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Radical-Left Populism during the Great Recession: *Podemos* and Its Competition with the Established Radical Left

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Abstract

The 2008 Great Recession has altered party allegiances in many countries. This has been very visible in some of the countries hardest hit by the crisis, such as Spain. The Spanish case stands out as the only one in which a fully newly created radical-left populist party, *Podemos*, has attracted sizeable support. Its success is more intriguing given its capacity to attract many former supporters of the established radical left, *Izquierda Unida*. This article analyses what factors explain the support for the new radical-left populist party *Podemos*, identifying the individual-level features that lead voters to support it rather than an already established anti-austerity radical-left party. As the results show, *Podemos* supporters do not correspond to the conventional descriptions of populist voters, the losers of 'globalisation' and the economic crisis. Instead, a combination of elements – protest, anti-mainstream sentiment and unfulfilled expectations – distinguishes *Podemos* supporters from the established radical-left electorate.

Keywords

political parties, populism, radical left, Spain, electoral behaviour

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The effects of the 2008 Great Recession on party politics have been notorious. Many European countries are experiencing a prolonged period of electoral turmoil. Throughout one of the worst economic crisis in the recent history of some countries, voters' electoral behaviour has followed, to a large degree, the expectations set by the economic voting models (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Van der Brug et al., 2007). In many cases, voters have punished incumbents amidst negative perceptions of the state of the economy, a collapse of growth figures and surging unemployment (Kriesi, 2014a). However, this

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cursory picture portraying the electoral dynamics of the countries battered by the 2008 Great Recession almost exhausts their commonalities.

The variety of electoral changes during the economic downturn is wide. Populist parties have gained electoral weight in countries like Italy, Germany or Sweden, while in others there has been no such populist surge, including interestingly some of the most affected by the crisis, such as Cyprus and Portugal. Radical-right parties have grown in France, Hungary and Greece, but remain weak or insignificant in many other countries, some of them intensely shaken by the crisis, like Spain. New parties have succeeded in places like Germany, Spain, Slovenia and Italy, while they have not in countries such as Ireland and Portugal. Finally, radical-left parties have advanced in Greece and Spain, while in most polities they remain relatively small or have been unable to escape from their extra-parliamentary status, as in Italy.

As Hanspeter Kriesi (2014a: 300–301) says, when dissatisfaction with the state of the economy drives voters to punish the incumbent, they can vote for the mainstream opposition; they can vote against all the mainstream parties (against the 'establishment', the 'elite') by voting for new challengers or for independent candidates, often of a populist kind; or they can fully retreat from electoral politics by abstaining. The goal of this article is to throw light on the conditions that make more likely one of the possible reactions to an economic crisis: supporting a populist party. However, instead of focusing on the better-known populist radical right, we concentrate on a new radical-left populist party. Among the many potential variables influencing such behaviour, our analysis focuses on the role played by the individual-level ones. In particular, we are interested in identifying which individual-level factors lead to supporting a new radical-left populist party when a similar and established anti-austerity radical-left party already exists. In other words, the main research question we aim to answer is, 'What individual-level factors make voters support new radical-left populists rather than established radical-left parties?'

To shed light on this question, we study the support for the new radical-left populist party *Podemos* (We Can) and its competition with the established radical left IU (*Izquierda Unida*, United Left) in Spain. The Spanish case is particularly interesting for several reasons. Spain is one of the countries in which the 2008 Great Recession has manifested more severely, but it is the only one in which a fully newly created radical-left populist party has emerged during the crisis attracting sizeable support, among others, from former voters of the established radical left (IU). This makes this case most pertinent to find out what distinguishes those voters who support a new radical-left populist party in a society particularly hit by the crisis rather than a radical-left party already present in the party system.[1] Focusing on the case of *Podemos*, we will significantly expand our knowledge about the less researched left-wing populism – as compared to the better-known populist radical right (Pauwels, 2014: 3). Finally, the study of the electoral competition between *Podemos* and IU also implies investigating the socio-demographic and attitudinal variables that drive radical-left populist support. In doing so, this article contributes to our knowledge of the increasingly important phenomenon of rising support for populist parties in advanced democracies.

In the next pages, we first briefly describe the new challenger party, *Podemos*, and the established radical-left one, IU. Then, we present the potential explanations of voting under economic distress for populist parties, establishing the theoretical expectations regarding the Spanish case. After that, we present the data and the variables we will use. We follow with a presentation of our main findings that show the commonalities and differences between *Podemos* and IU supporters in key socio-demographic and attitudinal variables.

Finally, we provide some concluding remarks on how *Podemos*' advantage with regard to IU among some voters cannot be fully explained either by the globalisation and economic crisis 'losers' hypotheses or by the common description of populist voters. On the contrary, *Podemos* combines a varied left-wing electorate, anti-mainstream protest voting and highly educated groups with unfulfilled expectations.

The Rise of Radical-Left Populism during the 2008 Great Recession in Spain

Spain was one of the worst hit countries during the Great Recession, having lost about 15% of its gross domestic product (GDP) between 2008 and 2013 (The World Bank, 2014). The social magnitude of the Spanish crisis is best summarised by looking at its impact on unemployment. While unemployment rates in Spain amounted to 8.2% in 2007, by 2013 they had reached a peak of 26.2% – 15.3 percentage points higher than the European Union (EU) average that year. Figures were all the more dramatic among young people, with 55.5% of those under 25 in unemployment in 2013 (Eurostat, 2015).

The consequences of the economic crisis in Spain led to an important increase in social unrest and mobilisations since 2011, including the emergence of the so-called *15-M* or '*Indignados*' movement (Hughes, 2011). From the point of view of electoral politics, despite the mostly moderate and resiliently electoral response to the crisis in Europe, Spain is one of the few cases in which a large realignment in party preferences with an increasing support for a radical-left populist party has taken place.[2] However, such re-alignment did not start to materialise until the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections.

In the first elections after the start of the crisis, the 2011 general elections, the incumbent social democrats, PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*), were severely punished (Torcal, 2014). The conservative PP (People's Party, *Partido Popular*) won office with a large majority, and the radical-left IU improved its results from a very weak position to 7% of the national vote. However, after implementing an austerity programme, the PP suffered a considerable decrease in support and the approval ratings of the conservative prime minister plummeted. The 2014 EP elections resulted in both PP and PSOE obtaining historical minimum levels of support. IU again improved its results (10%), but the most relevant outcome was the 8% of votes won by the new radical-left populist party, *Podemos*. Since then, *Podemos* has increased its vote intention in every survey until January 2015, overtaking IU and reaching levels of vote intention close to those of PSOE and PP.[3] In the December 2015 general elections, *Podemos* became the third largest party behind PP and PSOE. *Podemos* and its allies in Catalonia, Galicia and Comunidad Valenciana gained 21% of the vote, while IU reached its historical minimum (3.7%).

