A PERSONAL NETWORK STUDY OF INFORMAL POLITICAL CONVERSATION IN CATALONIA

Fieldwork report of Work Package 3 of the INCLUSIVITY research project

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INCLUSIVITY Project
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RESEARCH PROJECT

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INCLUSIVITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of growing polarization across Europe, the international research project *"Inclusivity norms to counter polarization in European societies"* (INCLUSIVITY) aims to understand current polarization dynamics in European societies and how to counter them. In particular, it examines the role that "inclusivity norms" (social norms that promote equality-based respect, dialogue, and unity) can play in mitigating polarization and promoting tolerance, inter-group contact, and cooperation. The four-year INCLUSIVITY research project, which was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, is conducted by an international consortium of five research teams from four European countries (see p. 3) with expertise in sociology, anthropology, and social psychology.

One of these teams is the COALESCE Lab (Laboratory for the Computational Analysis of Egonetworks, Social Cohesion, and Exclusion), based at the GRAFO research group at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Within the project, the COALESCE Lab is responsible for conducting a study (*Work Package 3*) about the dynamics of political polarization in people's everyday interpersonal networks in Catalonia (Spain). More specifically, the study analyzes how people experience and manage political differences with people around them (including family, friends, coworkers, and other acquaintances) in their everyday lives.[1] This study is directed by Professor Miranda J. Lubbers (co-PI of the project), who designed the study and implemented it together with postdoctoral researcher Alejandro Ciordia. The study collects new data in two stages. In the first stage, in-depth interviews were held with a varied sample of 76 citizens of Catalonia, about their experiences and management of political differences in their everyday social relationships (in their "personal network"). We aimed to explore how citizens manage political differences in their relationships and which social norms they adopt when navigating these differences in their everyday lives. In the second stage, we assess the degree of societal consensus around the norms for managing ideological differences observed in the first stage, through an online survey. This survey will be conducted in 2024 with a large representative sample of the population of Catalonia.

This report was written after the first stage. It summarizes the most important characteristics of the data collected for this work package through in-depth personal network interviews. It is written to inform the participants of the research and other interested people about our preliminary findings. Before moving to the next section, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to the 76 anonymous citizens of Catalonia who volunteered to participate in the interviews and generously agreed to share their time, views, and personal experiences for the purposes of this research. Their patience and explanations have greatly

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[1] Ethical approval for data collection was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (ID: CA66).

enlightened our understanding of the role of political differences in people's personal environments and how they manage them. We would also like to thank the people who helped us reach out to them, as well as the larger group of INCLUSIVITY researchers, for their feedback.

2. THE COLLECTED DATA

As mentioned above, data collection for the first stage of this study relied on in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face by a team of 5 interviewers (the postdoctoral researcher, two graduate research assistants, and two undergraduate research assistants) between October 2022 and January 2023.[2] Upon receiving participants' informed consent for the interview and audio recording, interviews were held in Catalan and Spanish/Castilian (the official languages of the autonomous community of Catalonia), depending on respondents' preferences. They were fully tape-recorded and later transcribed. Interviews lasted between 1 and 4 hours, with an average duration of 2 hours and 10 minutes. In recognition of their time and collaboration, participants were entitled to receive a small economic compensation of 15 €, though not all participants accepted it.

2.1. The participants: quota sampling and recruitment

Research participants are residents of Catalonia (who have lived there for at least 1.5 years prior to the interview) with diverse political views and sociodemographic characteristics. Following qualitative research principles, which are particularly apt for exploratory research endeavors in which little is known about a given social phenomenon, we aimed to obtain sufficient heterogeneity among the respondents in a reduced number of theoretically relevant dimensions. Technically, the term for the procedure we used for selecting a group of individuals for participation in the study (the "sample") is *purposive quota sampling*. In particular, we aimed at obtaining a relatively equal distribution of respondents belonging to each of the three major opinion clusters on the territorial status of Catalonia (see Balcells, Fernández-Albertos & Kuo 2020; Balcells & Kuo 2021 2023: (i) supporters of independence from Spain (*pro-independence*), (ii) supporters of Catalonia's continuing being a region of Spain with similar or reduced levels of political autonomy (*pro-status quo*), and (iii) citizens with intermediate, neutral, or mixed positions on the matter, for instance, supporting increasing levels of political autonomy for Catalonia but short of independence (*pro-autonomy*). In the end, based on participants' responses to the survey questions, the resulting numbers of participants per opinion cluster were the following: 27 (36%) of our participants were pro-independence, 23 (30%) pro-status quo, and 26 (34%) pro-autonomy. Apart from this main ideological criterion, we also aimed to maximize variation

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[2] Only one interview was conducted online through a videocall in order to better accommodate for the agendas of the participant and the asssigned interviewer.

within each of the three groups in terms of age, gender, left-right ideological self-identification, and degree of personal involvement in political activities.[3]

To recruit voluntary participants, the research team created a bilingual webpage with accessible information on the project and a link to an online contact form for prospective participants. This information was spread through four complementary strategies: (i) interpersonal diffusion initiated by research team members to potential participants and people who might know potential participants fitting the quota through personal conversations, text messages, and printed leaflets, (ii) in-person diffusion to attendees of public political events through the distribution of leaflets, (iii) formal email requests to local civil society organizations and political parties, and (iv) targeted private messages to visible representatives of selected activist organizations and political parties.

Interested readers can consult the distribution of key political and sociodemographic characteristics of the participants in the Appendix. However, it is important to note that our sample was not intended to represent the sociodemographic and political characteristics observed for the entire population of Catalonia. Rather, we aimed to interview sufficient people of each opinion group regardless of the size of those clusters in the population, and to interview people with a wide range of political identities and sociodemographic characteristics. Similar to many other personal network studies (e.g., Minozzi *et al.* 2020), our design is not intended to produce estimates about interpersonal political dialogue in the population of Catalonia as a whole, but rather to allow us to understand how these very different people encounter differences in opinion in their daily life and what unspoken rules they follow in the way they handle these differences. This helped us extract a set of rules that can be translated into survey items. The large-scale, online survey in Catalonia planned for 2024 during the second stage of data collection is intended to make population-level estimates about how common political disagreement is in daily life and whether there is consensus among Catalans on how to manage disagreement.

2.2. The interviews: mode and structure

The script for the Stage-1 interviews was designed following a mixed-methods approach (in this case, the interviews included both closed survey questions and open-ended, more conversational interview questions) within the methodological framework of Personal Network Analysis (McCarty *et al.* 2019). More specifically, as summarized in Figure 1, the script combined five types of questions to collect data on: (a) comparable information on participants' characteristics and attitudes, (b) the description of the composition and structure of participants' personal networks (that is, the set of people important to them and whom they talk to -or stopped talking to-), and (c) rich interview transcripts

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[3] Regarding the level of political involvement, originally, we intended to speak to a majority of "lay citizens" and a few "community leaders" per opinion group, but realities were much less clear-cut (see Section 2.3).

containing participants' open-ended responses and retrospective narratives and reflections about their personal experiences of informal political discussion. Structured (i.e., survey-type) and semi-structured (i.e., more open, conversational questions) sections were organized alternately. The three question formats for the personal network data (marked in blue in Figure 1) will be further explained in Section 2.4.

The interview script was administered with the assistance of the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) software *Network Canvas* (Complex Data Collective 2016; see Birkett *et al.* 2021), which was installed on touch-screen tablet devices. This highly interactive interview software not only allowed for an agile automatic recording of responses but, more importantly, allowed participants to see the exact wording of questions as well as engaging network visualizations based on their previous responses. This software was chosen to minimize the cognitive burden for respondents and stimulate participants' reflections in their open-ended responses during the last phase of qualitative in-depth interviewing.
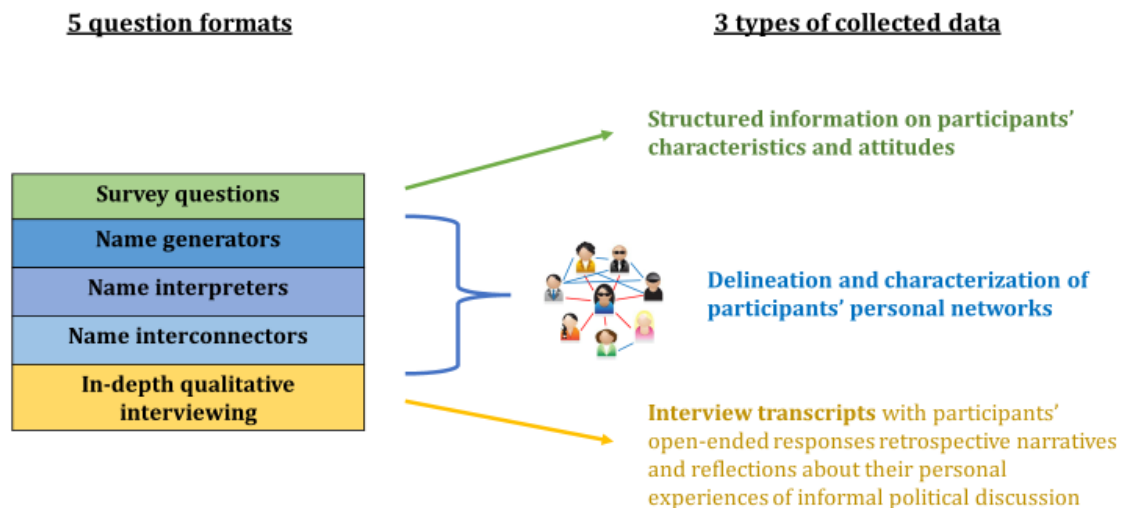

FIGURE 1. *Types of question formats and collected data*

2.3. Attitudes towards political discussion and main topics of interest

The voluntary participants in our study show a high degree of interest in politics and willingness to engage in informal political discussion. In the first place, high levels of political interest are evident in the rates of associational membership among our participants. Almost half of the sample (35 participants, 46%) declared to be active members of at least one political group or organization.[4] Among these participants, as many as 23 (30%) occupy some position of responsibility and/or

