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Economic crisis and the variety of populist response: evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain

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ABSTRACT

Greece, Portugal and Spain are among the countries worst hit by the 2008 Great Recession, followed by significant electoral and political turmoil. However, one of the dimensions in which they differ is the presence and varieties of populism in parties' political proposals. Drawing on holistic coding of party manifestos, we assess the varying presence of populist rhetoric in mainstream and challenger parties before and after the 2008 economic downturn. Our empirical findings show that populism is much higher in Greece compared to Spain and Portugal. We do not find a significant impact of the crisis as the degree of populism remains rather stable in Greece and Portugal, while it increases in Spain, mainly due to the rise of new populist forces. The study confirms that populist rhetoric is a strategy adopted mainly by challenger and ideologically radical parties. In addition, inclusionary populism is the predominant flavour of populist parties in new Southern Europe, although exclusionary populism is present to a lesser extent in the Greek case. We contend that the interaction between the national context – namely the ideological legacy of parties and the main dimensions of competition – and the strategic options of party leadership is crucial for explaining cross-country variation in the intensity of populism and the specific issues that characterise populist discourse.

KEYWORDS Populism; economic crisis; Southern Europe; holistic grading; inclusionary populism; party manifesto

As a result of the 'Great Recession', mainstream parties have faced electoral setbacks and challenger parties have gained growing strength in national party systems. While traditional party families (i.e. social democrats, Christian democrats, liberals) are losing popular support, a number of populist parties have made inroads into European political systems, destabilising usual alignments and patterns of competition. Although

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scholars disagree on the magnitude of the populist earthquake shattering democracies in affluent societies and whether the process came to a halt, they tend to acknowledge that, from a marginal phenomenon, populist parties have now become a persistent and quite successful political actor in Europe.

The economic and financial crisis has impacted significantly on party system change in Southern Europe (Bosco and Verney 2016). Greece, Portugal, and Spain, three South European new democracies, until recently characterised by stable party systems and centripetal dynamics of party competition based on two moderate forces, have experienced increasing fragmentation and an opening structure of party competition since the economic crisis (Morlino and Raniolo 2017). The emergence and success of new 'populist' actors have been one key element behind this major shift. Yet distinct trajectories can be seen, showing different patterns of party system change. Whereas in Spain two new parties, one of them leftist and populist, have shattered the post-Franco bipartisan system, in Portugal established actors have succeeded in averting the entrance of new political forces, populist or otherwise. On the other hand, Greece has experienced a new 'populist era' through the success of populist parties mainly on the left and less prominently, though still significantly, on the right.

This paper is primarily devoted to examining and explaining cross-partisan and cross-national variation in the extent and type of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain, in the aftermath of the economic crisis.[1] By means of a content analysis of election manifestos using holistic grading and a qualitative assessment of populist frames, it aims to contribute to an empirical analysis of the spread of populism in new Southern Europe across countries, party types and party systems. These three cases have been selected not only because they experienced a similar economic and political crisis since 2008,[2] but also because they underwent parallel trajectories in terms of democratic consolidation and party system institutionalisation (Diamandouros and Gunther 2001; Morlino 1998). How do these countries differ in terms of degree of party populism? Has the crisis increased the overall level of populism in the new democracies in Southern European countries? And what is the ideological bent of the populist frames adopted by distinct political parties? These are the main research questions that this study aims to address.

Our purpose, we stress at the outset, is not to determine the factors that explain the pervasiveness of populism, nor to test whether the crisis caused the emergence or electoral success of populist parties (see on this Hawkins *et al.* 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Addressing such goals would demand a drastic expansion of the cases included in the

analysis. Our goal here is much more modest, and it consists in the qualitative analysis of cross-national and diachronic variations in the levels and content in populist proposals in three countries that have shared important political and socioeconomic features over the last decades. Although it might be possible to approach our topic using quantitative methods (for example through public opinion surveys), we employ qualitative case studies because the question of context – namely ideological legacies and party strategies – is crucial for understanding the spreading of the populist phenomenon in the Southern European new democracies. Overall, we expect to find remarkable differences across countries, as well as across distinct party types (e.g. challenger vs mainstream, moderate vs. radical parties). Finally, we also expect to find a prevalence of the inclusionary type of populism, given the impact of the Great Recession in the region.

The article is structured as follows. We address in the next section key theoretical issues for the study of populism and lay out our main expectations concerning the emergence of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the next section we present our empirical research strategy and the type of data we analyse. The following section focuses on the political background of the three countries and the trajectory of party systems during the crisis. Then we discuss our main empirical findings. Finally, we conclude by presenting some comparative reflections and examining some possible implications of our analysis for future research.

The European crisis and the emergence of populism: literature review

Cas Mudde's well-established minimal definition of populism is that of 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004: 543). Populism is deemed a 'thin-centred' ideology because its core can be combined with other ideologies 'thick' or 'thin', such as communism, nationalism or ecologism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Canovan 2004; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). A variation on the understanding of populism as a 'thin ideology' is populism as a style or discourse of politics, i.e. not expressing core beliefs but a mode of political expression employed strategically by its proponents (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Populism thus seen allows for the study of the phenomenon as a 'gradational property' rather than as an essential quality of particular parties (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013: 7–10; Rooduijn *et al.* 2014).