While very similar in policy terms, IU and *Podemos* are ideologically and strategically very different. IU was created by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE, *Partido Comunista de España*) in 1986 as part of its transformation to confront its electoral and organisational crisis (Ramiro, 2004). The PCE created IU originally as an electoral coalition with some other smaller left-wing parties, but IU has progressively transformed itself into a more unified organisation in which the still existent parties (basically the PCE) play the role of factions. The creation of IU included an organisational dimension consisting in building a more open, inclusive and grassroot democratic type of organisation; and a policy dimension consisting in a political renewal that would add New Left and new social movement concerns (environmentalism, feminism and pacifism) to the classic democratic socialist PCE's policies. IU succeeded in offering a renewed platform

(Gómez et al., 2016), although it was simultaneously relatively traditional in ideological terms, as its adherence to socialist principles (defended internally by the PCE) attested. However, IU was not successful in its strategy of organisational innovation; more inclusive decision-making procedures always struggled to be implemented (Ramiro and Verge, 2013). In this way, despite a modernised radical-left platform, IU is relatively traditional in organisational and ideological terms. This was to appear in strong contrast to *Podemos*.

Podemos was created in January 2014, aiming to contest the May EP elections. It was promoted by a group of university lecturers and activists based in Madrid (Rivero, 2015; Torreblanca, 2015). Some of them had previously collaborated with IU (some had been IU members) acting as consultants,[4] some belonged to a small radical-left party called Anti-Capitalist Left (formerly integrated in IU) and some were social movement activists. Many of *Podemos*' members had actively participated in the *Indignados* movement that emerged back in 2011. According to *Podemos*' own account, the party was created to benefit from the existence of a 'window of opportunity' – provided by the economic (and political) crisis – in order to promote a fundamental socio-political change; and the creation of the party was motivated by the perceived insufficiencies of the established left-wing political actors to foster such transformation (see Di Pietro, 2014; Iglesias et al., 2014; Monedero et al., 2014; Osuna, 2014). Following their promoters' view, Spain had reached a state of systemic crisis – social, economic and political – in which the population had changed their political perceptions, making them available for the construction of an alternative political project (Iglesias, 2015).

Following Teun Pauwels' (2014: 5) qualitative analysis of populist parties, *Podemos* matches strikingly well the minimal definition of populism. A consensus is growing around this elusive concept that identifies the basic tenets of populism as the belief that society is characterised by the opposition and conflict between the 'honest' ordinary people and the 'corrupt' elite (Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016; Mudde, 2007: 23; Pauwels, 2014: 2; Rooduijn, 2014; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011: 727; Stanley, 2008: 102). Populism assumes then that society is basically characterised by two antagonistic groups, stresses the benign nature of the people and emphasises the idea of popular sovereignty (Canovan, 2002; Kriesi, 2014b). Fully matching this characterisation, the leaders of *Podemos* based much of their discourse during the party's first year on the dichotomy between the 'caste' (*la casta*) that has ruined the country's economy by extracting illegitimate rents and the 'people' – to the point of popularising the term 'caste' in the daily and ordinary-citizen political jargon in Spain (see, for example, Gallego-Díaz and Rivero, 2015).

Additionally, like many other populist parties (Pauwels, 2014: 6; Taggart, 2004: 274–275) and like the radical-left populist type depicted by Luke March (2011: 118–123), *Podemos* shows some degree of ideological eclecticism and nationalism.[5] In relation to the former, the leaders of *Podemos* have surprisingly insisted on the irrelevance of the left–right divide for contemporary Spanish politics (Gallego-Díaz and Rivero, 2015). In stark contrast with IU, the main leaders of *Podemos* declare themselves left-wing but simultaneously consider the left–right divide obsolete and useless to describe current political conflict. Additionally, despite their proposed policies being clearly left-wing, the leaders of *Podemos* have stressed that using the left–right dichotomy would be a self-defeating strategy that would only favour the mainstream 'caste parties' (mainly, but not only, the PP and the PSOE), hindering *Podemos*' efforts to attract all types of voters (Di Pietro, 2014; Ferrandis, 2014). Highlighting this strategic twist of their ideological reasoning, *Podemos* spokespeople have often neglected any other conflict that might disturb the mobilisation of their preferred 'people vs. elite' divide,[6] as is characteristic of populist ideology (Pauwels, 2014). This illustrates well the vote-maximisation strategy of

Podemos. Regarding their nationalism, the leader of *Podemos*, Pablo Iglesias, has repeatedly claimed he considers himself a patriot (Gómez, 2014). *Podemos* highlights the need to regain popular and national sovereignty, as they interpret that both have been taken away by the caste and by unelected actors (the Troika, the German government, the European Central Bank, etc.).[7]

In accordance with the interpretation of populism as a 'thin ideology' (Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008), populist parties attach to their claims different ideologies, either from the left or from the right (see also Taggart, 2000, 2004). Consequently, Cas Mudde (2007: 29) proposes three types of populist parties: radical-right, social and neoliberal. The social type depicts a left-wing version of populism developed in March and Mudde (2005) and March (2011). Resembling remarkably well the radical leftism of the 'populist socialist' party type proposed by March and Mudde (2005; March, 2011: 118–123), *Podemos* defines itself in opposition to the mainstream parties to which they refer as 'caste' parties (*partidos de la casta*), but combining strong anti-establishment and anti-elite claims with typical democratic socialist socio-economic policy proposals. Accordingly, despite its avoidance of a left-wing self-declaration, the party platform for the May 2014 EP elections and the programme approved in October 2014 included radical-left, anti-austerity and anti-neoliberal proposals (including among them debt restructuring and the proposal of not paying the 'illegitimate' debt) (*Público*, 2015). Although *Podemos* moderated some of its previous economic policy proposals in November 2014 and in its 2015 general elections manifesto, it still proposed the sort of traditional left-wing policies identified with classical left-wing socialism (Manetto, 2014).