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[4] For the sake of comparison, according to the most updated survey data covering the entire population of Catalonia, only the 2.4% are members of a political party, 9.2% are members of a union, 4.3% are members of an environmentalist group or association, and 2.5% are members of a political association other than a party. Source: *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió. Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3a onada 2023. Taules estadístiques.*

visibility within their organization. 87% of the respondents declared that they are always or usually willing to discuss politics with people around them (see Figure 2). Besides this predisposition to engage in informal political discussion, participants generally report more positive than negative feelings associated with experiences of informal political discussion. While interest is the most prevalent feeling associated with informal political discussion, more than half of the participants also reported feeling frustration in these situations. In contrast, feelings associated with political disengagement like indifference and boredom were reported only very occasionally.
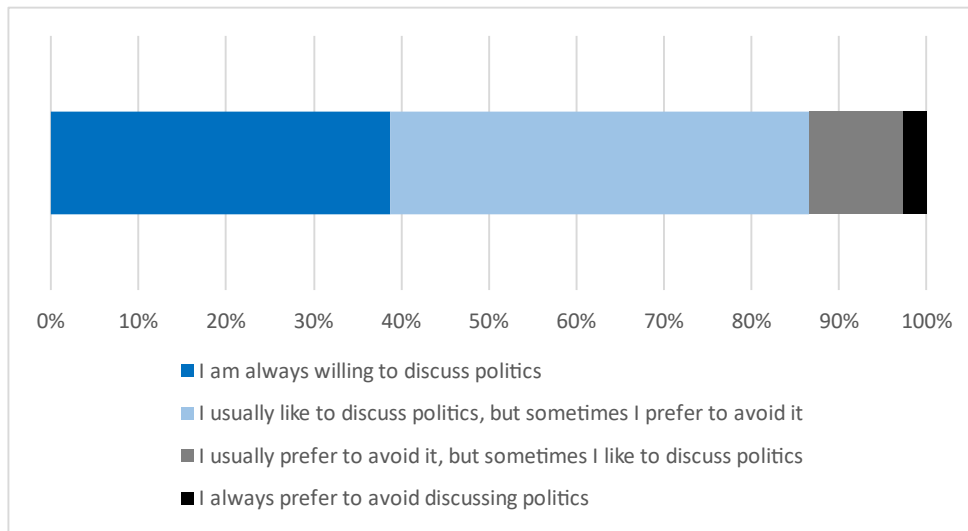
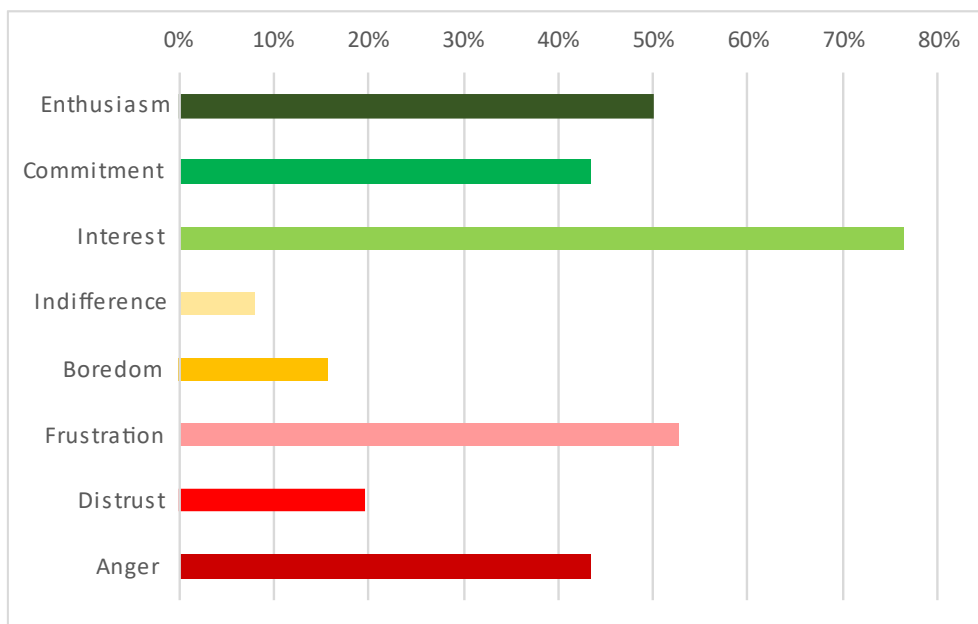**FIGURE 2.** *General predisposition to engage in informal political conversations*

FIGURE 3. *Feelings experienced when discussing politics*

TABLE 1. *Most important sociopolitical issues according to participants*

Label	Description	No. of participants mentioning	Percentage
CAT INDEP	Conflict over self-determination in Catalonia	33	44%
DEMOCR QUAL	Functioning and quality of democratic institutions	25	33%
MACROECON	Macroeconomic performance, crises, and inflation	24	32%
POLARIZATION	Polarization and politically related social tensions	23	31%
CLIMATE	Climate change and environmental protection	20	27%
ECON INEQ	Socioeconomic inequality	20	27%
JOBS	Job market and employment conditions	19	25%
EDUC	Education and social awareness	19	25%
LANG	Linguistic, cultural, and national rights	16	21%
PUBLIC SERV	Functioning of public services	16	21%
MIGRATION	Immigration and integration	14	19%
CRIME	Incivility and crime	10	13%
INTL POLITICS	International politics and conflicts	4	5%
	TOTAL RESPONDENTS	7*5*	

Legend. Issues are ranked by the number of interviews in which they were spontaneously mentioned in response to the following open-ended question: *"What do you think are the three main social problems or challenges that Catalan society is currently facing and which will continue to be important in the coming years? Could you rank them in order of most to least important?"*. We classified the responses into broader categories, resulting in the labels and descriptions mentioned in the table. This question was skipped in one of the interviews due to time constraints.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to freely name up to three societal issues that were the most relevant to them, and a wide variety of topics were mentioned. Table 1 shows the relative frequency of 13 general topics that emerged from participants' spontaneous responses. As can be observed, the conflict over self-determination in Catalonia stands out as the most frequent issue of concern for participants, being spontaneously mentioned as one of their top three concerns by 44% of respondents. However, as many as nine other issues were spontaneously mentioned by at least one-fifth of respondents (i.e., at least 15 respondents; see Table 1), which is illustrative of the very diverse sociopolitical concerns of interviewed citizens. It should also be noted that these issues were sometimes mentioned in relation to one another, as some people linked topics instead of listing them distinctly (for example, by arguing that polarization or the democratic quality is related to the Catalan independence movement).

After talking about political issues in an open-ended fashion at the beginning of the interview, subsequent questions concentrated on three selected topics of political conversation: general political issues without further specification, the conflict over self-determination in Catalonia, and climate change. This selection allows us to examine similarities and differences between conversation dynamics for general political discussion (the traditional focus of the academic literature) and

two specific political issues that exhibit highly contrasting characteristics in the Catalan sociopolitical context: the conflict over self-determination in Catalonia, and climate change. While the first is highly salient, politicized and contentious, the second is comparatively much less salient and still shows relatively low levels politicization and contentiousness.

Participants were asked a number of common socio-political survey questions about their political opinions and preferences on the left-right dimension and the two topics of conversations (opinion distributions are presented in the Appendix). Additionally, they were asked to report how often they engaged in each type of conversation, generally speaking. Figure 4 shows stark differences across the three topics, with general political conversation occurring very often (weekly or daily for almost 90% of participants), whereas discussion about Catalan independence and climate change occurs significantly less frequently, with less than half of the sample declaring to discuss these topics weekly. 30% of our respondents said that they talk about Catalan independence very sparingly, once a month or less.
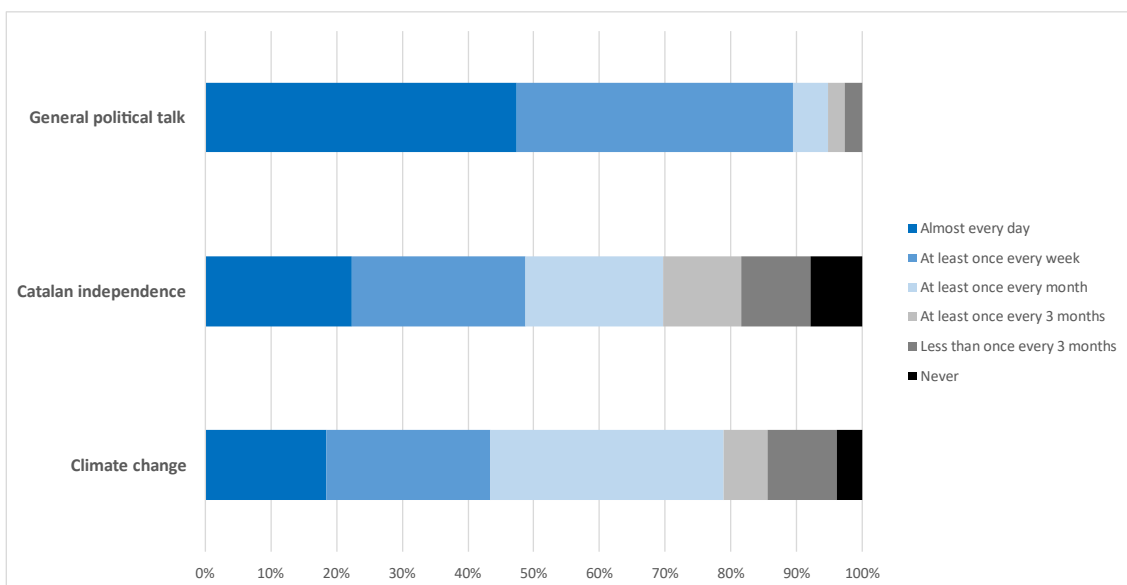

FIGURA 4. *Frequency of engagement in political conversation by discussion topic*

2.4. Participants' personal environments

To study the personal environment of our participants, we asked respondents six consecutive "name generator" questions, that is, questions that elicit a list of network members from them. In these questions, participants were asked to name as many people as applied with whom they have the social relationship we enquired about (e.g., people they frequently talk with, or with whom they talked about politics), regardless of its type, intensity, and frequency. A person named by participants as a network member is technically referred to as an *alter*. The six name generator questions were not mutually exclusive, so the same alter could be

nominated in multiple questions. Table 2 below reports the exact formulation and sequence of the six name generator questions used in the study, along with some descriptive metrics of the number of alters that each of them elicited. For instance, we see that on the question "Who do you talk to frequently throughout a typical day?", people gave between 4 and 20 names, with an average of 9.44 names. The first two questions tap into non-political social interactions, while the last four name generators have an explicit political dimension, with the last three enquiring about negative or potentially problematic interactions.