A significant distinction among populisms drawn in the comparative literature is that between an egalitarian, inclusionary type, which until recently has been more successful in the left-wing movements of Latin America, and a xenophobic, exclusionary type to be found mostly in the far-right parties that have developed in Europe since the 1980s (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). The distinction is analysed on the basis of three dimensions: material, political and symbolic (Filc 2010: 128–38). The material dimension concerns the distribution of resources among social groups with inclusionary populist parties in favour of mass welfare programmes to include the poor and exclusionary populisms defending forms of welfare chauvinism that aim to protect established welfare insiders from immigrant outsiders. The political dimension refers to forms of political mobilisation that go beyond representative democratic channels such as plebiscitary and local forms of radical democracy. Inclusionary populisms mean for these mechanisms to give a voice to disregarded groups while exclusionary populisms also advocate similar devices but demand the disenfranchisement of immigrant groups. Finally, the symbolic dimension involves setting the boundaries of 'the people', with inclusionary movements highlighting, for instance, the 'dignity' of indigenous populations, while symbolic exclusion often draws on forms of cultural discrimination (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

In order to understand why specific varieties of populism emerge, as well as its intensity across distinct countries and parties, we need to look at both the roots of this phenomenon and the main issues associated with the crisis of representative democracies. On the one hand, populism has mostly a contingent nature, given the fact that strategic choices and agency play an important role in activating the adoption of this type of discourse. On the other hand, some countries present more favourable conditions for the emergence of populism, making it a recurrent strategy for achieving the main party goals. We contend that the interaction of these elements is crucial for understanding both the levels and varieties of populism in the Southern European new democracies.

It has been widely argued that economic crises facilitate populism (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Moffit 2016; Stavrakakis 2014). Such events have 'catalysing effects' that intensify long-standing problems (Morlino and Raniolo 2017: 22). Such are the long-term trends of increasing economic inequality and social exclusion that have accompanied technological displacement, deep changes in the world of work and welfare and neoliberal economic policies (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 2). Economic crises reinforce the divide between globalisation's 'winners' and 'losers' (Kriesi 2014). In addition, the crisis has increased political discontent and mistrust towards representative institutions, a situation that seems strongly

connected to the success of populist parties (Moffit 2015; Rooduijn *et al.* 2016). This is particularly the case of Southern European countries, characterised by a significant worsening of different components of democratic legitimacy such as trust in the parliament, trust in political parties or satisfaction with democracy (Muro and Vidal 2017). In so doing they provide fertile ground for challenger parties to blame national elites and mainstream political parties for the economic and social woes of globalisation's 'losers' (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Higher levels of populism also seem to be more common among parties on the left and right extremes of the ideological continuum than among mainstream parties (Polk *et al.* 2017; Rooduijn *et al.* 2014).

The key factors that are likely to favour the emergence or predominance of inclusionary rather than exclusionary populism in the aftermath of an economic crisis can be argued to lie in high levels of crisis intensity, in the retrenchment of welfare states in the face of economic crisis (Kriesi and Pappas 2015), and in the lack of partisan programmatic responsiveness (Bornschier 2010; Roberts 2013, 2015). On the other hand, exclusionary populism, which is mostly associated with transformations taking place in the cultural and symbolic dimensions, is more likely to emerge when the salience of immigration increases and mainstream right-wing parties do not politicise or give priority to xenophobic public preferences (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

The Southern European new democracies have provided a fertile environment for the emergence of inclusionary populism for two main reasons. On the one hand, the Great Recession has brought to the fore materialist concerns, increasing the salience of socio-economic cleavages (Kriesi 2014: 369–70). On the other hand, these countries have also experienced a strong responsiveness crisis, as socialist parties have adopted neoliberal policies that contradict their founding principles. A number of authors have argued that this programmatic dealignment facilitates the emergence of populist contenders of the inclusionary type that promise to restore equality and dignity (Roberts 2017). However, so far we lack comparative studies on the presence, evolution and substantive content of populist appeals in Southern European party systems.[3]

The general links between populism and economic crisis are insufficient to account for cross-national, cross-partisan and even cross-temporal variations in the levels and substantive contents of populist appeals in Greece, Portugal and Spain. A comparative explanation of such differences must take into consideration national contexts and legacies (Taggart 2017), party ideological frames (Moffit 2016; Taggart 2017; Polk *et al.* 2017) and party strategies (Pauwels 2011). In sum, we argue that ideational theory (Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2018; Hawkins *et al.* 2017)

may explain to a great extent the different nuances that the variegated phenomenon of populism may take, even within the region most affected by the economic crisis. In addition, if we want to make sense of the varieties of populism, it is important not only to look at the dominant type of this phenomenon, but also at the trajectory and historical levels of the populist phenomenon in a specific environment.

The previous discussion allows us to lay out our main empirical expectations. For the reasons we outlined above, and given the intensity of the effects of the Great Recession, we expect substantial increases in the populism levels in these three countries after 2008. Now, we also expect to find important differences in this regard between Greece and the two Iberian countries. The already established prevalence of populist rhetoric elements in the Greek party system (Pappas 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Vasilopoulou *et al.* 2014) should also lead to substantially higher populism levels in that country than in Portugal and Spain. As for cross-partisan variations, for strategic reasons we expect populism levels to be higher among challenger[4] and opposition parties. Such parties will be more inclined to appeal to dissatisfied voters by emphasising the unresponsiveness and selfishness of political and ruling elites. Also at the partisan level, ideologically more extreme parties will be more likely to articulate populist discourses directed against status quo elites that resist drastic changes in either direction of the ideological spectrum. And finally, given the intensity of the economic crisis, the hardship of austerity measures, and the centrality of socio-economic cleavages in these three party systems, we expect that materially inclusionary, redistributive populism will be prevalent in these cases. However, the fact that anti-immigration appeals were previously activated in the Greek political arena (Ellinas 2013) – but not in Portugal (Marchi 2013) or Spain (Llamazares 2012) – leads us also to expect the presence of symbolically exclusionary components in the populist discourse of some Greek parties.