Hence, *Podemos*, has presented itself as a strongly anti-mainstream left-wing party and has been able to be perceived as such much more clearly than its radical-left competitor IU. Figure 1 shows how the main three left-wing Spanish parties (PSOE, IU and *Podemos*) are perceived in terms of their left–right ideological position and their anti-elite

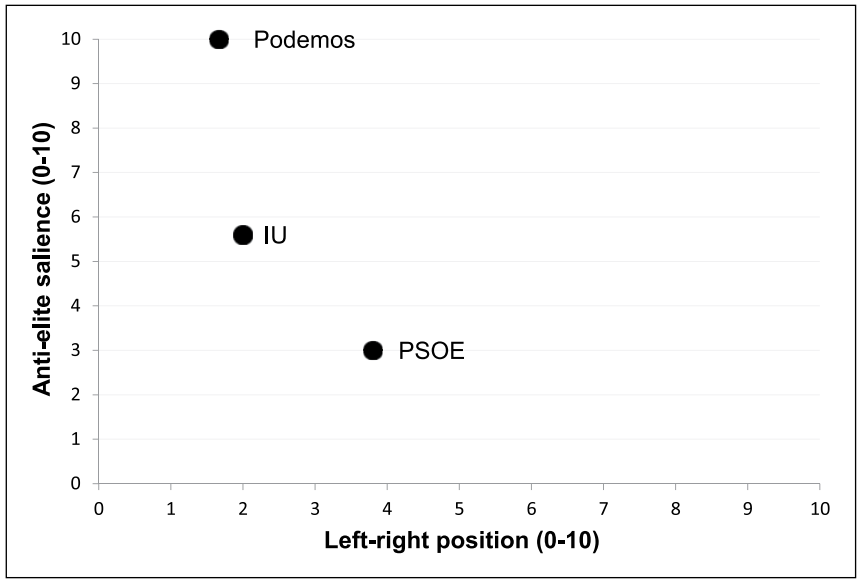

Figure 1. *Podemos*, IU and PSOE left–right position and anti-establishment/anti-elite salience.
Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015).

and anti-establishment claims (salience) using the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data. As it appears, *Podemos* is the most anti-mainstream party of the Spanish left.

Some other radical-left parties articulate claims of a populist resonance (e.g. by stressing the defence of 'the people' more than traditional categories such as 'workers' or 'working class'), employ anti-establishment rhetoric and emphasise the need to regain popular and national sovereignty.[8] However, what makes *Podemos* and the radical-left populist parties distinctive is the emphasis on 'the people vs the elite' divide as their ideological defining element. Certainly, *Podemos* is an exceptional case within the radical left. Despite the political orientation of *Podemos*' platform and of most of its founders, or the fact that *Podemos* MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) are integrated into the European United Left–Nordic Green Left group in the EP, plus the fact that its party leader (Pablo Iglesias) was the radical-left candidate for the presidency of the EP and that it has established relations with other radical-left parties across Europe (particularly *Syriza* in Greece, the *Bloco de Esquerda* in Portugal and the *Parti de Gauche* in France), *Podemos* painstakingly avoids declaring itself as being left-wing. This purposeful avoidance of the left–right divide is common among the radical-right populists, but it is unusual among left-wing parties adopting populist traits. In this sense, *Podemos* is a unique and innovative populist radical-left challenger in the European scene.

Support for Populist Parties during the Economic Crisis

The 2008 Great Recession has had considerable electoral impacts. Incumbents have frequently been punished (Bartels, 2014), and radical and populist left-wing and right-wing parties have grown in countries such as France, Sweden, Greece, Hungary and Spain. As Kriesi (2014a: 304) suggests, dissatisfaction with the austerity policies implemented by successive governments headed by the different mainstream parties might play an important role in the explanation of populist and radical parties' growth. This describes well the Spanish case and the breakthrough of *Podemos*. After having punished the incumbents (first PSOE and then PP), and being successively disillusioned with the policies of the mainstream opposition, many Spanish voters were inclined to support non-mainstream parties. But why support a new radical-left populist party rather than the established anti-austerity radical left?

The answer might lie in the characteristics of populist parties' supporters. Lower levels of political trust, dissatisfaction with democracy, lower levels of education, ideological extremism, weakness of social ties and Euroscepticism have been hypothesised to foster support for populism in Europe and to describe an electorate unattached to mainstream parties (Pauwels, 2014: 58–66).[9] These traits are similar in many respects to the characterisation of globalisation 'losers' depicted by Kriesi et al. (2008, 2012). Following Kriesi et al. (2008, 2012), globalisation generates three new political conflicts – economic competition, cultural diversity and political integration – that create groups of 'losers' and 'winners'. A common feature that 'losers' share in both the economic competition and the cultural diversity conflicts is their relatively lower educational level. Moreover, globalisation losers show, as a response to the globalisation political integration conflict, a stronger identification with their national community (Kriesi et al., 2012: 15). Feeling threatened by economic openness, political integration and increased competition with immigrants over jobs and welfare benefits, low-educated workers support populist parties (Kriesi et al., 2012: 12–15).

However, that globalisation losers constitute the key support of populism is not uncontested. Scholars have found that right-wing populist electorates are formed by

both losers and winners of the socio-economic modernisation (Mudde, 2007: 204). Nevertheless, the 2008 Great Recession might have had a particularly strong impact on globalisation losers. The rise of unemployment, austerity policies limiting welfare benefits and clearer manifestations of transnational constraints on national governments might have accentuated the relevance of the conflict between globalisation 'losers' and 'winners' (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012: 20).

An alternative explanation of the support for populist challenger parties during the 2008 Great Recession lies in the unfulfilled expectations of a sizeable group of voters. This factor has been deemed an important one leading to protest in some countries hit by the 2008 crisis (Beissinger and Sasse, 2014). These voters do not quite match the globalisation 'losers' profile. For example, highly educated individuals who have seen their social position affected as a consequence of the crisis may have turned to populist parties despite not fulfilling the profile of the traditional populist voter. However, the specification of the political effects of 'relative deprivation' or unfulfilled expectations sentiments faces two challenges. The first one is the lack of individual-level survey data that allow adequate measurement of this. The second one is that the political effects of unfulfilled expectations are mediated in complex ways by diverse system-level factors such as mobilisation, political opportunities and structural conditions (Beissinger and Sasse, 2014: 364).