TABLE 2. *Name generators questions and number of alters nominated for each*

Name generator question	Range (Min. – Max.)	Average	Median
1. Frequent contact *Who do you talk to frequently throughout a typical week? (either face-to-face, by phone and/or messaging)*	(4 – 20)	9.44	9
2. Important personal matters *With whom do you usually talk about personal and intimate matters? (e.g., concerns, important decisions or life events...)*	(0 – 18)	6.27	5
3. Political conversation, any kind *With whom have you talked lately (at least during the last year) about current political and social issues?*	(2 – 24)	10.17	10
4. Disagreeing political conversation *And lately (at least during the last year), with whom have you talked about current political and social issues and disagreed?*	(0 – 23)	4.93	4
5. Avoidance of political conversation *And with whom do you prefer not to talk about certain current political and social issues, for whatever reason?*	(0 – 11)	3.01	3
6. Strained relationships due to political disagreement *During the last few years, have any of your relationships been damaged or even broken as a result of political disagreements? If so, with whom?*	(0 – 8)	1.79	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF NETWORK MEMBERS	**(5 – 29)**	**15.8**	**15**

As can be observed in Table 2 and Figure 5, the total number of alters named by participants varied considerably, ranging from 5 up to 29, although most participants named between 11 and 20 alters. These alters corresponded to various types of relationships, as shown in Figure 6, with friends being the most common type in the sample (41%), followed by immediate family members (17%) and work-related contacts (14%). Of course, these alters do not represent a

complete nor necessarily representative account of individuals' personal environment, which is typically composed of hundreds of social relationships (Lubbers *et al.* 2019). Instead, these particular sets of alters should be regarded as a partial representation of people's personal environment in which three types of relationships are purposefully over-represented: frequent social relationships, close personal relationships, and people who hold dissimilar political views. This was done with the aim of having a diverse set of network members to address in the last phase of in-depth qualitative interviewing regarding how respondents navigate political differences in personal networks.
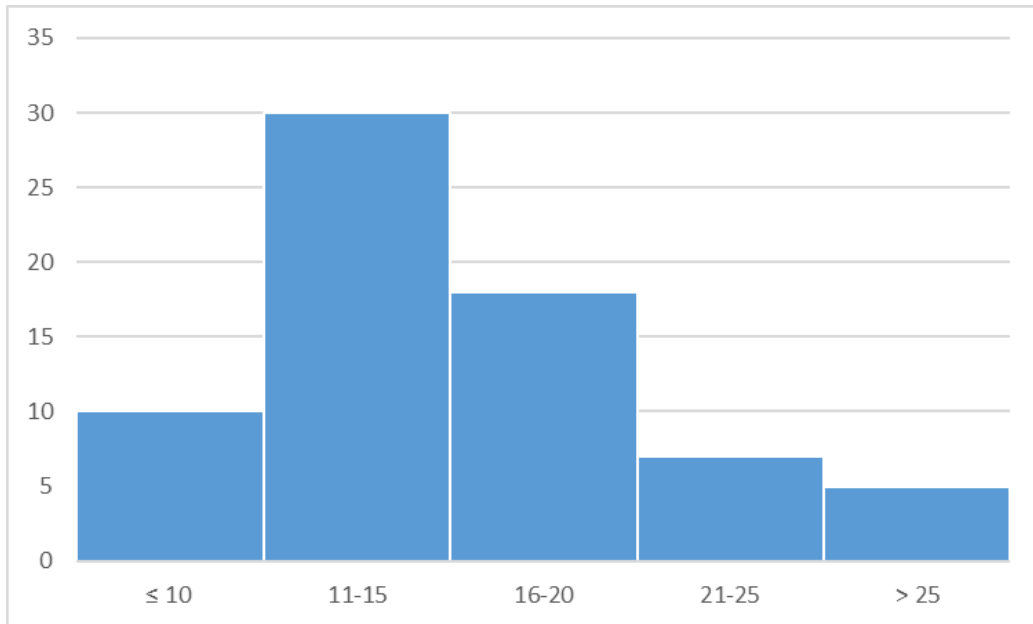

FIGURE 5. *Distribution of total number of nominated alters*
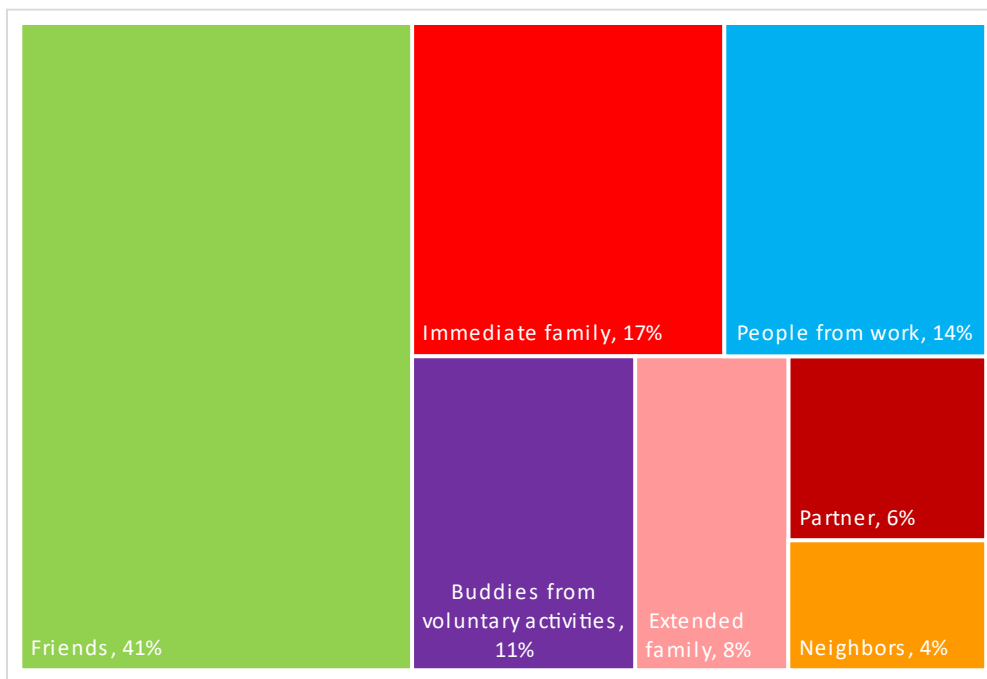

FIGURE 6. *Elicited alters by type of social relationship*

Except for the aforementioned question on the type of social relationship (asked for all generated names), all subsequent questions were restricted to a quasi-random selection of maximum 15 alters, following the most up-to-date methodological guidelines for "balancing bias and burden" in the collection of personal network data (Stadel & Stulp 2022; see also Marin & Hampton 2007). In practice, when the number of elicited alters exceeded 15, interviewers were instructed to select the first three elicited alters, the last three, and then nine of the remaining alters in alternating fashion (one "in", one "out", one "in", and so on). Thus, further information on the networks was collected for a quasi-random selection limited to a maximum of 15 network members. This selection allowed us to examine the characteristics of a sufficiently large selection of both strong and weak personal ties while keeping interview length and cognitive burden within acceptable limits.

Once a list of up to 15 alters had been constructed, we first wanted to assess the degree of interconnectedness among these network members. In particular, we asked participants to report whether the listed network members were personally acquainted with one another (i.e., could recognize each other by face and name) and, if so, whether these people directly interact even if the participant is not present. Such questions are called "name interconnectors". This information can be used to visualize the personal network for each participant, displayed below in Figure 8, which allows us to take into account the varying interconnectedness and clustering of participants' social environments. The interconnectedness of individuals' personal environments is important because there is supposedly more social control, potential third-party intervention, and norm adoption in tightly connected networks.

As can be observed in Figure 7, the personal networks of our participants vary considerably in terms of the number of network members. They also differ in the connectedness between their nominated alters (that is, disregarding the participant, who is by design connected to everyone else), from cases in which almost all alters are isolated from one another and may only know one another indirectly, via the participant (e.g., the first case on the left in the second row), to cases in which the majority of alters are acquainted and have active social relationships with one another, which informs us that the participants belong to a single, tight-knit social sphere (e.g., the first two cases on the left in the last row). Table 3 reports some summary values for the density (i.e., the proportion of all possible pairs of alters in the networks that are actually connected) for the two types of examined relationships across the personal networks of 70 participants.[5]

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[5] Due to time constraints, structural information on alter-alter ties were not gathered in six interviews.
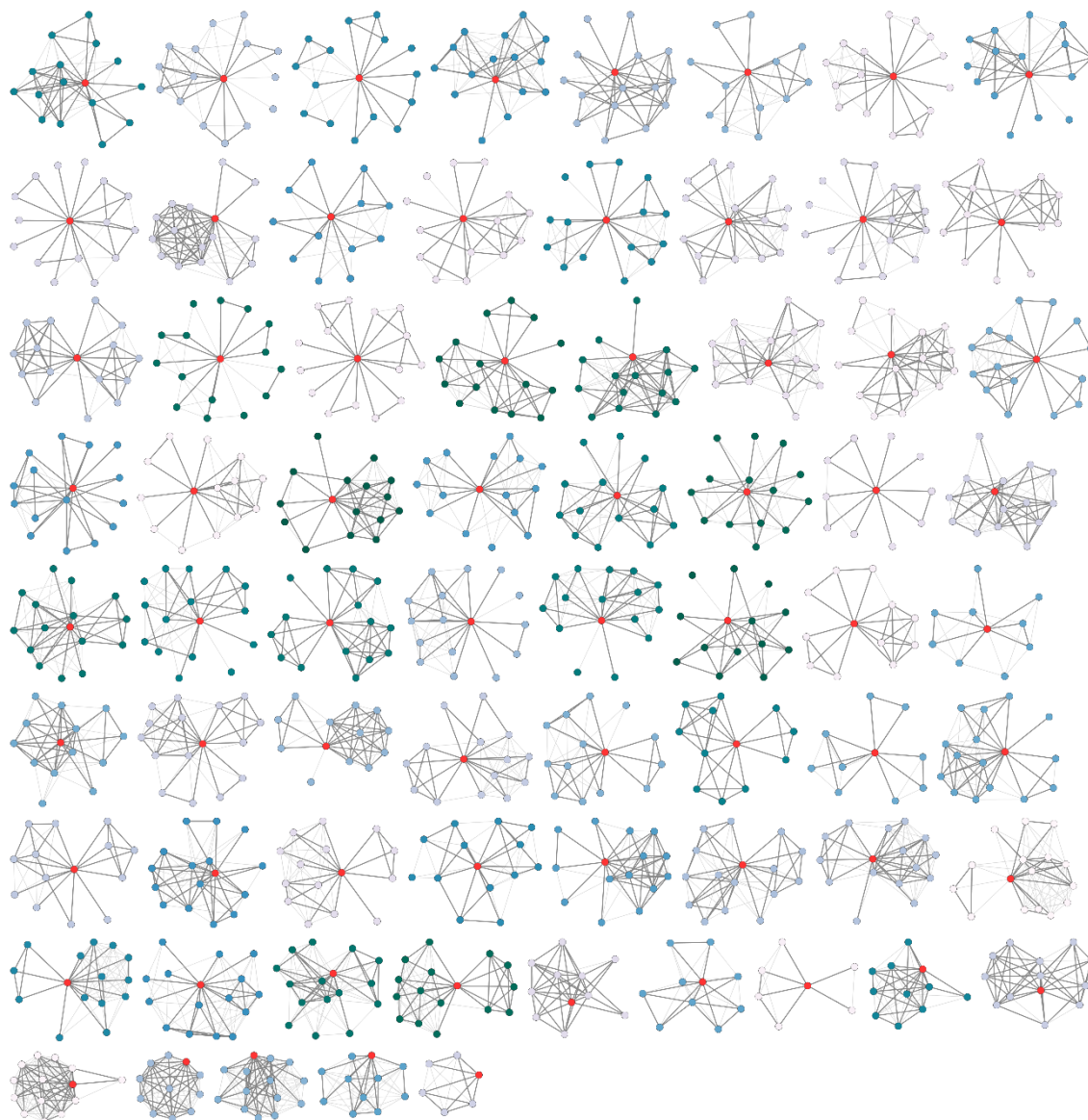
FIGURE 7. *Graphic representation (sociograms) of the personal networks of 70 participants*

