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The Breakdown of the Spanish Two-party System: The Upsurge of Podemos and Ciudadanos in the 2015 General Election
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Abstract

The 2015 General Election (GE) marked the end of the two-party system that had existed in Spain since the restoration of democracy. Two new parties, ‘Podemos’ and ‘Citadáinos’ entered the national arena for the first time and together obtained 34.6 percent of the vote. This paper describes this election’s context and electoral results by analysing the individual determinants behind the change to the Spanish party system. Our results indicate that economic factors predominantly explain the votes for the traditional parties, the PP and PSOE. On the other hand, political factors help distinguish why some voters remained ‘loyal’ to the traditional parties and others switched to the new formations. While Podemos’ switchers were mainly politically disaffected left-wing voters, electoral support for Ciudadanos came from younger and ideologically moderate voters who had lower levels of political trust.

Keywords: Spain, General Election, Voting Behaviour, Podemos, Ciudadanos, Electoral Change

The 2015 general election put an end to the two-party system that had governed Spain for the past three decades. Two new parties came into play that challenged the dominant position of the traditional mainstream PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español - PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) and the People’s Party (Partido Popular –PP). On the one hand, Podemos (We Can), a left-wing party created a few months before the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections eroded the PSOE’s electoral support and that of other smaller left-wing parties. On the other, Ciudadanos (Citizens), a centre or centre-right party, focused on the defence of territorial centralisation and on the need for profound political regeneration, which mainly attracted voters from the incumbent PP.

The first clear sign that the traditional Spanish two-party system was under threat appeared at the 2014 EP elections (Cordero & Montero 2015). Podemos was able to obtain 1.3 million votes (8 per cent of the vote share) and five seats. After this unexpected success, Podemos’ support rapidly grew and throughout the second half of 2014 the party even led the opinion polls. Since the EP elections, almost all election surveys published in the newspapers predicted the end of Spanish two-party system. However, the first real picture of the new party system appeared at the regional elections in May 2015. In those elections,
both Podemos and Ciudadanos gained seats in most regional chambers and became key components of government formation in several regions.

The transition from three decades of two-party system to a multi-party one finally took place in the 2015 general election. While historically, the two main parties were able to obtain more than 80 per cent of the seats, in 2015 they only managed 51 per cent. For the first time since the re-establishment of democracy in 1977 the party that received the most votes was not able to form a government. This election also represented the end of four years of conservative absolute majority. Until 2014, the PP had also controlled the key municipalities and almost every region. However, from 2011 to 2015, the incumbent PP lost a large portion of its regional and local power and its vote share in the general election fell by 16 percentage points. Although this was the largest drop in support for an incumbent party since 1982, the main party in opposition, the PSOE, was not able to benefit from it. On the contrary, the PSOE suffered a loss of about 1.5 million votes (and almost seven percentage points). The beneficiaries of the two-party system collapse were not the existing statewide minor parties such as IU (Izquierda Unida - United Left) and UPyD (Unión, Progreso y Democracia - Union, Progress and Democracy), which in fact also suffered significant losses, but the newcomers Podemos and Ciudadanos.

This article is structured as follows: first it recounts the main events that took place during the 2011-2015 legislature and that potentially had an impact on the general election. Then it describes the electoral campaign, the evolution of the election polls and the final results of the general election that took place on 20 December 2015. The two final sections focus on analysing the determinants of the vote and paying particular attention to the rise of Podemos and Ciudadanos, and the main reasons explaining the vote transfers from the PP to Ciudadanos and from the PSOE to Podemos.

**The Spanish Two-Party System**

From 1982 to 2015, the Spanish party system was dominated by two-way competition between the PSOE and PP. The PSOE obtained clear parliamentary majorities during the 1980s and controlled the executive for 21 of the first 37 years of democracy. The conservative PP only started to really challenge the PSOE in the 1990s, when the new leader José María Aznar changed the ideological profile of the party by moving it towards the centre (Orriols & Lavezzolo 2008).
The Spanish two-party system had two different types of minor political groups: the statewide and the non-statewide parties. Among the former, the most important has traditionally been the ex-communist IU, a coalition of left-wing parties that incorporates the communist, feminist and green parties. However, from 2008 to 2015 the UPyD also gained sufficient support to enter parliament. The UPyD is a party founded by the high-ranking ex-socialist official Rosa Díez that stands for pro-Spanish unity and refuses to clearly locate itself within the traditional left-right divide. The electoral system strongly punished these two parties in favour of the PP and PSOE. In the 2011 election, IU and UPyD only respectively achieved 44 per cent and 29 per cent of the seats that they would have obtained with perfect proportionality.