Finally, the populist vote can also be understood as a form of protest vote catalysed, among other factors, by the decline of the mainstream parties' representative function (Mair, 2013). Protest voters are described as primarily moved by their intention to express their dissatisfaction by voting for a party manifestly opposed to the mainstream, the elite or the political regime (Van der Brug et al., 2000). As Wouter Van der Brug and his colleagues highlight, protest votes will be cast for a party that is perceived as a protest/anti-mainstream one – a designation that can either be made by the party itself or by mainstream parties and the media in order to marginalise it.

From this latter point of view, the rise of left-wing populist parties in party systems where the radical left is already present and consolidated is particularly puzzling because the traditional radical left has commonly been attributed this protest 'stigma'. However, it is possible that the 'protest' character of established radical-left parties might have been diluted by their increasing government participation as a minor partner in social democrat-led coalition governments since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Unfortunately, measuring 'protest vote' is not straightforward, but, in general, protest voters have been understood as not being primarily motivated by ideological concerns (Van der Brug et al., 2000; Van der Eijk et al., 1996).

In sum, following these theoretical accounts and previous findings, we will first analyse whether support for the new radical-left populists of *Podemos* in Spain can be mostly explained by the reaction of the globalisation and 2008 crisis 'losers'. In this respect, the economic crisis might have increased the alienation of such voters from mainstream parties, making them especially available to radical-left populist appeals in Spain (where a credible populist radical-right party is absent). If these expectations are correct, *Podemos* should have been successful in attracting these voters and would have been so to a greater degree than the established radical-left party, IU.

Globalisation losers are characterised by their lower level of education/skills, and low-skill jobs in traditional sectors threatened by economic openness. Thus, if *Podemos* were successful in attracting this group, lower education/skills (Education Hypothesis), and being a manual worker (Manual Worker Hypothesis), should foster support for the radical-left populists to a greater degree than for IU.

We would also expect the new radical-left populist party to receive more support than IU not only from the groups that were worst affected by the 2008 Great Recession because they are unemployed, or they work on temporary contracts, or they are at risk of losing their jobs (Great Recession Losers Hypothesis), but also particularly from young people (Young People Hypothesis), who suffer from an extremely high unemployment rate. Moreover, young voters have been shown to play an important role in the emergence of new contenders in the past – especially in the case of Green and radical-right parties (Franklin and Rüdig, 1992; Henjak, 2009).

Similarly, following both the hypotheses on the basis of populist support and on globalisation's new conflicts, we would expect support for *Podemos* to be higher among those with Eurosceptic views (Euroscepticism Hypothesis). Moreover, we would also expect their supporters to show a stronger Spanish national identity, certainly stronger than that of IU supporters (National Identity Hypothesis). This expectation is consistent with some elements of *Podemos*' messages emphasising the loss of national sovereignty and criticising German 'supremacy', as well as their appeals to national symbols. It is also consistent with IU remaining an antagonistic party regarding Spanish nationalism (Núñez-Seixas, 2001). Spanish nationalism has traditionally been associated with preferences for territorial centralism. Therefore, as the centre–periphery cleavage is key in Spain and has caused divisions within the electorates of many Spanish parties, it is plausible to expect radical-left supporters to display contrasting attitudes, with the radical-left populist ones showing stronger centralist preferences than the supporters of the established radical left (Centralism Hypothesis).

It is also reasonable to expect populist radical-left supporters to be dissatisfied with the political and economic situation (Dissatisfaction Hypothesis), although there is no obvious logical or theoretical reason to expect that they will be more intensely dissatisfied during the economic crisis than established radical-left supporters. However, this dissatisfaction could also be understood as a proxy indicator of anti-mainstream attitudes. It is more reasonable to expect, though, that those intending to vote for the new challenger party might often be individuals who were previously so alienated from electoral politics that they did not bother to vote before (Non-voters Hypothesis). Some citizens might have been so alienated by mainstream politics that they might even perceive the established radical left as part of the mainstream. *Podemos* should then recruit a considerable number of supporters from former non-voters and do so in greater degree than IU.

The role of individuals' ideology brings up conflicting expectations. Following previous studies on populist electorates, we might expect support for radical-left populists to be more likely among ideological extremists (Extremism Hypothesis). However, there would be no obvious reason to expect these voters to be more extremist than the established radical-left ones. Yet, given the aforementioned particularities of protest parties, jointly with *Podemos*' messages regarding the obsolescence of the left–right divide, we could expect just the opposite: that *Podemos* supporters are less extremist than those of IU – perhaps voters who were not attracted by the ideological extremism of IU – or that they are less ideological (Non-ideological Hypothesis). The latter hypothesis would be consistent with the expectation that some of them would have been previously alienated from electoral politics.

Finally, as previously suggested, support for *Podemos* might be explained by feelings of unfulfilled expectations or relative deprivation. For lack of a more direct measurement of this phenomenon, a proxy indicator of this dynamic operating would be to find greater support for *Podemos* among people who, despite being highly educated, experience a situation of economic insecurity through unemployment, fear of losing their jobs or who

work in temporary jobs (Unfulfilled Expectations Hypothesis). If support for the radical-left populist *Podemos* is based on unfulfilled expectations, these voters should support it to a greater extent than they support the established radical left, IU.

Data and Methods

We analyse support for the radical-left populist *Podemos* using five cross-sectional surveys conducted in the first year of activity of the new party. All the surveys were conducted by the same polling institute using the same sampling and interviewing methods.[10] The first survey is a post-electoral study conducted immediately after the May 2014 EP elections, when *Podemos* made its electoral breakthrough; the other four surveys were conducted in July and October 2014 and in January and April 2015. For our analyses, we have merged these five data files, including the wave (and hence the timing) as a control variable. Some analyses will not use data from all five surveys because several variables were included only in some of them.

The variable of support for the radical-left populist *Podemos* and for the established radical-left IU has been created using the question about which party the respondent intends to vote for in the next general election.[11] Levels of education are derived from a question about the level of formal education attained by the respondent. A question on occupation allows identification of those individuals who belong to the manual working class (i.e. workers, non-specialised workers, manual workers or workers in the fisheries and agricultural sectors). Questions about working situation enabled us to obtain information about whether the respondents are unemployed or work in temporary jobs; an additional question asks respondents whether they fear losing their jobs; and with these pieces of information we have created a variable identifying those who are economically insecure because they are unemployed, work in temporary jobs or fear losing their jobs.

The variable on national identity measures on a 5-point scale whether respondents identify *only with their region* (1), *more with their region than with Spain* (2), *equally with both their region and Spain* (3), *more with Spain than with their region* (4) or *only with Spain* (5). A question on the preferred structure of the state throws light on the preferences regarding decentralisation and federalisation. We consider those answering that they prefer a central state without regional autonomies or that they prefer regional governments with fewer powers than at present as showing 'pro-centralist' attitudes.