Data and methods

The difficulty of defining conceptually the populist phenomenon mirrors the ambiguity in measuring the degree of populism associated to distinct political actors. A number of approaches have been used to measure populism. Overall, these strategies rely on the ideological conceptualisation of populism (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) that consists of two main dimensions, namely (1) people-centrism and (2) anti-elitism. The first dimension aims to measure references to the 'people', the 'popular will', the homogeneity of the people, etc. The second dimension refers to critiques towards political elites, conceived as the

'evil', a minority that controls key decisions against the interests of the people.

To analyse populist discourse, the most common approach is based on content analysis of party documents. The two main variants are based on computerised content analysis and human-coded content analysis (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). This paper relies on a different approach based on holistic grading of party documents. This technique has been developed mainly by Hawkins and his team (Hawkins 2009, 2013; Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2016, 2018). Basically, it consists of attributing a score to the document (election manifesto or speeches) as a whole by looking at the degree of populist discourse. The key unit of observation and analysis is the entire election manifesto, not the single words or paragraphs (as used in Rooduijn and Pauwels' work).[5] The scoring varies from 0 (no populist elements identified in the document) to 2 (very strong and systematic use of populist discourse). Coders are instructed to look at whether party manifestos contain references to the 'popular will', as well as negative opinions on the political or economic elite in general. In each country two coders have examined party manifestos and the final score reflects the average of the scoring assigned by the coders. All party manifestos are in their original language and the coders have a native or near-native knowledge of the language.

Holistic grading presents several advantages for our research objectives. First, it can be easily applied to different parties and countries, allowing us to compare new cases not yet covered by the literature to other European counterparts. Second, this technique provides the opportunity to code several documents, thus examining the evolution of populist discourse before and after the crisis. Finally, it allows us to interpret political discourse, that is, it offers a more fine-grained analysis of the context and the arguments used by both mainstream and challenger parties.

Our units of analysis are the party manifestos of all parliamentary parties in Greece, Portugal and Spain (see online appendix). Party manifestos are considered to represent and express the policy collectively adopted by the party (Budge *et al.* 2001). Moreover, as a number of works have already highlighted (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), this type of source presents other positive aspects. First, these documents provide a clear overview of the arguments deployed by parties during election campaigns. Second, these texts are readily available and are easily comparable across countries, parties and elections. As for the time frame, in order to gauge populist trends over time we select at least one party manifesto in the pre-crisis era and one in the post-crisis period (i.e. from 2009–2010 until 2018).

We present the holistic grading scores in the next section. We checked the reliability of coding and the robustness of these scores in two ways.

First, we compared them to the values obtained by using Rooduijn and Pauwels' (2011) technique based on a content analysis of party manifestos. This method has been widely used for measuring the degree of populism of a party in Western European countries. The Pearson correlation index between holistic grading scores (values for 2015 in our three countries) and the scores derived from the codification of party manifestos using Rooduijn and Pauwels' (2011) technique equals +0.82 (for 14 cases). Second, we compare holistic grading with the anti-elitist scale included in the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert data (Polk *et al.* 2017). The Pearson correlation between these two measures equals +0.71 (for 17 cases).[6]

In order to qualify the variety of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain, we use the dimensions identified by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) to distinguish between inclusionary and exclusionary populism. Consequently, we complement the quantitative longitudinal analysis with the examination of the material, symbolic and political dimensions.

Populism and the crisis in Greece, Portugal and Spain: the background

In contrast to Portugal and Spain, populism has a long history and a strong presence in Greece. It is often argued that populism was brought into the mainstream of Greek politics by PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) in the aftermath of the 1974 democratic transition (Lyrintzis 1987). PASOK's successful populist appeals to the 'underprivileged' led to populist 'contagion' (Pappas 2014a, 2014b), as New Democracy (ND), the centre-right pole of what turned out to be Greece's stable two-party system up until 2012, adopted similar discourses in order to secure its place on the electoral map (Mavrogordatos 1997). While the two main parties continued to alternate in power until the 2009 election, Greek voters' party identification and levels of trust in the political system had been in decline since at least 2007 (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014: 224–8).

During the first year of the economic crisis (2010–2011), PASOK, a party of social democracy, adopted severe austerity measures in return for a bailout loan from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013). Over the crisis period the populist discourse of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) – an established minor party of the radical left whose aim was to express and represent the economic concerns and anti-party sentiments of the Greek voters that were distancing themselves from PASOK and the other mainstream parties – struck a chord with disillusioned Greek voters. SYRIZA was successful in replacing PASOK as one of the two major

parties in Greece (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Tsakatika 2016). On the right and far right, the Independent Greeks and Golden Dawn were also successful in mobilising a lesser, but still significant, proportion of the vote, through the politicisation of immigration and the adoption of populist frames. The peculiarity of the Greek case when compared to the Iberian countries has been the growing salience of immigration, which particularly after the 1990s emerged as a key issue in party competition (Ellinas 2013; Karamanidou 2015). An additional point of confrontation related to the cultural cleavage was therefore also present in Greek party politics when the economic crisis was transformed into a political crisis.

