Anti-Party Sentiments in Southern Europe
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Political scientists who have written about party decline (the ‘crisis of parties’) fall into two broad categories: one group includes those who focus their analysis on the organizational structures, functions and membership of parties, and their performance in government and in representative institutions; a second group has been more concerned with citizens’ attitudes towards political parties, although their empirical studies have rarely focused on the question of the decline in public support for parties, and have instead been primarily concerned with themes such as the evolution of party identification, electoral participation, and the traditional social ties linking parties to citizens. Despite widespread interest in this theme, there have been surprisingly few empirical studies of the extent and possible origins of anti-party attitudes. Aims to fill this gap in the literature by systematically exploring the hypothesis of the ‘decline of parties’ from the standpoint of citizen support for these key institutions in four Southern European democracies, although the existing literature on the topic has produced contradictory findings. Has four complementary objectives: (1) to develop and discuss attitudinal indicators that can serve as adequate measures of anti-party sentiments; (2) to observe the evolution of these indicators over time in a variety of contexts; (3) to discuss their relationship with other aspects of political behaviour; and (4) to speculate about the origins of anti-party sentiments. While most of the analysis focuses on Spain, similar attitudes are also explored in Portugal, Italy, and Greece, in an effort to determine the extent to which an increase in anti-party sentiments represents a general feature of contemporary West European democracies, and to what extent it maybe linked to a broader concept of political disaffection; also examined are some of the consequences of this phenomenon with regard to electoral
behaviour, to psychological identification of citizens with parties, and to the overall level of involvement of citizens in public life.