The variable regarding Euroscepticism is derived from an ordinal variable about support for the EU in which we consider the answer 'somewhat', 'quite' and 'very' against the EU as indicating Eurosceptic attitudes. A 1–10 left–right ideology scale is used to explore the role of ideology on voting. Individuals ideologically undefined are those answering 'don't know' to this question.[12] Reported voting behaviour in the previous general election is used to identify non-voters, among those eligible to vote. Regarding age, younger voters are considered to be those less than 30 years old. Finally, we employ respondents' evaluations of the economic situation, the political situation, the government (PP) and the main opposition party (PSOE) as indicators of economic and political dissatisfaction. All four variables are measured through a scale ranging from 5 (*very positive*) to 1 (*very negative*).

Findings

To test our hypotheses, we employ multinomial models where the characteristics of *Podemos* supporters are compared with the characteristics of supporters of other parties.

As we are interested in comparisons with the established radical-left party, IU, comparisons with supporters of the social democrats (PSOE), other left-wing parties (which comprise nationalist and other smaller nationwide parties) and non-left-wing parties (PP and other non-left-wing) are only provided in the online Appendix.[13]

As the variables needed to test some of the hypotheses are not available for all surveys, we proceed in the following manner: the hypothesis regarding Euroscepticism is only tested with the post-European election survey since this question is not available in any other study; hypotheses regarding national identity, centralisation, and evaluations of the government, opposition and the economic and political situation are tested using all but the post-European election survey, which does not contain such variables; finally, hypotheses regarding age, losers of globalisation and of the Great Recession, economic insecurity and unfulfilled expectations, and ideology are tested in the aforementioned two models and in an additional model including all four surveys.

Losers of Globalisation and Great Recession?

In order to shed light on the reasons why people support *Podemos* instead of IU, we start by looking at the set of hypotheses related to losers of globalisation and of the Great Recession. If the losers from both processes are more likely to support *Podemos* than IU, then we should find significant differences concerning the young, the less educated, the manual working class and, in general, those experiencing economic insecurity. Moreover, Eurosceptics (Euroscepticism Hypothesis) and those who did not vote in previous elections (Non-voters Hypothesis) should also be more likely to support *Podemos* than IU.

Models 1–3 (Table 1) show the results of the multinomial models using data from the post-European Election study (Model 1) and from all the five surveys (Models 2 and 3). As can be seen in Models 1 and 2, losers from globalisation and the Great Recession are not significantly more inclined to support *Podemos* than IU, at least not when we look at age, manual working class and economic insecurity, neither of which is significant.[14]

Support for both parties increases with the level of skills (see Figure 2), but the effect is larger for *Podemos* as low-skilled individuals seem even less inclined than their highly skilled counterparts to support this party. The suggestion that globalisation losers are more likely to opt for the populist version of the radical left is, therefore, not sustained by the data.[15]

The only significant differences with IU are that, at least in the 2014 European election, Eurosceptics and those who had not voted in the previous election were more strongly attracted to *Podemos* (Model 1, Table 1). Eurosceptics were 6% more likely than non-Eurosceptics to vote for *Podemos* but 3% less likely (although not significantly so) to vote for IU.[16] Former non-voters, on the other hand, were also more likely to support *Podemos* than IU (see Models 1–4, Table 1).[17] Leaving former abstainers and Eurosceptics aside, the evidence seems to reject the hypothesis that *Podemos* supporters resemble losers of globalisation (and populist voters) to a greater extent than do IU supporters.

Radicals, Moderates or Alienated?

Regarding the role of ideology, there were conflicting expectations. Following the literature on populism, *Podemos* supporters should be radical (Extremism Hypothesis), but in accordance with the party's discourse and its potential protest party status, *Podemos* could also be more successful than IU in attracting support from more moderate and less ideological individuals (Non-ideological Hypothesis). The latter hypothesis finds support

Table 1. *Podemos* supporters compared with IU supporters.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Post-electoral	All surveys	All surveys	All but post-electoral
Younger	−0.271	−0.029	−0.042	0.122
	(0.301)	(0.127)	(0.128)	(0.154)
Male	−0.006	0.276***	0.279***	0.352***
	(0.242)	(0.104)	(0.104)	(0.126)
Primary education	−0.799**	−0.380**	−0.414**	−0.311
	(0.39)	(0.162)	(0.163)	(0.201)
Higher education (HE)	−0.063	−0.110	−0.304*	−0.437**
	(0.297)	(0.128)	(0.156)	(0.185)
Economic insecurity	0.409	0.192*	0.055	−0.119
	(0.252)	(0.107)	(0.123)	(0.149)
HE × Economic insecurity			0.538**	0.638**
			(0.248)	(0.291)
Working class	−0.221	−0.057	−0.056	0.104
	(0.285)	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.146)
Non-voter	0.909**	0.525***	0.525***	0.450**
	(0.449)	(0.151)	(0.151)	(0.176)
Ideology	0.472***	0.327***	0.331***	0.376***
	(0.102)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.050)
Undefined ideology	2.039***	1.814***	1.838***	2.537***
	(0.59)	(0.265)	(0.265)	(0.391)
Eurosceptic	0.742**			
	(0.289)			
Pro centralism				0.415***
				(0.157)
National identity				−0.088
				(0.062)
Political situation				0.343***
				(0.109)
Economic situation				−0.162
				(0.108)
Government evaluation				0.301***
				(0.101)
Opposition evaluation				0.196**
				(0.082)
Constant	−1.293***	−0.880***	−0.833***	−3.632***
	(0.413)	(0.195)	(0.196)	(0.670)
Observations	1169	6815	6815	5094
Pseudo R^2	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.37

IU: *Izquierda Unida.* HE: Higher education.
Multinomial logistic regression models. Model 1 contains post-2014 European election survey data. Models 2 and 3 contain data from all five surveys. Model 4 contains data from all except the post-2014 European election survey. Fixed effects by period are omitted in Models 2–4. The reference category for education is secondary school, further or vocational education.
*$p < 0.1$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