Legend. Interview participants ('egos') are represented as red nodes, while the alters they nominate are represented in a uniform color, like white or blue (the chosen colors have no further meaning). Thicker dark edges represent the existence of an active relationship between a given pair of nodes, while thinner and lighter ones represent mere acquaintanceship.

TABLE 3. *Density of alter-alter relationships*

	Range (Min – Max)	Mean	Median
Acquaintanceship	(0.1 – 1.0)	0.43	0.40
Active relationship	(0.04 – 0.62)	0.20	0.18

Legend. Values in the 'acquaintanceship' relationship type are necessarily larger than in the case of 'active relationship' given that the latter is a subgroup of 'acquaintanceship' (see the explanation on page 16).

After collecting information on the ties between nominated alters, we asked 18 'name interpreter' questions to qualify the relationship participants have with the people they had named and to describe some of their social and political characteristics (as far as they know and as they subjectively perceive them). Given the central focus of our study on informal political discussion across three topics, we were particularly interested in obtaining information on the (perceived) ideological composition of participants' networks. Research has long shown that people tend to have personal relationships with others who are similar to them on a wide variety of traits (such as social class, level of education, or skin color), and political opinions are no exception. At the same time, citizens' contact with people who hold contrasting and even opposing political views has long been considered a key ingredient for the healthy functioning of democracies, enhancing public deliberation, citizens' opinion formation, and democratic accountability (e.g., Conover *et al.* 2002; Delli Carpini *et al.* 2004; Mutz 2006).

For these reasons, we collected information on the degree to which each participant perceived the nominated people as holding similar or dissimilar political viewpoints on the three discussion topics we investigate (see Section 2.3.): position on the left/right dimension, position on Catalan independence, and concern about climate change. To ascertain the relative opinion similarity or dissimilarity of each participant with each od their network members (that is, in each 'ego-alter pair'), we devised an indirect measurement strategy. First, at the beginning of the interview, we asked participants to place themselves on three topic-specific opinion scales ranging between 1 to 7 (the center being 4). Then, towards the end of the survey, we asked participants to place nominated alters on the same scales. After the interview, we could compare these two values and obtain a simple measure of ego-alter opinion distance ranging from 0 (i.e., ego and alter have a very similar point of view) to 6 (i.e., ego and alter have completely opposed opinions). Figure 8 illustrates the average similarity of participants and their network members for the three selected topics. The figures distinguish between alters with similar opinions to the participant (when the participant is at most one scale point away from the network member), alters with dissimilar opinions (when the participant and an alter are at least two scale points apart), and alters whose opinion on a topic is unknown to the participant. The three topics are remarkably parallel in their average values: about half of nominated alters hold very similar opinions to participants, yet a sizeable share of nominated alters (between 34% and 41%) hold significantly dissimilar viewpoints. Given the lower salience of climate change as a topic of everyday sociopolitical discussion, it is not surprising that participants were slightly less informed about their network members' stances on climate change than on their views on Catalan independence and general politics. Let us remind the reader that our questionnaire purposively overrepresented relationships with disagreement, which may have influenced the observed numbers.

To have a clearer idea of what these percentages mean in practice, the diagrams below the charts show what the approximate composition of a

hypothetical network of 16 alters (the observed average size, see Table 2) would be for the three topics. In such a scenario, this hypothetical average participant would have 8 alters with very similar viewpoints, 6 or 7 with dissimilar viewpoints, and 1 or 2 individuals with unknown positions. Even though in this report we concentrate on these average values for reasons of simplicity, behind these average values, there is significant variation among participants: some of them are surrounded mostly by people with very similar views, while others are in contact with a much larger number of people with differing viewpoints. The causes and implications of these variations are precisely the focus of our ongoing and future scientific analyses.

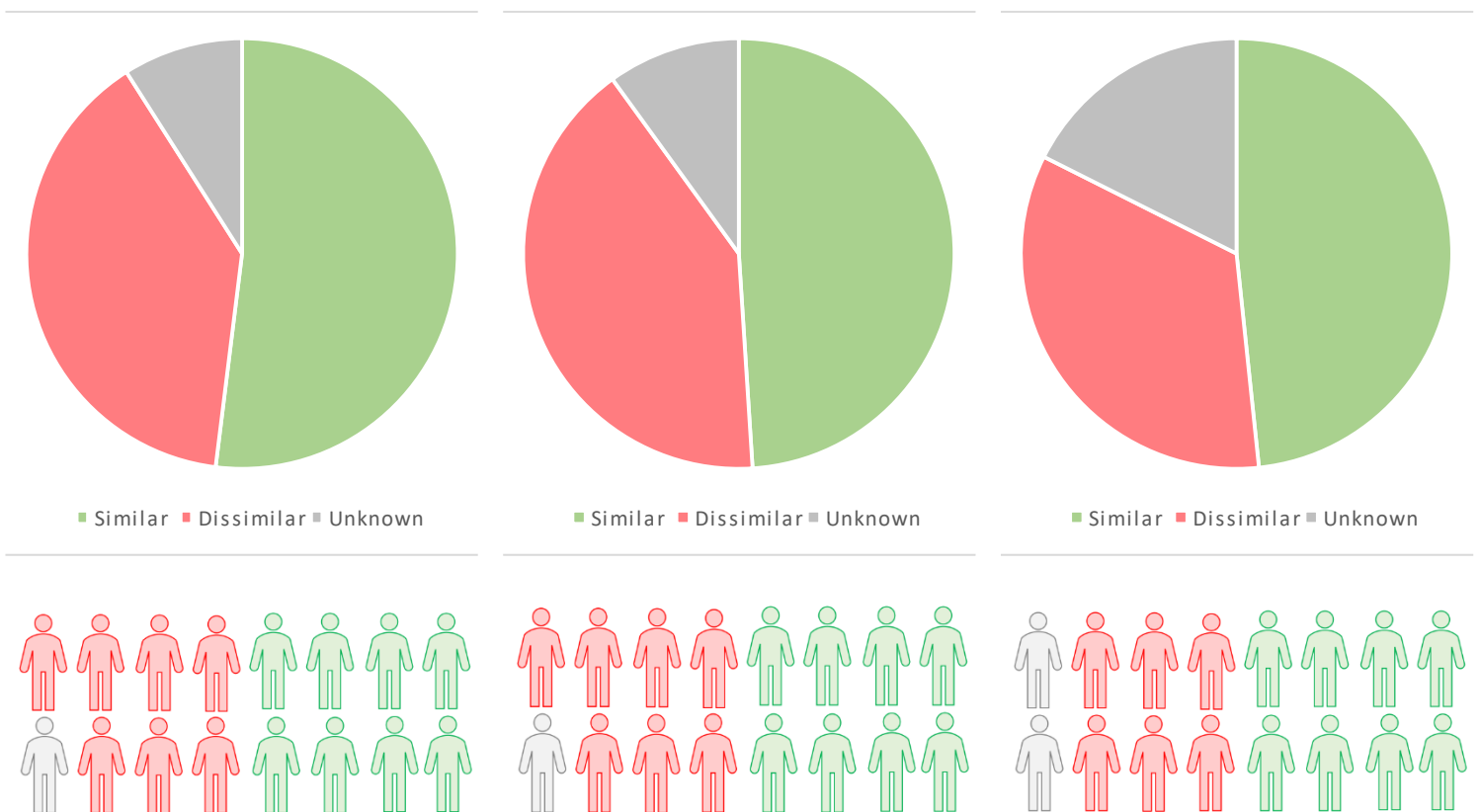| Left-right axis	Catalan independence	Climate change

FIGURE 8. *Average network composition in terms of similarity of the similarity in opinions between participants and their network members on the three selected topics*