As far as Portugal is concerned, two key aspects are worthy of examination to understand the peculiarities of its political context and party strategies. First, no radical right parties have succeeded in Portugal, due to organisational, programmatic and leadership failures (Marchi 2013). Second, Portugal has been considered an outlier in the populist *Zeitgeist* that has populated European politics over the last decades (Salgado and Zúquete 2017). The main example that resembles European populist counterparts is the National Renewal Party (PNR, *Partido Nacional Renovador*), an extreme right-wing party that has remained a marginal actor in the party system, never achieving more than 0.5% of the votes (Marchi 2013; Salgado and Zúquete 2017). The economic and political crisis that followed the bailout and the Troika intervention has facilitated the emergence of several new parties that ran in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Among these, only the PDR (Republican Democratic Party, *Partido Renovador Democrático*) has adopted an unorthodox style of political communication centred on its leader (António Marinho e Pinto) and a strong anti-elite rhetoric. However, these new parties have failed to innovate the Portuguese party system, whereas the main parties have adopted a very conventional electoral campaign, in terms of both style and issues (see De Giorgi and Pereira 2016). This is also confirmed by the Chapel Hill expert survey, which includes an item related to the anti-establishment rhetoric adopted by European parties. According to these data, Portugal scored relatively low in 2014 in the anti-elitism scale, below the European average and other Southern European countries.

The Spanish party system that emerged after Franco's death was characterised by the absence of populist appeals and discourses. The democratic transition gave rise to a party system structured along two basic dimensions (left–right and centre–periphery). After the demise of the centre-right UCD (*Unión de Centro Democrático*) in 1982, the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and the PP (*Partido Popular*, Popular Party) remained the two main parties in the system. They always formed single-party governments at the national

level, even if on many occasions they had to rely on the support of other forces. Until 2014 party system stability went hand in hand with a strong ideological structuration and a persistent absence of anti-elite and populist discourses. A few wealthy businessmen attempted to enter the political arena based on anti-party and populist platforms, but they attained very limited successes (a seat in the European Parliament for Ruiz Mateos in 1989 and control of a few southern city councils in the case of Jesús Gil from 1991 onwards).

However, the Great Recession and the policy switch that the PSOE put into practice after 2010 led to a deep representation crisis in the Spanish party system. This crisis was aggravated by public outrage at corruption scandals coming to light in those same years. The collapse of the PSOE in the 2011 elections, and the populist mobilisation that crystallised in the 15-M movement as a reaction to austerity policies and political corruption, paved the way for the birth and 2014 electoral breakthrough of Podemos, a party that deliberately adopted a populist rhetoric (Giménez 2014; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2018). In the 2014 European elections, the party attained 8% of the votes. In the 2015 local elections the candidates endorsed by Podemos became the mayors of the two main Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona. And in the 2015 national elections Podemos and its political allies achieved almost 21% of the vote. The 2015 general elections also witnessed the upsurge of *Ciudadanos* (Citizens), a centrist party that called for a profound renovation of political life and political institutions and which suddenly attained 13.9% of the votes.

Populism in Southern Europe through holistic grading: results

Overall, content analysis reveals considerably higher levels of populism among Greek political parties in comparison to Portugal and Spain (see Figure 1). We also find that the crisis does not show a general trend on the evolution of populism. Remarkably and counter-intuitively, it would seem that average populism scores in Greece have slightly declined since the beginning of the economic crisis. However, if we consider the averages of populism scores weighed according to electoral performance across Greek parliamentary elections between 2007, the last pre-crisis election won by New Democracy, and January 2015, and the elections that brought the SYRIZA–ANEL coalition to power, there is little variation in the levels of populism encountered in the Greek political system, despite the fact that in the meantime the latter had undergone radical change (see Table 1). These findings seem at odds with our expectation that the crisis heralded higher levels of populism.[7]

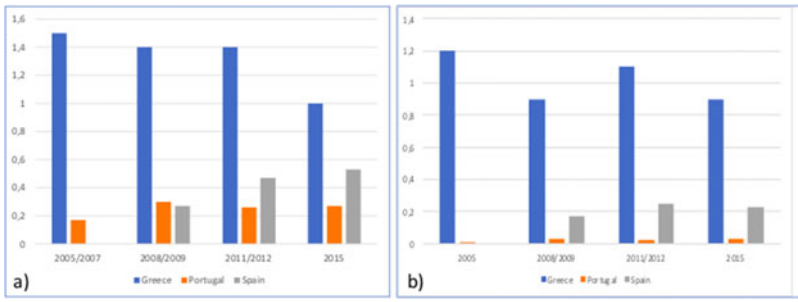

Figure 1. Populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain according to holistic coding, before and after the crisis (average per country): (a) average holistic scores per country; (b) average holistic scores per country weighted according to electoral performance.
Notes: Election years: Greek elections: 2007, 2009, 2012 (May) and 2015 (January); Portuguese elections: 2005, 2009, 2011 and 2015; Spanish elections: 2008, 2011 and 2015.