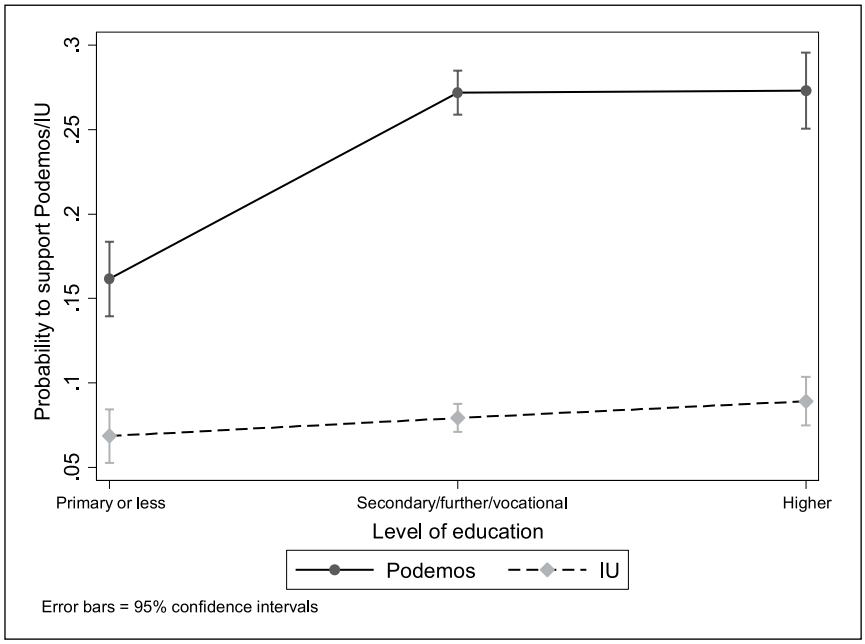

Figure 2. Support for IU and *Podemos* according to respondent's level of education (population-averaged conditional probabilities based on Model 3).

in the post-2014 European election survey data (Model 1, Table 1) and also when using all five surveys (Models 2 and 3, Table 1). As can be seen, people who do not declare an ideology are significantly more inclined to support *Podemos* than IU.[18] Regarding left–right ideology, the expectations are both partially supported by all the models too. *Podemos* supporters are strongly left-wingers (Extremism Hypothesis) but, interestingly, the party is significantly more successful than IU in attracting support from moderate sectors of the electorate (see the positive coefficient for ideology).[19]

In order to better understand the different ideological profile of both radical-left parties' supporters, Figure 3 shows the marginal probabilities of supporting IU and *Podemos* along the left–right scale. IU's support is clearly monotonous – the probability to support IU is very high (about 24%) for extreme-left people, decreases for more moderate respondents and is zero or almost zero for those on the right. In contrast, the probability to support *Podemo*s is very high for both extreme-left and left-wing individuals (positions 1, 2 and 3), and although it decreases with ideological moderation, the party is relatively successful among centrist individuals too – at least during its first year of activity. Indeed, one argument is that *Podemos* might be perceived by citizens as being more moderate than IU, but that does not seem to be consistent with the evidence. When asked about the ideological position of the different parties, respondents place both parties on the left (on average, IU scores 2.6 and *Podemos* scores 2.4).[20]

Overall, our findings so far do not provide support for the hypothesis that *Podemos*' success, when compared to IU, is based on the losers of globalisation or the most affected by economic insecurity due to the 2008 crisis. It seems, instead, that its support is at least partially based on protest voting dynamics as shown by its successful appeal (relative to IU's) to previous non-voters and to individuals who do not declare their ideology.

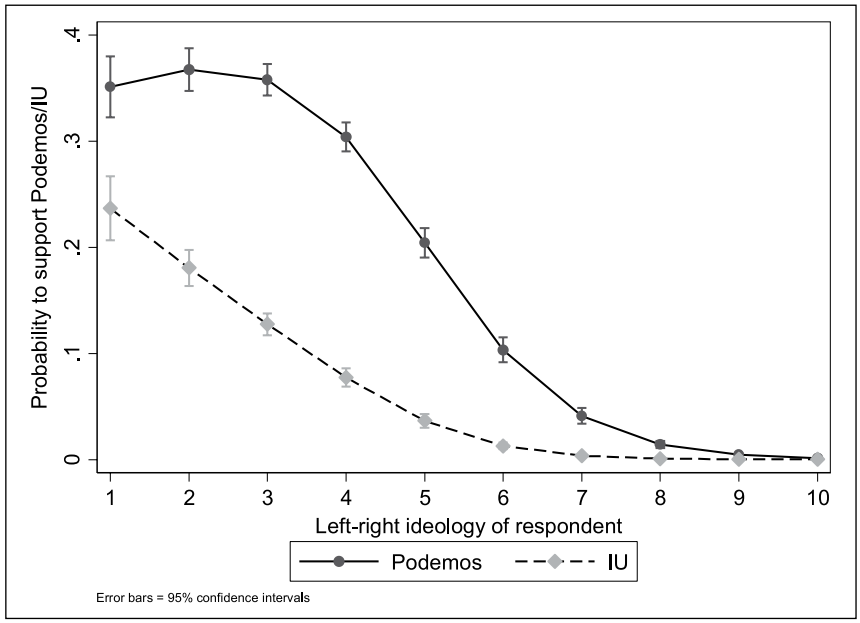

Figure 3. Support for IU and *Podemos* according to respondent's ideology (population-averaged conditional probabilities based on Model 3).

Unfulfilled Expectations?

The Unfulfilled Expectations Hypothesis stated that *Podemos* has been relatively more successful than IU in attracting support from highly educated individuals in a situation of economic insecurity (i.e. temporary jobs, unemployed or at risk of losing their jobs), whose expectations are likely unfulfilled due to the crisis. This hypothesis has been tested in Model 3 (Table 1) through an interaction between the economic insecurity variable and having a higher education degree. The interaction is statistically significant. In order to better understand the interaction effects, we have calculated the effect of economic insecurity on supporting *Podemos* and IU for two types of citizens: those with and without a university degree. As can be seen in Figure 4, economic insecurity increases support for both radical-left parties among citizens without a university degree (by 5% for *Podemos* and 1% for IU).[21] However, while highly educated individuals are about 7% more likely to support *Podemos* when they find themselves in a situation of economic insecurity, this is not the case for IU (there is a small, negative but non-significant effect). It must be noted, though, that when Euroscepticism is added as a control variable (which is only available for the post-European election study), the interaction between skills and economic insecurity is no longer significant.[22] Although results cannot be compared due to different data being used, a cautionary note is in order. It is possible that this particular group of highly skilled individuals in a situation of economic insecurity have also developed distinct levels of Euroscepticism, which might in turn have led many of them to support *Podemos*.