2.5. Political conversations within interpersonal environments

Apart from characterizing the perceived political leanings of each nominated alter, we also formulated several specific questions to ascertain with whom our participants talked about a given topic and with whom they did not. For this

purpose, we asked participants to report how often they discussed each of the selected topics with particular alters. Figure 9 shows the average share of nominated alters with whom participants report to discuss each of the three considered topics regularly, that is, "often" or "very often". Values are higher for general political discussion and discussion on the conflict over Catalan independence, topics that are regularly discussed with around half of nominated alters. In contrast, as expected, the less salient topic of climate change is regularly discussed only with approximately one third of nominated alters.
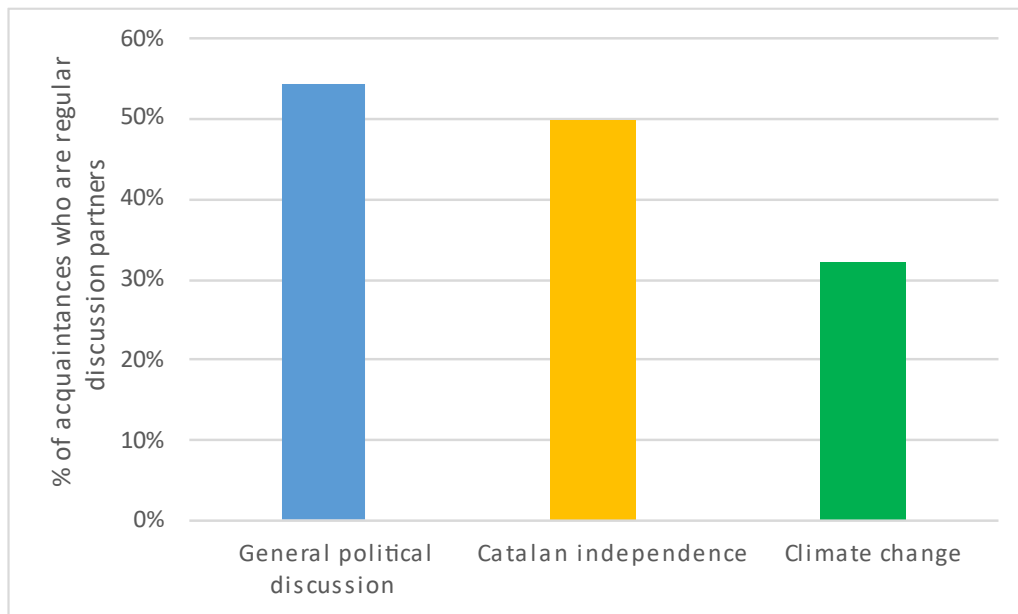

FIGURE 9. *Average share of nominated alters with whom participants regularly discuss each of the three political topics examined*

Nevertheless, different members of the personal environment are not equally likely to engage in regular political discussion. Instead, alters who socialize more frequently, to which the participants feel emotionally closer, and who are more similar to them in terms of political opinions are more likely to be regular political discussion partners. Focusing on this latter factor, Figure 10 displays the average rates of political discussion on each of the three topics across alters who are perceived as holding a similar or dissimilar opinion. The charts show that the proportion of alters activated as regular discussion partners (represented in darker colors) is much higher for politically similar alters than for dissimilar ones across all topics. This preference to discuss politics with people who think alike and avoid it with people with whom we disagree results in political discussion networks being much more homogeneous than the overall personal environment. For instance, while alters who think similarly to participants represent about half of all nominated alters on average, they represent 65%, 69%, and 72% of people with whom our participants regularly discussed, respectively, general political issues, Catalan independence, and climate change.

General political discussion | **Catalan independence** | **Climate change**
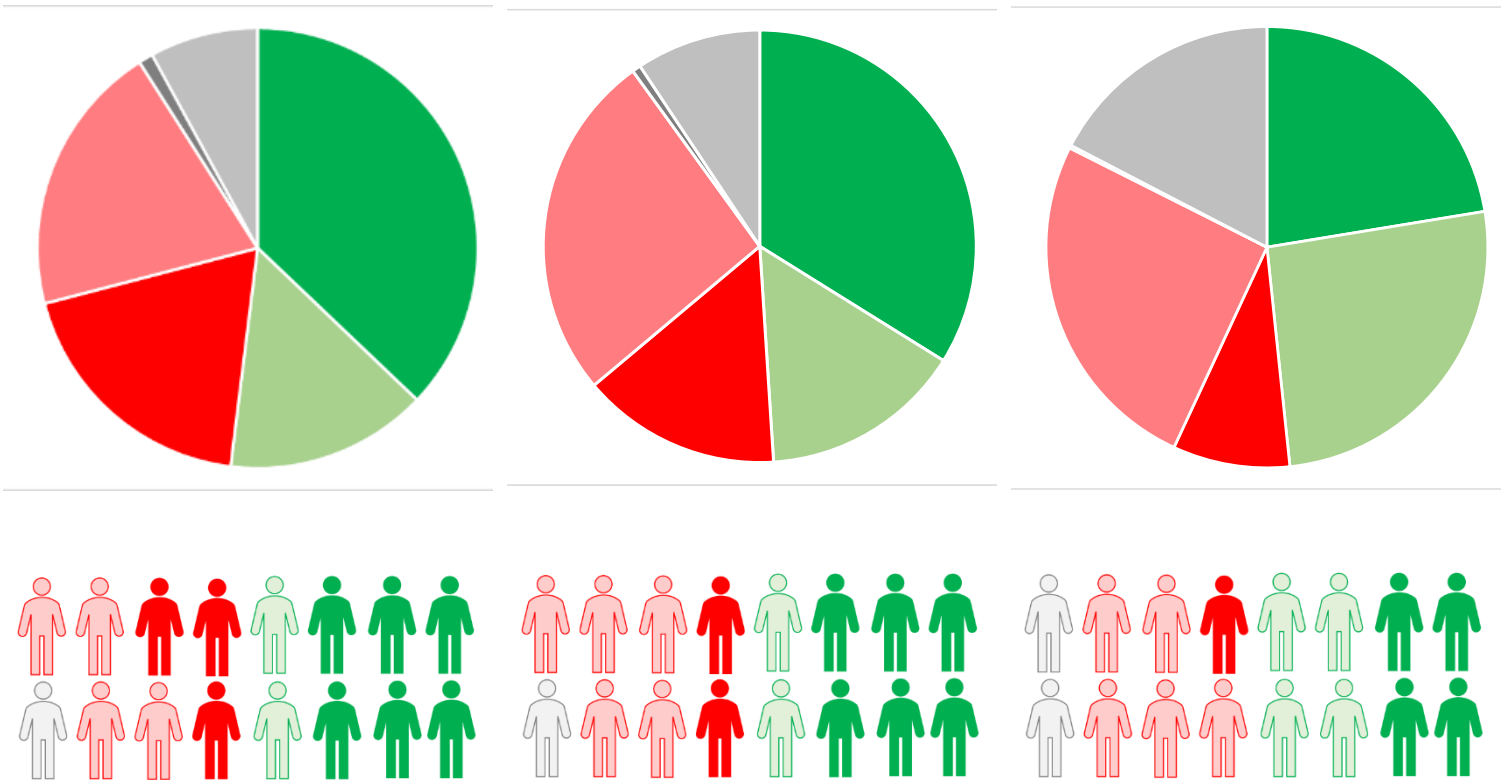

FIGURE 10. *Average rates of activation for regular political conversation on the three selected topics by alters' similarity of opinions to participants*

> *Legend*. We consider that a social tie has been activated for regular political conversation when participants report discussing a specific political topic with one network member "often" or "very often". For each of the three topics, the colors indicate the following: dark green, network members with similar opinions with whom the respondent regularly engages in political conversation; light green, network members with similar opinions with whom the respondent does not regularly engage in political conversation; dark red, network members with dissimilar opinions with whom the respondent regularly engages in political conversation; light red, network members with dissimilar opinions with whom the respondent does not regularly engage in political conversation; dark grey, network members with unknown opinions with whom the respondent regularly engages in political conversation;[6] and light grey, network members whose opinions the respondent does not know and with whom the respondent does not regularly engage in political conversation.

Despite the notable (and unsurprising) bias towards regular political discussion with politically similar acquaintances, very few participants appeared to be completely shielded from regular exposure to disagreeing opinions in their personal network, although this varied considerably depending on the topic of discussion. When considering general political discussion, participants engage on

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[6] As expected, the share of network members in dark grey is negligible, because if respondents discussed the topic with someone, they would likely become aware of alters' opinions.

average with about half (49%) of the network members they perceive to hold significantly different positions on the left-right scale. By contrast, when considering regular conversations about the specific topics of Catalonia's self-determination and climate change, participants maintained regular conversations with, 36% and 25% of the people around them whom they perceived to hold opinions contrasting to their own, respectively. These rates of engagement in regular political discussion across lines of political difference, even if certainly lower than for acquaintances with very similar views, may be interpreted as an indicator that exposure to disagreeing opinions and the exchange of ideas is still relatively frequent, even in highly polarized political contexts.

2.6. The handling of political disagreement and the role of social norms

Apart from describing citizens' exposure to opposing political views in their personal networks, the project aimed to understand how citizens manage political differences in their social relationships (e.g., whether they engage in them, avoid them, break their relationships, etc.) and why they act differently with different people. The INCLUSIVITY project pays particular attention to one kind of explanation, _social norms_, which can be broadly understood as *"informal rules of behavior that individuals follow because they think others also follow them, think they should be followed, and are willing to sanction those who deviate"* (Valentim 2023: 1). In particular, the project concentrates on the role that norms that promote equality-based respect, dialogue, and unity (so-called 'inclusivity norms') can play in fostering tolerance, contact, and cooperation between members of different social and political groups. In our study, we sought to examine the role of social norms in the context of political polarization in everyday life through survey and exploratory interview questions.

On the one hand, we used survey questions to analyze the role of a general and abstract **norm of inclusive dialogue** that prescribes engagement in mutual listening and understanding with members of society regardless of their opinions. It was formulated as follows: *"Despite our differences, one must listen to anyone in society, engage in sincere dialogue with them, and try to understand/empathize with their opinions, behaviors, and experiences"*. After reading it, we asked participants to what extent they agreed with it (on a scale from 1 to 7), their personal understanding of it (in an open-ended question), and their perception of the approximate percentage of people in Catalonia who they think follow this norm (on an 11-point scale ranging from 0% to 100%). In addition, once the participants' personal networks had been elicited (see section 2.4 above), we asked participants to assess the degree to which they perceived each nominated alter to respect contrasting political opinions (on a 4-category ordinal scale from "not at all" to "completely"). Table 4 summarizes the average responses of our participants to these survey questions regarding the norm of inclusive dialogue. These questions allowed us to gauge how participants felt about that norm, understood it, perceived it among their network members and in society.