Table 1. Populism scores in Greek parties (2007, 2009, 2012 and 2015 elections).

Party	2007	2009	2012 (May)	2015 (Jan.)
KKE	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8
SYRIZA	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.4*
DIMAR	–	–	1.0	–
POTAMI	–	–	–	0.5*
PASOK	2.0	1.0	0.3	0.1*
ND	0.4	0.7	1.4	0.4*
ANEL	–	–	1.5	0.5*
LAOS	1.6	1.8	–	–
GD	–	–	2.0	2.0
Average	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.0
Weighted average	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.9

Source: Own elaboration from party manifestos, except for *Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2018).

The Portuguese case shows clearly the lowest levels of populism. The difference with other new Southern European democracies is even bigger if we consider weighted scores, which demonstrates that populism in Portugal is only related to the periphery of the party system. Indeed, both PCP and BE have displayed some degree of populism, whereas governing parties have been constantly reluctant to adopt a populist strategy (Table 2). As for longitudinal trends, we cannot really see a clear impact of the crisis. If we take 2008 as the beginning of the crisis, populist scores seem to increase after the crisis. However, the 2009 elections were not actually characterised by the discussion of austerity measures. Therefore, our interpretation is that on average the degree of populist discourse has remained relatively stable over time.

By contrast, Spain shows a very high increase in the average supply-side level of party populism, which jumped from 0.27 in 2008, the last pre-crisis elections, to 0.47 in 2011 and 0.53 in 2015 (Table 3). However, if we weight our scores by electoral success we get a much more stable image of the evolution of populism in the Spanish party system.

Table 2. Populism scores in Portuguese parties (2005–2015).

Party	2005	2009	2011	2015
BE	0.25	0.7	0.5	0.4
CDS-PP	0.00	0.0	0.0	0.0
PCP	0.55	0.8	0.7	0.7
PS	0.00	0.0	0.05	0.2
PSD	0.05	0.0	0.05	0.0
Average	0.17	0.3	0.26	0.27
Weighted average	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03

Source: Own elaboration from party manifestos.

Table 3. Populism scores for Spanish parties with more than 3% of the national vote (2008, 2011 and 2015 elections).

Party	2008*	2011**	2015***
PP	0.4	0.4	0.2
PSOE	0.0	0.0	0.15
Podemos			0.65
Ciudadanos			0.15
UP/IU	0.4	1.0	1.15
Average	0.27	0.47	0.53
Weighted average	0.17	0.25	0.23

*Source: Our elaboration, **Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2016), ***Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2018).

Weighted populism levels moved from 0.17 in 2008 to 0.25 in 2011 and 0.23 in 2015. These contrasting results derive from the fact that the PP, the most voted for party in 2011 and 2015, drastically reduced the populist overtones of its discourse after gaining access to power in 2011. This fact is consistent with the expectation that parties have stronger incentives to use populist appeals when they are in opposition. On the other hand, the sharp rise in non-weighted average levels of populism after 2011 resulted from the fact that the two main parties rejecting austerity policies, the established IU-UP (Unitary Left-United We Can) and the newly founded Podemos, articulated their proposals in a populist discursive framework. Interestingly, voting behaviour studies on the 2015 elections have shown that populist attitudes were one of the elements affecting (directly and in interaction with ideological positions) votes for Podemos, IU-UP, Ciudadanos and, negatively in this case, the PP (Andreadis *et al.* 2018). That is, although by 2015 weighted populism levels were not much higher than before the Great Recession, populist discourses were more present in the party system than in 2011, and furthermore, populist public attitudes had direct and indirect effects on vote choices.

Our analysis also highlights interesting differences between two groups of parties. Moderate and governing parties exhibit in general lower scores than challenger parties. As expected, mainstream parties seem rather immune to populist appeals, with rare elements associated with anti-elitist rhetoric or the 'popular will'. The exception here is the Greek case, where

mainstream parties also adopt populist discourses when this offers them an advantage in party competition. Two examples are PASOK's high score in the 2007 manifesto (2) when the party was challenging ND for office and ND's populist high watermark (1.5) in 2012, which can be explained by the fact that for a brief period (2010–2012) ND chose to conduct populist opposition to PASOK before being forced to join coalition governments with PASOK between 2012 and 2015. When they have not chosen to adopt populist discourses Greek mainstream parties tend to speak of the citizens, society and 'people', as well as the country and only secondarily of Greeks, while they tend to present 'demagogues', bureaucrats and partyism as the 'enemy'. On the other hand, challenger parties present higher levels of populism. However, country differences remain stronger than the variation within each category of party type. Within this group, Greece still displays the highest scores, while Portugal presents the lowest values.

Another issue addressed in our theoretical framework consists of assessing whether ideologically radical parties are more populist than moderate ones or not. Overall, the findings do confirm our expectations and previous works (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). Yet it is interesting to note that populism is not a generalised strategy for newly created parties. While there have not been new successful populist parties in Portugal, the level of populism for new parties in Greece and Spain is not higher than for old ones. Of all the Greek parties analysed, it is only ANEL, POTAMI and DIMAR that emerged as new parties in the aftermath of the crisis and their discourses do not score higher in terms of populism than most established political parties on the right or left. The fact that the two new parties in Spain are characterised by comparatively high (Podemos) and low (Ciudadanos) populist scores seems to contradict the expectation that new parties will display higher populist scores.