Finally, Model 4 (Table 1) tests two different sets of hypotheses regarding nationalism and political and economic dissatisfaction. The model employs all but the post-2014 EP elections survey, which did not contain the relevant variables. Regarding nationalism, we

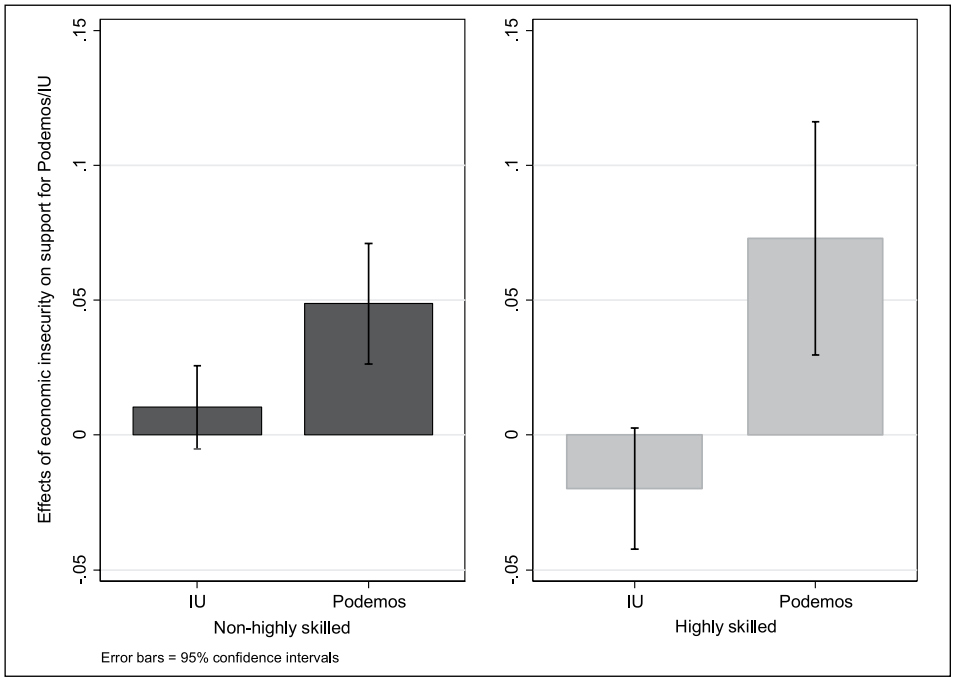

Figure 4. Effect of economic insecurity on support for *Podemos* and IU, by respondent's skills (changes in population-averaged probabilities based on Model 3).

had hypothesised that *Podemos* supporters should resemble the populist type of voter in their stronger national identity (National Identity Hypothesis), which in Spain is also associated with preferences for greater political centralism (Centralism Hypothesis). As can be seen, national identity does not make a difference in choosing *Podemos* over IU. Not only is the coefficient for national identity very small but also it is not statistically significant.[23] This is, however, not the case when we look at preferences for political centralisation, as those who favour greater centralisation are somewhat more inclined to support *Podemos* rather than IU. Translated into probabilities, people in favour of centralisation are 3% more likely to prefer *Podemos* to any other party, but 2% less likely to support IU over any other alternative.

Finally, Model 4 also presents further tests on whether *Podemos*' support can also be qualified as protest/anti-mainstream support. To do this, we have looked at the effect of evaluations of the current state of the economy, the current political situation, the government (PP) and the mainstream opposition (PSOE). The four variables are measured backwards, so positive coefficients indicate more negative evaluations. As can be appreciated, economic evaluations do not explain the differences between *Podemos* and IU supporters.[24] Things change, however, when we look at evaluations of the political situation. Interestingly enough, negative evaluations increase the likelihood to support *Podemos* rather than IU. Similarly, negative views of both the government and the opposition significantly increase the probability to choose *Podemos* over IU, indicating stronger dissatisfaction with mainstream politics.

Altogether, the findings provide further support for the hypothesis that dissatisfaction with the political situation and with mainstream parties is what explains the differences

between support for *Podemos* and that of the established radical left IU. Again, all this, together with ideological non-definition (and relative moderation), suggests that much of the success of *Podemos* vis-à-vis the other radical-left alternative can be characterised as a protest reaction by some citizens against mainstream politics. However, far from resembling the traditional populist voter from other European countries, *Podemos* is relatively more successful among educated citizens who do not match the profile of globalisation losers. At most, it is the unfulfilled expectations of highly skilled people experiencing economic insecurity that has contributed to the party's success vis-à-vis IU.[25]

Conclusion

The Great Recession has raised questions regarding the support of radicalism and populism, and most especially in countries that have been hit hardest by it. The case of *Podemos* is particularly interesting because it involves the emergence of a new radical-left populist party in a context where a radical-left competitor has been present for decades. Why do people consider supporting a new radical-left populist contender instead of the established radical left? This is the main question this article has addressed.

Given the populist rhetoric displayed by *Podemos*, its success vis-à-vis IU might have been explained by the former being able to attract a different type of supporter, more similar to that of other populist parties in Europe. However, this does not seem to be the case. Globalisation losers, who tend to be more prone to support populism in other Western democracies, are not more likely to support *Podemos* than they are to support the established radical left in Spain. In fact, the only resemblance we found with populist voters is that Eurosceptics are more strongly attracted to the populist radical left than the established radical left, and to some extent the same is true for people with more centralist attitudes (an indicator of nationalism). There are two possible explanations for these findings. Either *Podemos*' support is only to a very limited extent explained by their populism, or we cannot rely on exactly the same categories developed by previous studies on populism in Europe (which is, by and large, a radical-right movement) to explain the emergence of radical-left populism. In this way, this article contributes to broaden the findings from the German and Dutch cases shown by Pauwels (2014), which signalled a differentiation between the radical-left and radical-right populist electorates.