TABLE 4. *Agreement and perception of the social norm of inclusive dialogue*

Social norm of inclusive dialogue *"Despite our differences, one must listen to anyone in society, engage in sincere dialogue with them and try to understand/empathize with their opinions, behaviors, and experiences"*			
	Range (Min – Max)	**Mean**	**Median**
Participant's agreement with the norm of inclusive dialogue	(1 – 7)	6.12	6
Perceived conformity among all members of Catalan society	(0% – 90%)	47.7%	50%
Perceived conformity of individual members of their personal networks	*To what extent do you consider that this person respects others' opinions when these differ from their own?*	**%**	**N**
	Completely	23.3%	220
	To a large extent	39.7%	374
	Not much	20.7%	195
	Not at all	9.4%	89
	Don't know / Prefer not to respond	6.9%	65

Legend. 'Participant's agreement with the norm of inclusive dialogue' was assessed by asking participants to indicate to what extent they agreed with the general formulation of the social norm of inclusive dialogue that was read to them, using a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). 'Perceived conformity among all members of Catalan society' was asked through the following question: "*According to your own perception and experience, what approximate percentage of Catalan society would you say that try to listen to and enter in dialogue with anyone and attempt to understand/ empathize with their positions?*"

On the other hand, as mentioned above (see section 2.2), the second half of the interview consisted of open-ended questions to better understand how participants navigate political differences in their personal networks. In this part, we asked participants to reflect on specific experiences of political disagreement and their strategies for managing political differences within their networks. Participants reported a wide variety of experiences and personal strategies for managing political differences depending on who the person is they differ with, the type of relationship they have with them, or the particular circumstances of each interaction. These experiences included, for instance, engaging in constructive confrontations of ideas, having heated and unpleasant confrontations, explicitly or implicitly avoiding some topics, or even occasionally halting some social relationships as a result of profound political disagreements.

In these rich narrative responses, participants elaborated (often spontaneously and inadvertently) on what they perceived as prescribed or proscribed behavior in different situations, that is, they explained in their own words what social norms are supposed to be followed in distinct social situations. This qualitative data provides two rare opportunities: (1) to observe how people formulate social norms or unspoken rules that regulate social relationships in a

polarized society like Catalonia, and (2) to observe if, apart from our theoretically-derived inclusivity norms, there might be other relevant social norms that either facilitate or hinder social contact and political conversations across socio-political groups. The research team is currently analyzing this part of the interviews, to make a comprehensive list of these norms that regulate social interactions between politically disagreeing people in Catalonia. However, because our sample does not represent the whole population, we do not know to what extent there is a shared understanding of these norms in the wider society. Therefore, in the second stage of Work Package 3, we will assess the societal consensus around these observed social norms through an online survey with a large sample representative of Catalonia's population. This survey will be conducted in 2024. It will contain a list of statements reflecting the social norms observed in the personal network interviews, asking respondents to indicate which of them they perceive to be in place in their social surroundings. The responses will then be analyzed following an established anthropological mathematical technique called Cultural Consensus Analysis (see Weller 2007).

3. SCIENTIFIC OUTPUTS IN PROGRESS

The richness of the collected data allows for a wide range of scientific analyses. This section reports four research articles that are currently under preparation based on the collected data, each addressing specific and complementary research questions. At present, preliminary versions of these articles have already been presented in international academic events to receive feedback and suggestions for improvement from fellow academic experts. Once the analyses are completed and consolidated, the corresponding articles will be submitted for publication in leading international academic journals. Once submitted, these scientific articles will undergo a thorough process of peer-review, which typically lasts several months, and eventually be published if accepted by the journal. Thus, the titles can still change in this process. Dissemination activities for non-academic audiences will also be prepared and properly announced in due time.

How political conversation partners vary across topics: ideological, social, and normative determinants of interpersonal discussion about contrasting issues

Authors. Alejandro Ciordia, Miranda Lubbers, Eva Jaspers, and Jan-Willem Simons.

In this article, in collaboration with fellow researchers from Utrecht University (the Netherlands) who are also part of the INCLUSIVITY project, we investigate what factors influence respondents' decisions to engage in regular political discussion, depending on the specific topic of conversation. These factors include the extent of ideological (dis)similarity between participants and their network members, relationship characteristics such as the closeness or intimacy between the participant and a network member, and individuals' perceptions of social norms of inclusive dialogue.

How bridges remain standing under severe polarization: motivations and strategies for maintaining political cross-talk in Catalonia

Authors. Alejandro Ciordia and Miranda Lubbers.

In this article, we focus on the rich personal accounts of participants' everyday experiences of informal political discussion. Applying a qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, we investigate the motivations that lead people to engage in and maintain potentially socially 'risky' political conversations with others with opposite political identities and views, as well as the discursive strategies that people deploy in such conversations.

The relational toll of political involvement in polarized times: experiences of damaged personal networks in Catalonia

Authors. Alejandro Ciordia, Núria Targarona and Miranda Lubbers.

In this article, we pay attention to the negative social consequences of political disagreement in polarized contexts, in particular to the extent to which individuals may experience a deterioration of their personal relationships with less politically committed or ideologically-opposed acquaintances. Preliminary results show that participants who were more politically involved as activists in formal or informal political groups are slightly more vulnerable than nonactivists to politically-motivated social estrangement in relationships, though these damaged relationships typically concern superficial acquaintances rather than friends or family members, in comparison with non-activists.

From Awareness to Action: Unveiling Pathways of Individual Mobilization into Collective Action on Climate Change

Authors. Sophie de Lede, Alejandro Ciordia, Miranda Lubbers, and Maarten van Zalk.

The INCLUSIVITY project also collected personal network data on interpersonal discussion about climate change, and Sophie de Lede (research assistant in the research team from the University of Osnabrück, Germany) investigated this particular type of political discussion more in depth. This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of climate action research by exploring the complex interplay of personal and relational factors influencing the participation in climate action of individuals (see Appendix, Figure B3, for the general views on climate change among the participants). This study, situated at the intersection of sociology and social psychology, aims to advance our understanding of the belief-action gap regarding climate change, bringing to the forefront the potential mobilizing influence of the interpersonal context.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report intended to give an overview of the type of data that were collected within the framework of Stage 1 of the Work Package 3 of the INCLUSIVITY research project. We have abstained from making comparisons across sociodemographic, ideological and opinion groups (e.g., by gender, age, preferences about Catalonia's territorial status, opinion on climate change, etc.), since our analyses are based on a small, non-representative sample of individuals and are meant for exploration, not for making general inferences about the broader population of Catalonia. As mentioned before, Stage 2 of the work package plan (which will be carried out in 2024) will focus on estimating how common political disagreement in personal relationships is and how frequent different strategies to manage it are. Nonetheless, the collected data already allowed us to work on four scientific articles and more are being considered. These articles will not only be published in scientific journals and presented at academic events, but they will also potentially be discussed and cited by other national and international scientists and experts in this field of knowledge, becoming part of what we conceive as scientific knowledge.

Overall, stage 1 interviews have helped us obtain a wide range of preliminary insights into the everyday dynamics of political polarization in personal environments. For instance, one might have expected that people mostly have relationships with people who think alike, but social and political interactions are not extremely segregated. Indeed, most participants seemed to be exposed to many opportunities for political dialogue with people holding contrasting viewpoints, and many do not shy away from them but, in fact, regularly engage in cross-cutting political debates, even for highly controversial and sensible topics. The generalizability of these and other preliminary observations will be tested in the Stage 2 survey. Similar scientific outputs can be expected in the following years, shifting to a more quantitative approach.

To discuss any of this work or to give us further feedback, readers can contact Miranda Lubbers at mirandajessica.lubbers@uab.cat or Alejandro Ciordia at alejandro.ciordia@uab.cat. Readers can also read more about the INCLUSIVITY project at the project's website (https://inclusivitynorms.com/) and about the COALESCE Lab at the team's website (http://coalesce-lab.com/).

Inclusivity

APPENDIX

A. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

The following figures represent the distribution of selected characteristics of the 76 participants who comprise our sample. Therefore, as explained in Section 2.2., these descriptive statistics are not by any means representative of the entire population of Catalonia.
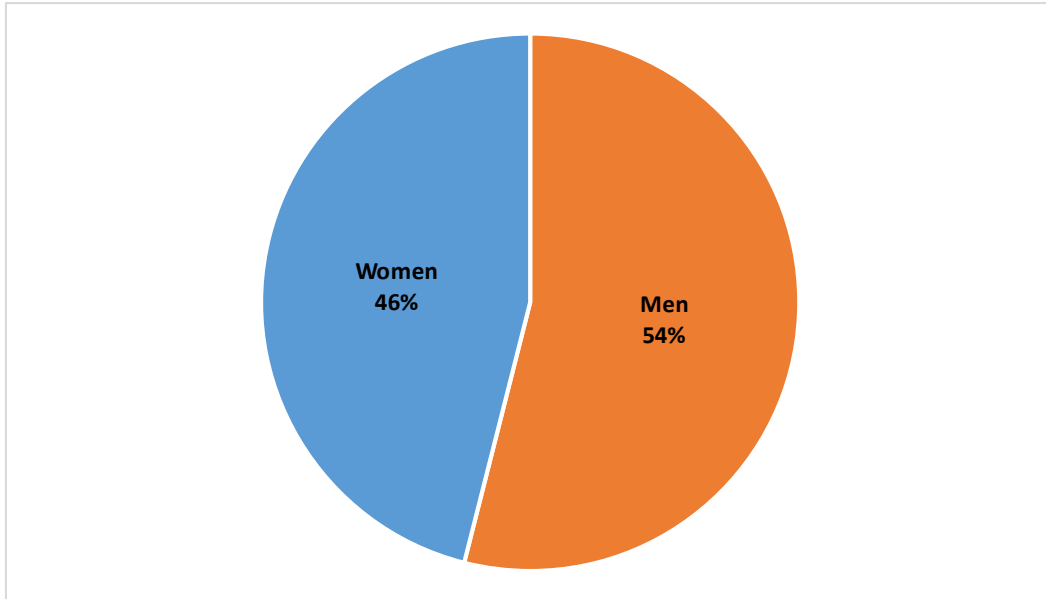
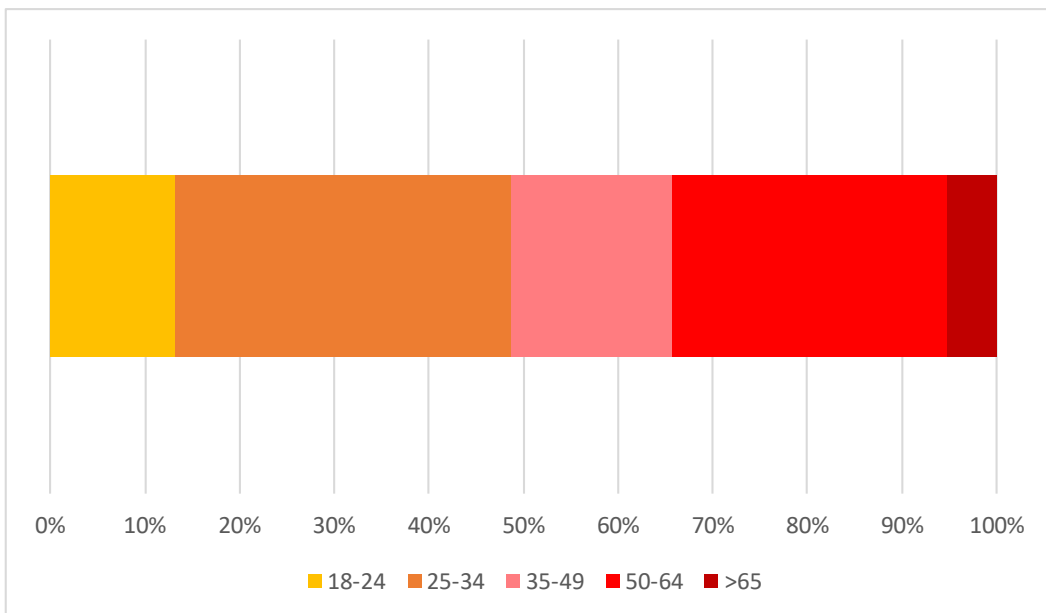