After assessing how the degree of populism varies across countries and party types, we qualify the content of populist discourse through means of qualitative analysis. We begin by focusing on the two parties that constitute Greece's ruling coalition, SYRIZA, the major partner, and Independent Greeks (ANEL), the minor partner, asking how they fare in terms of the inclusionary–exclusionary dimension of populism. With respect to the economic dimension, SYRIZA clearly supports an inclusionary policy of welfare state expansion to improve the lives of those groups that are subject to deprivation, exclusion or discrimination, particularly exacerbated by the economic crisis, in particular the less well off, the unemployed, women, the young and immigrants/refugees (SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 5). These are all groups to which power, income and rights should be extended because they constitute 'the people' (Font *et al.* 2019).

In terms of the political dimension, SYRIZA actively supported extra-parliamentary mobilisation and inclusive direct democratic practices (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013) and advocated the more generalised use of referenda at national and European levels (SYRIZA 2014) while in opposition. Once in government, SYRIZA extended citizenship law to second generation migrants in Greece. Moving on to the symbolic dimension, in ways not dissimilar to inclusive populist frames elsewhere in the world, SYRIZA characterised Greek political and economic elites as subservient to foreign powers such as banks and multinationals, the Troika and its components (EC/ECB/IMF) and, particularly until 2015, Germany and the German leadership (SYRIZA 2014; SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 2). SYRIZA can hence be considered a party that clearly leans towards inclusionary populism.

On the contrary, the Independent Greeks can be characterised as an exclusionary populist party, largely by virtue of its positions – while in opposition – on the question of immigration. On the economic dimension, ANEL would see 'illegal' migration eradicated and quotas introduced for legal migration, defined as a percentage of the Greek population (ANEL 2015: 6); it has also put forward policy proposals such as the immediate deportation of migrants involved in illegal commercial activities (ANEL 2012: 27). In the political and symbolic dimensions ANEL can be considered exclusionary by virtue of its opposition to multiculturalism and the close articulation of national identity, the people and Orthodox Christianity (ANEL 2015: 11).

The cohabitation of an inclusionary with an exclusionary populist party in government (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016) is highly unusual and has on occasion led to intra-governmental disagreements, with the Independent Greeks for example not supporting SYRIZA's citizenship law which involved extending citizenship to second generation migrants (Kathimerini 2015). Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that the Greek case confirms the expectation that in the aftermath of an economic crisis in Southern Europe it would be the inclusionary type of populism that could be expected to dominate. Indeed, SYRIZA's inclusionary version of populism has been significantly more electorally successful (36.3%) than the exclusionary version represented by the Independent Greeks (4.6%) and Golden Dawn (6.3%), if we take the 2015 elections as a benchmark. That said, the expectation that exclusionary populism will also emerge where the cultural cleavage is activated via the immigration issue is also confirmed.

As far as Portugal is concerned, both radical parties are close to the inclusionary type of populism, as both forces defend the protection of the welfare state – to reduce unemployment and poverty and to improve the

healthcare system – and the lower sectors of society. Both BE and PCP have always supported the expansion of social policies through an increase in public spending (Freire and Lisi 2016). Indeed, one of their core principles has always been to help improve the life conditions of weak socio-economic groups. Finally, they both advocate the nationalisation of certain sectors (i.e. transport) and state control of specific industries, as well as the 'democratic' control of the bank, which is manipulated and controlled by foreign capital.

However, when we look at the political and symbolic dimensions, a qualitative analysis unveils some peculiarities worthy of examination. On the one hand, their populist discourse is based more on the fact that 'real' democracy was incompatible with the dominance of European institutions and the most powerful countries through austerity policies, rather than on broader political participation (as 'inclusionary' populism conventionally entails). On the other hand, the two forces have conceptualised the symbolic dimension in rather different terms. In the communist election manifestos, the term 'people' is always used as synonymous with workers within a Marxist theoretical framework. The defence of sovereignty, national dignity and the people's interests were the main objectives of the alternative based on a left-wing and patriotic government (PCP 2015). By contrast, there are no direct references to the 'people' in the BE 2015 election programme.[8] This left-libertarian party has come closer to the 'new generation' of left-wing populism – like SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain – characterised by a rejection of a traditional Marxist interpretation of social conflicts and by the attempt to build an 'interclassist' approach.

The analysis of the Portuguese case reveals that, although radical left parties have adopted an 'inclusionary' discourse, this is not an innovation compared to their ideological and programmatic legacy. The crisis has fostered a populist discourse based on the criticism towards external – i.e. European – actors and the EU democratic deficit, leading these actors to strategically ally with 'populist' movements (Aslanidis 2017: 311–12). While the ideological legacy accounts for the different tones and arguments used by the two radical left parties, party strategy was also important in articulating populist arguments.