The second group of minor parties were non-statewide, especially the Catalan and Basque nationalists. As with the previous group, these parties also had a small share of the parliamentary seats but they had a key strategic position in forming parliamentarian majorities. During the two-party system period, the peripheral nationalist parties supported the formation of the PSOE’s (1993 and 2004) and PP’s (1996) governments.

The electoral strength of the PSOE and PP progressively increased during the 1989-2008 period, moving from 65 to 83 per cent of the total vote share. However, this trend suddenly reversed after 2008, with the arrival of the Great Recession. In fact, although the 2015 general election represented a fundamental break with the traditional two-party system, in the previous election held in 2011, there were already some signs that Spanish politics was entering a new era. In this election, the total vote of the two dominant parties declined for the first time in more than two decades and the PSOE scored its worst electoral results since the restoration of democracy (Torcal 2014). Moreover, political trust and the prime minister’s approval rates (then the socialist José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero) reached their lowest levels since 1979 (Orriols & Rico 2014).

The beneficiaries of the collapse of the two-party system from 2015 were not the existing minor parties (which also suffered substantial losses) but two new statewide parties: Podemos and Ciudadanos. The emergence of these two political formations radically changed the Spanish party system, which moved from a two-party system to a multi-party system. Podemos and Ciudadanos shared a democratic regeneration agenda, but they had a radically different ideological profile (see Figure 1). While Podemos was perceived as a markedly left-wing party, Ciudadanos had a centre or centre-right profile. The latter, although young, was already a central political actor in Catalonia. In the 2012 regional elections, this
party obtained 8 per cent of the vote. Ciudadanos’ discourse was mainly characterised by its strong position against Catalan nationalism (Rodríguez-Teruel & Barrio 2015).

![Ideological Distribution of the Electorate of the Main Parties in Spain, 2015](image)

**Figure 1** Ideological Distribution of the Electorate of the Main Parties in Spain, 2015.
*Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.*

**A Critical General Election in an Environment of Economic and Political Crises**

As previously discussed, the first signs of change in the Spanish party system took place at the end of the second socialist legislature (2008-2011), as a consequence of the Eurocrisis. In the following pages, we describe the three main trends that marked the 2008-2011 and especially the 2011-2015 legislature: (i) the economic and debt crisis, (ii) the corruption scandals, and (iii) the political crisis, especially marked by growing disaffection with political parties and politicians.

*The Economy and the Debt Crisis*

The bursting of the housing bubble and the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 culminated in a long and deep economic recession in Spain, as in many other European countries.
However, the scope of the Eurocrisis and its social and economic effects were not equally distributed across Europe (Fernández-Villaverde, Garicano & Santos 2013). As shown in Figure 2a, the GDP growth rate in Spain went down from 1.1 per cent in 2008 to -2.6 per cent in 2012, while the unemployment rate increased from 11.3 per cent to 24.8 per cent in the same period (from 37.7 per cent to a dramatic 52.9 per cent among those under the age of 25). However, the origin of the Spanish crisis was not the result of excessive government spending or fiscal irresponsibility as in some other peripheral European countries, but mainly due to the burst of the housing bubble. While the central government public debt was below the average of the EU, the private sector debt reached more than 20 per cent of GDP in 2010 (Fernández-Villaverde, Garicano & Santos 2013; García 2010). Excessive dependence on the construction industry exacerbated unemployment growth among less qualified workers following the housing crisis, especially among the youngest cohorts.