FIGURE A1. *Gender distribution of the participants*
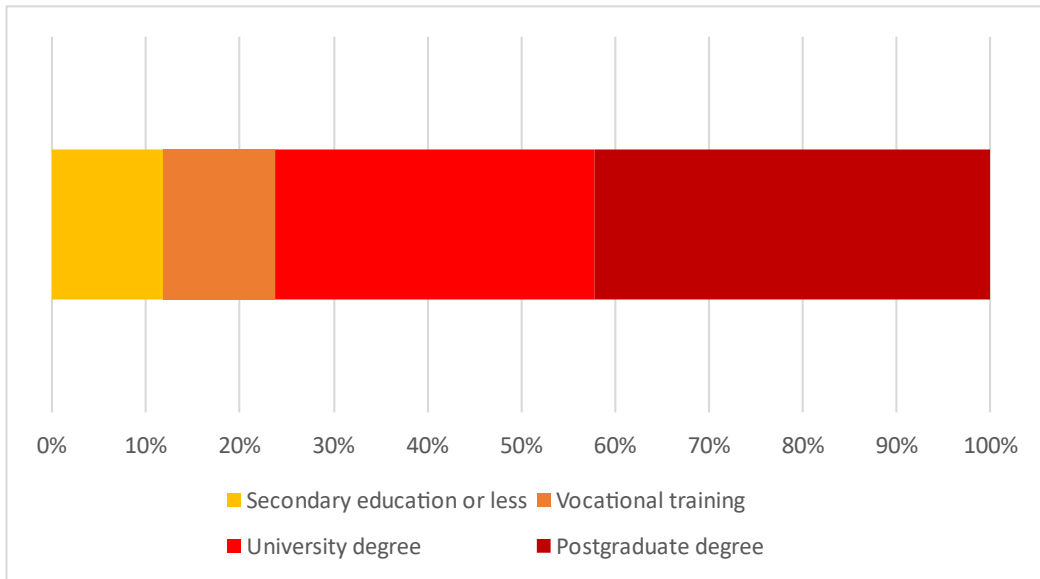

FIGURE A2. *Age distribution among the participants*

FIGURE A3. *Level of education of participants*

Legend. The figure shows the highest level of education achieved. "Vocational training" refers to non-university post-secondary education (e.g., "FP"), and "postgraduate degree" encompasses master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and similar qualifications that require a previous graduate degree for enrolment.
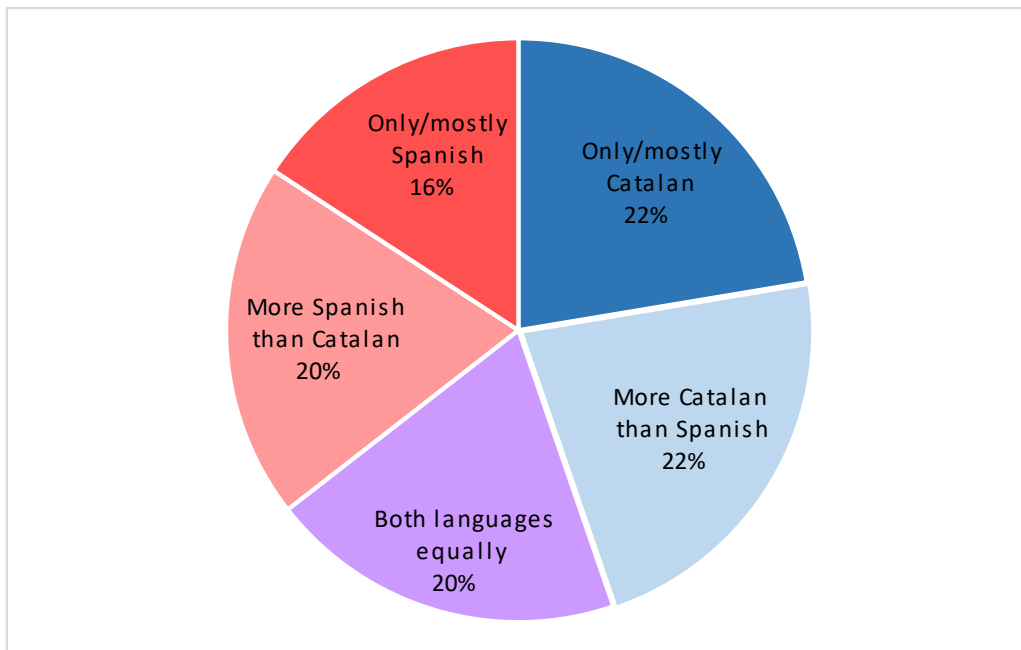

FIGURE A4. *Daily language use of participants*

Legend. The figure shows the distribution of participants' answers to the following single-answer multiple-choice question: *"Which of the two languages spoken in Catalonia do you use on a daily basis?"*. This question is designed in a similar fashion to questions about linguistic uses by areas of use in the Survey on Language Uses of the Population (EULP) of the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (Idescat), but it does not specify an area of use.
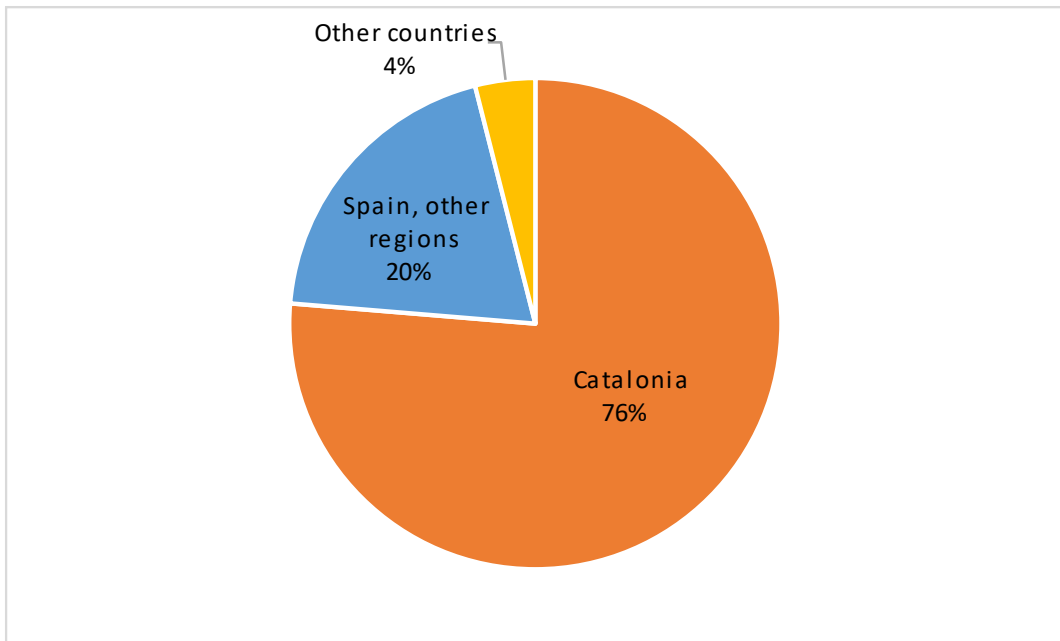
FIGURE A5. *Place of origin of participants*

Legend. In this study, place of origin considers the locations where participants declared to have been raised and to have spent most of their childhood and teenage years. Therefore, place of origin does not always correspond to the place of birth.
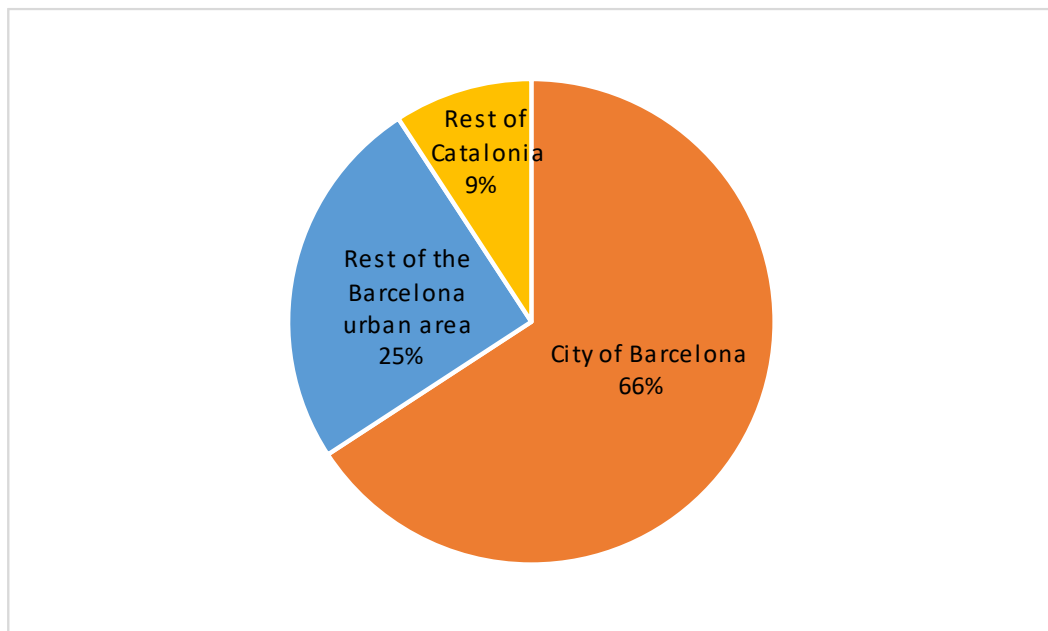

FIGURE A6. *Place of residence of participants*

Legend. The category "City of Barcelona" includes only participants who live within the municipality of Barcelona, while the category "Rest of the Barcelona urban area" includes participants who live in other municipalities belonging to the extended Barcelona's urban area, according to the official classification of the *Statistical Atlas of Urban Areas 2022* elaborated by the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda.