Our findings also show the way in which new populist parties build their success gaining support from specific groups of voters that other direct competitors are not able to reach. At most, what explains the emergence of *Podemos* as a separate radical-left contender is a mix of highly skilled supporters with unfulfilled expectations and, more importantly, anti-mainstream protest by individuals who, disappointed by the mix of economic and political crises, are targeting their anger at both the government and the mainstream opposition (which arguably would potentially include the established radical left as well). *Podemos*, then, can be described as a populist party resulting from the action of creative political entrepreneurs who 'address and positively resonate with values and sentiments held by a part of the population and make manifest and discursively articulated what, without their activity, would probably remain more latent and less clearly articulated' (Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016). The 2008 Great Recession has created a large contingent of dissatisfied voters that constituted a facilitator for *Podemos*' creation and success. But the radical-left populism of *Podemos* and its avoidance of a clear left-wing self-identification constituted a supply-side feature that, contrasting with the ideological traditionalism of IU, might have facilitated its appeal to some sections of the electorate too. The analysis of *Podemos*'

successful appeal to some specific groups of voters illustrates the electoral turmoil generated by the 2008 Great Recession and the way in which it has taken place through the realignment of some groups very negatively affected by the crisis.

Probably as a result of attracting an important proportion of dissatisfied voters, *Podemos* has not only managed to attract people without a defined ideology but also individuals who, being left-wing, are ideologically more moderate than IU supporters. This enriches the literature on contemporary radical-left voters (Gómez et al., 2016; Ramiro, 2016) showing the distinct social basis for the growth of radical-left populism: less ideologically radicalised groups, hit by the crisis and dissatisfied with mainstream politics.

This appeal, which is clearly an asset for *Podemos* and explains its rapid success, may also be its main burden in the future. In the past, the radical left in Spain had been successful in getting support from somewhat moderate voters who, now and then, switched between them and the social democrats (PSOE) to express their disappointment when the latter were in office. Those voters were aware they were temporarily supporting a party clearly to the left of their ideal ideological position, and that might also be happening, but to a greater extent, with *Podemos*. It is not clear whether, and how, the party will manage to stabilise that support in the medium- to long-term. More moderate supporters might eventually decide to support other more moderate parties or to switch back to PSOE. Others, however, might decide to stay with *Podemos* for longer, and the question, then, will be whether populism can serve as a useful tool for the radical left to forge wider electoral support in Western countries.

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We wish to thank Sebastián Lavezzolo, Sandra León, Laura Morales and the three anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on previous versions of this article.

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Notes

1 We do not provide a thorough explanation of the rise of the new party. This would require assessing the behaviour of the existing parties, institutional facilitators and social conditions (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Hauss and Rayside, 1978; Hino, 2012; Hug, 1996, 2001; Meguid, 2005).

2 Only Greece is comparable in terms of a rising radical left during these years.

3 In the January 2015 vote forecast by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, *Podemos* (23.9% of the votes) was right behind the incumbent PP (27.3%) and ahead of PSOE (22.2%) and a weakened *Izquierda Unida* (IU) (5.2%), which has lost more than 11 points since *Podemos* emerged.

4 Some had worked for Latin American left-wing governments (especially Venezuela).

5 The nationalist claims by radical-left populists are not of a cultural nature, as with the radical-right populists, but refer to regaining popular/national sovereignty from the hands of the corrupt elites (Pauwels, 2014).

6 One example is the advice given to party activists by one leader of *Podemos* to avoid the abortion issue (*Ctxt*, 2015).

7 Addressing *Podemos* demonstrators in Madrid (1 February 2015), Iglesias repeatedly appealed to Spanish historic national symbols and national sovereignty (Carvajal, 2015). While IU, as many other radical-left parties, also defends regaining national/popular sovereignty, its leaders have never used this type of nationalist tone.

8 See Pauwels (2014) for the German *Die Linke* and the Dutch *Socialistische Partij*.

9 Additionally, for the radical right and social populist parties, anti-immigrant attitudes and attitudes favourable to state intervention, respectively, have been mentioned as fostering their support (Pauwels, 2014: 66).

10 The Sociological Research Centre (*Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*).
11 In the European Parliament (EP) elections post-electoral survey, the question on vote intention in the next general election was not asked. We have replaced it with the respondents' declared vote in the May 2014 EP elections.
12 Individuals without an ideology take on value 0 on the left–right scale.
13 For a full description of *Podemos* voters, see Fernández-Albertos (2015).
14 We have also tested for the effect of unemployment alone and results do not change.
15 Moreover, *Podemos* supporters are also significantly better educated than PSOE supporters (second column in Tables 1a–3a in the online Appendix).
16 The probabilities reported are population-averaged conditional effects. We follow Mood (2010), who suggests that population-averaged conditional probabilities have the advantage of not being affected by unobserved heterogeneity.
17 Regardless of the model we look at, non-voters are about 9% more likely to support *Podemos*; effects are not statistically significant for IU.
18 Note that the size and significance of this effect may be affected by the value that voters without a defined ideology are assigned on the left–right scale (see Note 12). As a consequence, two additional robustness checks were performed. First, we replicated the model excluding ideology. Second, we used multiple imputation to assign a value on the left–right scale to individuals without an ideology. Conclusions remain substantially the same.
19 They also place themselves to the left of PSOE (see the negative coefficient for ideology in the second column of Tables 2a–3a in the online Appendix), although differences with PSOE are not significant if we only look at the post-European election survey (Table 1a in the online Appendix).
20 The same applies to those who place themselves on the left/centre area of the ideological scale, between positions 1 and 5 (IU = 2.8; *Podemos* = 2.5), and to *Podemos* supporters (IU = 3.2; *Podemos* = 2.8).
21 The effect is significant at $p < 0.01$ for *Podemos* and non-significant for IU.
22 The interaction is, however, significant using post-European election data when Euroscepticism is not controlled for.
23 The coefficient is not significant either when preferences for political centralisation are excluded from the model. This indicates that the lack of significance is not due to the correlation between both variables.
24 They do not explain the differences between *Podemos* and any other party (Table 4a in the online Appendix), probably because most people give very bad evaluations as a result of the Great Recession.
25 But again, we cannot be certain that this effect is not really driven by distinct attitudes towards the European Union.

Supplementary Information

Additional supplementary information may be found with the online version of this article.

Table 1a. Full results from Model 1 (multinomial logit). The base category changes across columns in order to facilitate the comparison between *Podemos* and each of the other parties or blocs of parties.
Table 2a. Full results from Model 2 (multinomial logit). The base category changes across columns in order to facilitate the comparison between *Podemos* and each of the other parties or blocs of parties.
Table 3a. Full results from Model 3 (multinomial logit). The base category changes across columns in order to facilitate the comparison between *Podemos* and each of the other parties or blocs of parties.
Table 4a. Full results from Model 4 (multinomial logit). The base category changes across columns in order to facilitate the comparison between *Podemos* and each of the other parties or blocs of parties.

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