As in other peripheral European countries, a series of dramatic austerity measures were implemented under the imposition—or ‘recommendation’—of the so-called ‘Troika’ as preconditions for emergency loans and other forms of assistance. As in other countries (Fominaya & Cox 2013) this situation fuelled widespread public protests, among them, the ‘15-M’ movement, which took its name from the date of the first big demonstration of the ‘Democracia Real Ya!’ Movement (Real Democracy Now!). This took place in Spain on 15 May 2011 (a week before the local and regional elections), after which a first group of protesters started camping in the ‘Puerta del Sol’ square in Madrid. This first demonstration was the origin of a series of new protests throughout the spring of 2011 against austerity, corruption and the bailout of the banks, and in favour of ‘real democracy’, seeking more participatory democracy and a new electoral system, among other demands. New protests emerged after the announcement of the constitutional reform that introduced a cap on the deficit in August. The number of strikes per year in Spain increased from less than 800 in 2007 to more than 1,000 between 2009 and 2010; also the number of demonstrations increased from 10,000 to 25,000 during the same period, most of them related to labour, welfare and economic issues (Medina 2015, pp. 16-17).
In this atmosphere of public protest and social discontent, the socialist prime minister, Rodríguez Zapatero, called for general elections on November 2011, four months before the end of the legislative term. With promises of restoring the international credibility of the Spanish economy and generating employment without reducing social expenditure on pensions, education or health, the PP won the election, obtaining 44.6 per cent of the vote. With this result the conservative leader Mariano Rajoy managed to obtain an absolute
majority. However only a few weeks after the election, with the risk premium on Spanish debt reaching 350 points, the government was forced to implement a new package of austerity measures, including massive redundancies and salary cuts for public sector employees, tax increases, and cuts in pensions, education, and health.

During its first year in government, the PP was also involved in two financial bailouts, one related to the Spanish banking system and the other to several regional governments that had budget difficulties. Firstly, a few weeks after the collapse of Madrid’s regional government-owned bank, Bankia in May 2012, the government was rescued by the Eurozone bailout fund. Eurozone finance ministers agreed to lend Spain up to 100 billion euros in order to bailout the banking system. According to the Spanish government, Europe did not demand further austerity measures and structural reforms in exchange for the borrowed funds. The finance minister Luis de Guindos argued then that ‘there will not be any type of macroeconomic or fiscal conditions’ attached to the bailout. However, the Eurozone finance ministers made it clear that they would continue to maintain strict supervision of the Spanish fiscal consolidation plans and the implementation of structural reforms (Pérez & Doncel 2012).

Secondly, several regional governments also had to be rescued due to their financial problems in 2012. Central government offered a line of credit (known as FLA - Fund for Regional Liquidity) for those regions with limited access to financial markets. Ten out of the 17 regions finally accepted being part of the bailout plan, which in 2012 reached the amount of 16.6 million euros (Ministerio de Hacienda 2014).

The Spanish economy entered into a second recession period during the transition from the socialists to the conservative government of Mariano Rajoy, which ended in the second half of 2013, when GDP started to show a positive trend. Therefore, throughout the final years of the Rajoy government, the economy was in fact improving. However, this economic growth only helped to recover a negligible percentage of the losses accumulated during the worst years of the Eurocrisis. At the end of Rajoy’s mandate, the majority of the population still perceived that the economy was performing poorly. According to the surveys of the government research centre CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas – Centre for Sociological Research), just a few weeks before the election almost two-thirds of the population considered that the economic situation was bad or very bad.

Probably the most significant consequence of the economic deceleration was the huge increase in unemployment, as mentioned above. Although this figure has improved since 2013 (see Figure 2b and 2c), the absolute number of unemployed is in 2015 almost the
same as in 2011. Furthermore, in the first half of 2015 more than 90 per cent of the new contracts were temporary, with 25 per cent being one-week or shorter contracts (Mundera 2015).

The corruption Scandals

The new conservative government headed by Mariano Rajoy did not only have to face the severity of the economic and debt crisis, but it also had to deal with the appearance of several corruption scandals that affected the party. The three with the greatest impact on the mass media were: the Gürtel case, the Bárcenas papers and the ‘black credit cards’ of the savings bank Caja Madrid / Bankia.

The most salient scandal during these years was the Gürtel affair, consisting of a corrupt organisation headed by the businessman Francisco Correa (the police took his surname ‘Correa’, ‘belt’ in English and ‘gürtel’ in German, as the codename of the operation) who allegedly bribed several PP politicians with money or gifts in exchange for public contracts. The case began in 2009, before Rajoy’s victory, and since then has caused the resignation of several local and regional politicians, mostly in the regions of Valencia and Madrid. One of the most prominent politicians affected by this affair was the head of the regional government of Valencia, Francisco Camps, who was prosecuted for receiving expensive suits from the Gürtel organisation. He resigned in July 2011, less than two months after being re-elected but he was finally absolved of guilt in January 2012.

The PP’s illegal double accounting system, commonly known as the Bárcenas’ papers, emerged during the investigation of the Gürtel affair. The former PP treasurer Luis Bárcenas was accused of setting up an illegal party-financing scheme in order to receive secret party donations and to distribute illegal bonus payments to several leading PP politicians. This bogus accounting of the party allegedly took place between 1990 and 2009. The judge sent Bárcenas to prison pending trial in June 2013.