B. Political attitudes and behavior

The figures in this section represent the distribution of selected characteristics within our sample of 76 participants. Therefore, as explained in Section 2.2, our sample is not intended by any means to be representative of the entire population of Catalonia.

Even though our sample is notably skewed towards the left, the distribution of ideological self-identification does not dramatically differ from the overall distribution for the population of Catalonia as a whole. Average ideological self-identification is traditionally skewed towards the left in Catalonia (and, to a lesser extent, in Spain as well). Indeed, Catalonia has long been one of the European regions (along with the Basque Country) where the average ideological self-positioning is more skewed to the left (Dinas 2012), due to the entanglement of the left-right spectrum with preferences about territorial status and national identities. For reference, recent data from the *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* show that, on a scale from 0 to 10, 46.7% of the population of Catalonia self-identifies as left-wing (from 0 to 4), whereas 31.4% does it as center (5) and only 14.8% as right-wing (from 6 to 10). In contrast, the proportions observed in our sample (not designed to be statistically representative, as explained before) are the following: 63.1% left-wing (1 to 3), 18.4% center (4), and 18.4% right-wing (5 to 7).
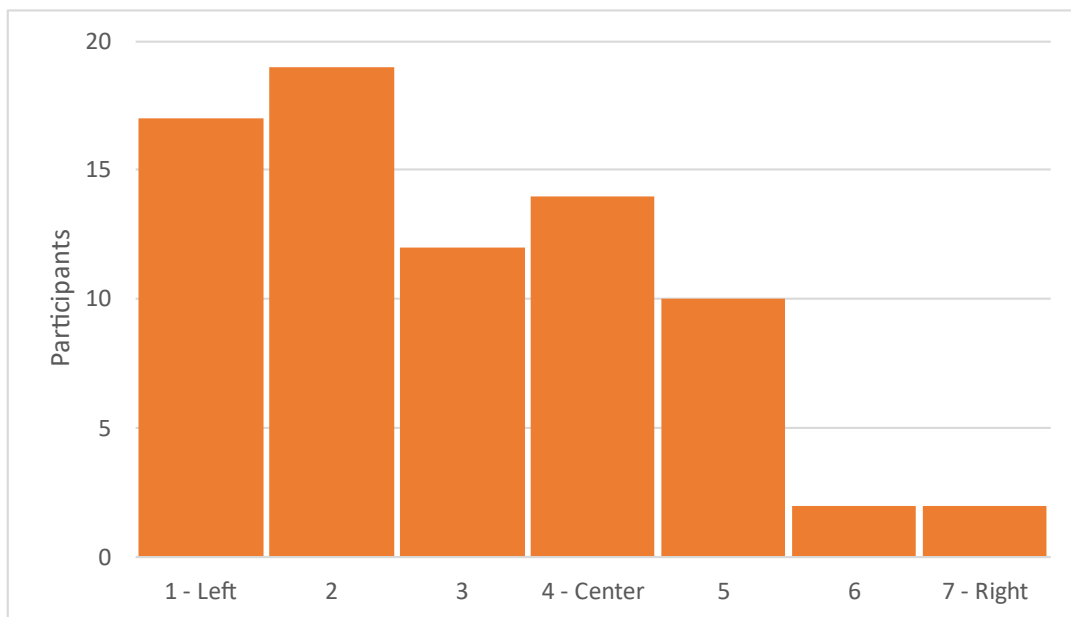

FIGURE B1. *Left-right self-identification of the participants*

Legend. The histogram shows the distribution of participants' self-placement in a 7-point Likert scale representing left/right political views in which 1 represents "left-wing", 7 "right-wing" and 4 "center". The precise formulation of the question was the following: *"When talking about political opinions, the terms "left" and "right" are typically used. Where would you place yourself on this scale?".*
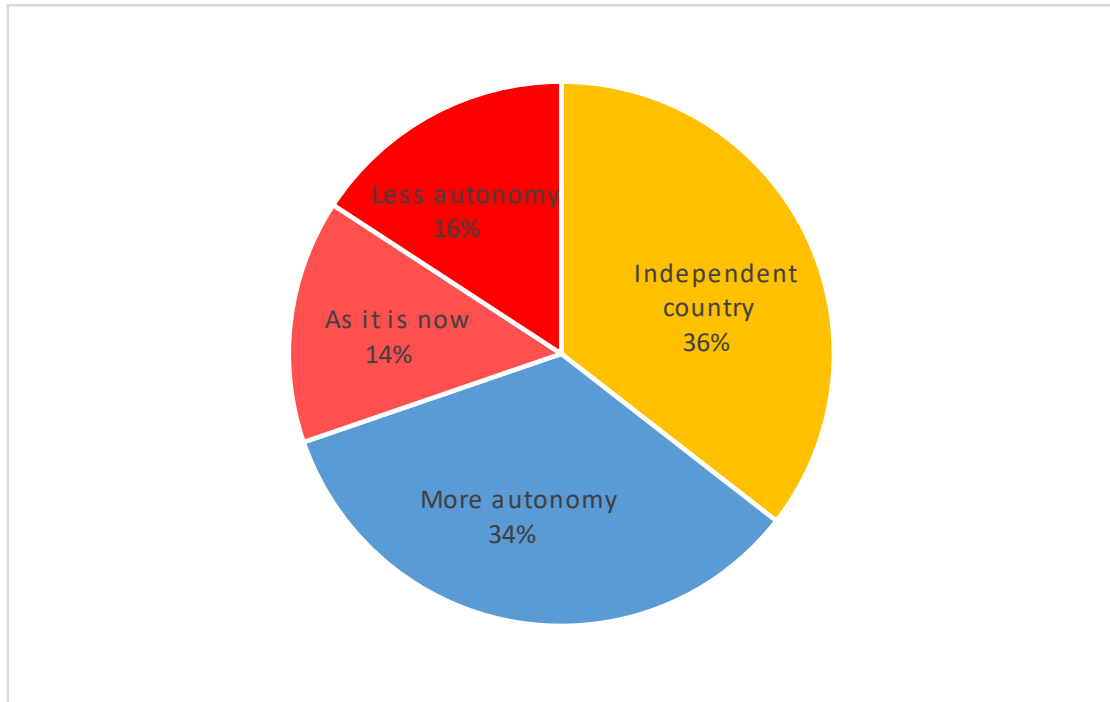
FIGURE B2. *Preferences of the participants about the territorial status of Catalonia*

Legend. The figure shows the distribution of participants' preferred territorial status of Catalonia in response to the following single-answer multiple-choice question: *"Which of these phrases best represents your preference about Catalonia's political and territorial status in the future?"* The four response options were formulated in the following way: *"I would like Catalonia to be an independent republic"*; *"I would like Catalonia to continue being part of Spain, but with more autonomy"*; *"I would like Catalonia to continue being part of Spain, just as it is now"*; *"I would like Catalonia to continue being part of Spain, but with less autonomy"*.

The wording of this question replicates (with minimal modifications) the formulation employed in a related survey on political polarization in Catalonia by Balcells & Kuo (2021; 2023), which was itself adapted from similar questions included in Catalonia's Center for Opinion Studies (CEO). We thank Prof. Laia Balcells for her availability in sharing the exact wording of their survey instruments during the design phase of our study.
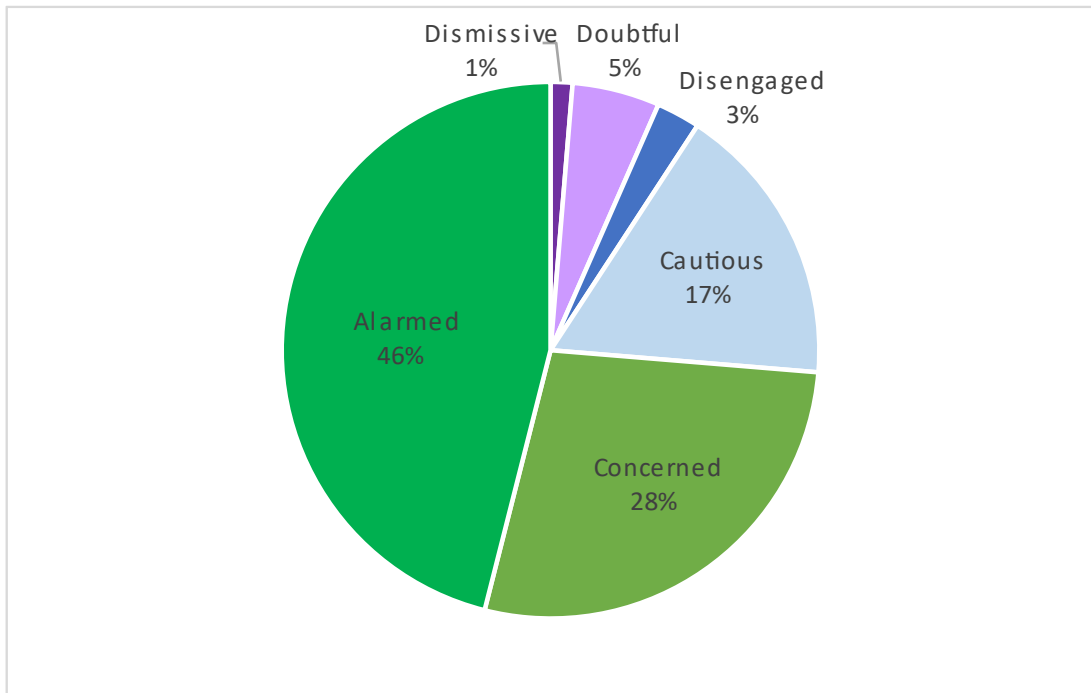
FIGURE B3. *Opinions about climate change of the participants*

Legend. The figure shows the relative size of six opinion segments regarding climate change. This six-category typology has been elaborated and empirically validated by researchers affiliated with Yale University's Program on Climate Change Communication (see Leiserowitz *et al.* 2021). Respondents were classified into these six groups according to their responses to a validated survey instrument consisting of four single-answer multiple-choice questions (for more details, see Chryst *et al.* 2018).

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