The qualitative analysis for the Spanish parties resembles to a great extent that of the Portuguese ones, at least in terms of the domestic dimension. The electoral programmes of UP-IU and Podemos were characterised by their intense pro-redistributive proposals, their defence of civic and political liberties, their emphasis on democratic participation and their opposition to restrictive immigration policies (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2018; Torreblanca 2015). No exclusionary proposals were

included in the 2015 and 2016 electoral programmes of the two national parties adopting the most populist discourses according to holistic grading analysis. The electoral programmes of Podemos and IU-UP emphasised the systemic association between political elites, large firms and financial capital. By contrast, neither xenophobic nor anti-EU statements were present in the manifestos of these two political actors. The Podemos programmes for 2015 and 2016 proposed the restructuring of the Spanish debt so that banking institutions would pay back the loans they received from the European Stability Mechanism. They also proposed the overhaul of the EU stability pact and the reform of the statutes of the European Central Bank so that the fight against unemployment would become one of its main goals (Podemos 2016: 134, 136). However, they also proposed the development of a common EU fiscal policy and of an ambitious EU budget (Podemos 2016: 136). Podemos policy proposals were remarkably inclusionary in the political and symbolic domains, demanding the access of immigrants to full social benefits and protection. In general, our content analysis confirms the absence of exclusionary populism in the Spanish party system (at least at the national level) and the inclusionary, redistributive and libertarian character of Podemos and IU-UP's populism.

The statistical analysis of the associations between populism levels and ideological and programmatic party positions (Polk *et al.* 2017) allows us to summarise and compare some of the main features of populist discourses in new Southern European democracies. In the first place, extreme or radical parties clearly show higher levels of populism than moderate parties, as shown by the +0.66 Pearson correlation between populism scores and an indicator of left–right radicalism based on the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk *et al.* 2017; see also Rooduijn *et al.* 2014). This also shows that populism can be used as a discursive resource by groups with very different thick ideologies. There are however some important differences between Greece and the two Iberian countries. In the latter there is a very strong association between left–right party positions (Polk *et al.* 2017) and populism scores (Pearson correlation of −0.81 for all Iberian parties). By contrast, in Greece this association is entirely absent. That is, while Iberian populisms have a predominantly leftist character (Gómez-Reino and Plaza-Colodro 2018; Lisi and Borghetto 2018), Greek populism is equally present at both extremes of the ideological spectrum. Overall, however, parties with higher populism levels tend to be materially inclusionary and pro-redistributive: The Pearson correlation index between populist scores and the positions of parties in the redistribution versus market dimension (Polk *et al.* 2017) equals −0.56. This association is even stronger when we restrict the

analysis to the Iberian cases ($r = -0.73$). Finally, the association between populism and party positions regarding immigration and multiculturalism is non-existent at the Southern European level (Pearson correlations of −0.14 and −0.07 respectively), but it is strong for the Iberian parties (correlations of −0.73 and −0.72 respectively). In other words, parties with higher levels of populism tend to be more favourable to immigration and multiculturalism in Portugal and Spain. Again, these data reveal the presence of important differences in the substantive correlates of populist appeals between Greece and the two Iberian countries.

Conclusion

This contribution explores the use that political parties in the new Southern Europe have made of populist discourse after the onset of the Great Recession. Our article is based on a set of interrelated expectations regarding cross-temporal, cross-partisan and cross-national variations in the uses of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the first place, we assumed that the social malaise triggered by the European crisis had led to a substantial increase in the presence of populist elements in party discourses. In the second place, based on the ideational theory on populism and previous comparative analyses, we assumed that populist elements would be more prevalent among ideologically extreme parties (both right and left) and challenger parties opposing well-established political players. We also assumed that, given the severe social costs imposed by economic crisis and austerity policies, populist discourses would have a predominantly inclusionary character in the material, redistributive domain. However, when political-cultural issues (such as immigration or European integration) had been previously activated by political actors, populist discourses could also take a xenophobic (or nationalist) and culturally exclusionary character. Finally, as far as cross-national differences are concerned, we also expected that current changes would not definitively erase previous contrasts between Greece and the two Iberian countries regarding the intensity of populist discourse, and that the uses of populism would continue to be more frequent in the former case. We have used the holistic grading of party manifestos to evaluate these claims empirically.

Our expectation regarding the evolution of populism works relatively well in the case of Spain, only moderately in the case of Portugal, and not at all in the case of Greece. In the latter case, levels of populism were relatively stable between 2007 and 2015. In Spain supply-side populism increased substantially from 2008 to 2015. However, weighted populism grew moderately from 2008 to 2011, and then remained at a very similar

level in the 2015 elections. Supply-side populism experienced a substantial increase also in Portugal, especially from 2005 to 2009, and the scores show an overall stability in the subsequent period. In general, these results show that there is not a shared pattern of evolution leading to higher populism levels as a result of the Great Recession. Rather, the interaction between exogenous shocks and domestic logics and legacies has shaped the evolution of populism in these three countries.

As far as cross-partisan variations in the levels of populism are concerned, our findings confirm the expectation that populism is associated to challenger parties, which adopt populist frames to criticise mainstream forces and erode their popular support. We also corroborate that there is a strong association between ideological radicalism and degree of populism. As for the inclusionary–exclusionary character of populist discourses, our qualitative case discussion showed the prevalence of materially inclusive, redistributive proposals among the parties employing populist rhetoric elements. This means that, in general, parties that sympathise more with the populist cause tend to be more pro-redistributive, and if we focus on the Iberian peninsula this association becomes particularly strong. As indicated previously, this phenomenon can be explained not only by the dramatic effects of the austerity policies implemented in these three countries, but also by the persistence of the socio-economic cleavage as the main dimension of party competition and the previous lack of party system responsiveness on the left side of the political spectrum. However, the Greek case also shows the possibility of parties adopting explicitly exclusionary populist discourses in the symbolic, polity boundary dimension, a fact that can be connected to the greater salience of immigration, its previous politicisation in this country, and the presence of political entrepreneurs on the right and far right (ANEL, LAOS, Golden Dawn) who over the course of the crisis engaged in competition over the anti-immigration vote (Ellinas 2013: 557).

