march were to survey the needs of rural people and to set up local assemblies. The eight columns of the march met in Madrid on 23 July, 2011 at la Puerta del Sol. The columns shared their experiences from the march and created a document called The Book of the People.

The next day, demonstrators moved through the city spraying red graffiti on buildings and posting bills that read “GUILTY” on banks, who activists blamed for the economic crisis. Protesters met in front of the Congress of Deputies. Then on the next day, 25 July, a contingent of 50 Indignados left la Puerta del Sol on a march to Brussels to deliver their proposals to the European Parliament.

Two days later, 27 July, police violently removed a protest camp in Madrid with 12 injuries reported. Meanwhile, Indignados disguised in formal attire snuck into the Congress of Deputies and managed to get the Book of the People presented to the Prime Minister.

On 2 August, riot police attempted to remove the information booth that had been left behind in la Puerta del Sol. The Indignados attempted to prevent this. Heavy police presence kept them from entering the square. More than 5000 protesters took to the streets and occupied Plaza Mayor, set up a temporary information booth, and planned for the next day.

On 3 August, the demonstrators attempted to enter la Puerta del Sol from many different streets, harried by police the whole time. They were stopped by overwhelming police presence at every turn and the 4,000 remaining protesters were forced to call it a day after hours of struggle.

This marked the end of contiguous action by Indignados in Spain, determining the dating of this campaign that was part of the larger movement against austerity. Estimates of number of participants in the campaign range from one to three million people.

Sporadically during October and December activists held demonstrations, largely in concert with the global Occupy movement. Some of these events attracted thousands of protesters -- as many as 250,000 gathered in Barcelona on 15 October 2011. Ultimately, however, the campaign did not regain its momentum. It also failed to achieve any of its goals.

Some protests that continue in Spain can in some ways be characterized as aftershocks of the campaign of “Indignados” or the 15M Movement. It is possible that these somewhat smaller campaigns will be more successful than their inspiration despite their smaller size because their demands are more focused.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

This campaign was influenced by the Arab Spring, specifically protests in Tahrir Square. As well as Grecian protests in 2008 & South Korean protests in 1980 & 1987. (1)

This campaign spun off into many smaller protests in Spain & contributed to the Occupy movement as well. (2).

**Sources:**

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**Additional Notes:**

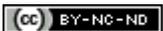
Some reports suggest that, even though this 2011 upsurge was too unfocused on specific and realizable goals to be what is usually considered a "campaign," the very fact that the demands were profound and sweeping might have accounted for the passion and widespread participation of indignant Spaniards.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Zachary Arestad, 21/10/2013

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