

## **The Southern Contrast: Explaining the Politics of Welfare Conditionality in Spain, Portugal, and Italy.**

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"The literature on welfare politics generally argues that the left-right spectrum is no longer sufficient to explain the tightening of welfare conditionality. This article argues that politics, encompassing ideology, party competition and coalition dynamics, play a crucial role. An examination of legislative changes in Southern Europe during the past decade shows that while welfare conditionality has been strengthened in Italy, it has diminished in Portugal and Spain. This paper argues that this divergence stems from the distinct patterns of party competition that emerged in each country after the 2013-2015 electoral turmoil. In Spain and Portugal, social democrats found themselves in bloc systems of party competition, characterized by having left-wing and right-wing blocs in which the vote and office strategies coincide. Within this context, social democrats accommodated the policy stances of emerging left-libertarian parties when forming coalition governments. Conversely, Italy's political landscape evolved into a tripolar system of party competition since no relevant party emerged from the far-left. This led to a policy consensus among the populist center-left, social democrats, and the far-right in favor of strengthening welfare conditionality. It is argued that such policy directions mirror the ideological foundations of these party families.