Finally, our data show that despite the attenuation of cross-national differences, the use of populist rhetoric has remained substantially higher in Greece than in Portugal and Spain. This endorses the path-dependent interpretation that national legacies matter, and that the previous and successful activation of populist styles that characterises 'populist democracies' (Pappas 2014a, 2014b) may have created a persistent pattern of populist rhetoric in party competition. From this viewpoint, our analysis suggests that 'populist democracies' not only entail lasting and path-dependent dynamics, but also shape the strategy and discourse of mainstream parties. Despite this, strategic choices are also key for understanding cross-time variations, for example the fact that parties in opposition moving to government are prone to reduce

populist rhetoric and vice versa. Overall, the findings lend support to the dilemma between responsible and responsive parties magisterially elaborated by Mair (2011).

There are several broad implications that we can draw from our findings. The first is that populist discourse is a complex phenomenon that can be associated with different substantive policy proposals and ideological frames (Taggart 2017). Indeed, we also find examples of the exclusionary type of populism in Southern Europe, characterised by the prevalence of inclusionary populism. Even more interestingly, we do find some important differences within the inclusionary version of populism (see also Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2018). This means that it is dangerous to characterise the populist phenomenon in global terms, as the specific country setting is key to understanding its content and strategy. The second important implication is related to party system change. Wolinetz (2018) has recently noticed that the use of populist discourse by political parties is associated more often than not with an 'outsider' status and that it is much rarer among mainstream parties. However, favourable contextual (e.g. 'hard' times) and historical conditions may also lead to both the adoption of populist discourses by mainstream parties and to party system change (e.g. Greece, Italy, Spain). Again, this shows that the evolution of populism and its effects on party systems result from a complex, conjunctural combination of contingent, structural and historical factors.

Although ideational theory goes a long way to understanding cross-national, cross-time and cross-partisan variations, it does not explain in and of itself the success of populist parties. This is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that this study cannot address. One interesting puzzle in this regard is the lack of party system innovation of the Portuguese case. Our findings show that the protest and populist components of the two radical left parties may have channelled voters' dissatisfaction with mainstream parties. But there are certainly other factors at play, such as voters' demobilisation (Morlino and Raniolo 2017), the lack of populist leaders (Marchi 2013), the anti-populist approach of mainstream media (Salgado 2018) or the high polarisation of the party system.[9]

This point is related to one limitation of the present study, namely that we focus on populism on the supply-side party level. This means that a partially different picture may emerge if we look at citizens' attitudes, as other studies have already done (e.g. Akkerman *et al.* 2014; Schultz *et al.* 2018; Tsatsanis *et al.* 2018 for the Greek case). Furthermore, the analysis of leaders' speeches might provide us with a more complete and more nuanced picture of the use of populist discourses within these three cases.

The scope of this analysis is limited to just three South European countries. However, this focused comparison has both comparative and theoretical interest. On the one hand, comparative empirical studies on the characteristics and dynamics of populism in these countries are needed. On the other, this analysis can enrich our understanding of the factors conditioning the evolution and the substantive political content of populism in Europe after the Great Recession. Future research should aim to expand the empirical analysis both geographically and longitudinally, as well as to assess how and when populist rhetoric leads to electoral success.

Notes

1. This paper deals mainly with populism on the supply-side level, i.e. looking at populist discourse of the party as a whole. We are aware that this phenomenon can be examined from other 'angles' – e.g. looking at leaders' discourse or citizens' attitudes.
2. Both dimensions are included in Kriesi and Pappas' (2015) work. According to their indicators, Italy seems to diverge from new Southern European democracies as it did not experience a deep economic crisis (only a political one).
3. Salgado and Stavrakakis (2018) have examined populist political communication in Southern Europe, mainly from a media research perspective. Gómez-Reino and Plaza-Colodro (2018) have also addressed the evolution of populism in Portugal and Spain. Their work reveals the leftist character of Iberian populism, but their analysis focuses on the presence of Eurosceptic appeals among populist parties. The focus and scope of their analysis are therefore different from those of this article.
4. The concept of 'challenger party' refers to those actors that have never participated in government coalitions (see Hobolt and Tilley 2016; van der Wardt *et al.* 2014).
5. Unfortunately, we could not rely on speeches because this material is not available for the three countries and for the period before and after the crisis.
6. Polk *et al.* (2017) report a +0.51 correlation between the CHES anti-elitism indicator and Rooduijn and Pauwels's scores for the parties in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.
7. We know that in the January 2015 elections populist attitudes had a positive impact on voting for SYRIZA, ANEL and the KKE (Andreadis *et al.* 2018), but we lack comparable empirical evidence for previous elections and cannot ascertain whether the diffusion or the electoral effects of populist attitudes changed across time.
8. One of the few references to the people in BE's manifestos can be found in 2011 electoral programme, when it uses the term 'people' to identify the victim of the bailout negotiation (BE 2011: 29).
9. According to Dalton's index, Portugal displayed higher levels of polarisation than Greece and Spain during the crisis period (data available through the ParlGov website: http://www.parlgov.org/).

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