According to the CIS survey series, between January and February 2013 public concern about corruption more than doubled (see Figure 2e). The percentage of citizens that considered ‘corruption and fraud’ to be one of the most significant problems moved from 18 to 40 per cent in just one month. This increase took place just after the newspaper El País published Bárcenas’ accounting papers (31 January 2013) in which the names of several senior PP leaders appeared, including some former ministers, the party General Secretary, María Dolores de Cospedal, and even the prime minister Mariano Rajoy. Bárcenas’ papers included payments to Rajoy for a total amount of 25,000 euros in the 1997-2008 period.
Rajoy strongly denied this accusation in a televised speech delivered to the PP Executive Committee. Rajoy declared: ‘I have never, and I repeat, never received nor distributed black money in this party or elsewhere […] I did not engage in politics to make money. I did it losing money’ (Manetto & Cué 2013).

Public preoccupation with corruption peaked in November 2014, when 64 per cent of respondents in CIS surveys considered ‘corruption and fraud’ to be one of the biggest problems in Spain. During October, the anti-corruption prosecutor's office opened an investigation into several executives of Madrid’s regional government-owned bank of Madrid (Caja Madrid savings bank, subsequently reincarnated as Bankia with the fusion of six other regional saving banks), for illegally spending 15.5 million euros between 2003 and 2012 (Agueda 2014). During this period, 86 members of the Board of Directors of the savings bank -most of them nominated by political parties, trade unions and employers’ associations (Huffington Post 2014)- were issued with 'black' credit cards for personal purchases and cash withdrawals as ‘representation expenses’. The former Spanish Finance Minister and former Head of the IMF, Rodrigo Rato, was accused of spending 54,800 euros during his two years as the Caja Madrid / Bankia president (Minder 2014).

There were other prominent PP corruption scandals such as the Palma Arena and the Nóos Institute affairs. The former was related to cost overruns of a velodrome in Palma de Mallorca (Majorca). As a consequence of this investigation, the former president of the regional government of the Balearic Islands, the conservative Jaume Matas, was sentenced in 2012 to six years (finally reduced to nine months) in prison for embezzlement, prevarication, falsifying documents, public administration fraud and influence peddling (Manresa 2012). The Nóos institute affair, which appeared as an offshoot of the Palma Arena scandal, not only investigated some regional PP politicians, including regional president Jaume Matas, but also some members of the royal family. The not-for-profit Nóos Institute, presided over by Princess Cristina’s husband, Iñaki Urdangarín, supposedly overcharged regional governments in Valencia and the Balearic Islands for the organisation of sporting events.

The corruption scandals that affected the PP dominated media attention, but other parties and institutions also faced major scandals. The main opposition party, the PSOE, was mainly affected by the ERE scandal, a corruption case involving the misappropriation of public funds in Andalusia. The regional president Antonio Griñán resigned in 2013 due to this scandal.
The political crisis

In the 2011 general election, the PP obtained its best results ever and gained ten seats more than that needed for an absolute majority, the second largest margin since the restoration of democracy. Despite this, the new prime minister, Rajoy, did not experience a long and comfortable honeymoon period after being elected. According to CIS surveys, Rajoy’s peak of popularity just after the election was modest. The electorate gave him a score of 4.8 on a 0-10 scale and almost 60 per cent had no confidence in the new prime minister. Moreover, during his first year in office, he had already become the most unpopular Spanish prime minister ever and, according to CIS voting intention polls, the PP lost half of its electorate.

Although voting intention for the PP sharply dropped from 31 to 16 per cent in just one year (according to CIS surveys), the PSOE was unable to attract these voters. In fact, voting intention for both the incumbent and the main opposition party moved relatively in parallel during the legislature. Although the two existing minor parties IU and UPyD experienced an increase in electoral support, this was relatively modest when the fact that both PP and PSOE were sharply declining is taken into account. Thus, although the mainstream parties performed poorly in polls throughout the early years of the legislature, none of the remaining minor parties were able to challenge the two-party system. In fact, until the EP elections in May 2014, the greatest beneficiaries of the PP’s decline were the BAI options (blank vote, abstention and indecision). More than half of those who recalled voting for the incumbent PP in 2011 declared that not only would they not vote for this party again but that they also had no alternative party preference (CIS barometer of January 2013).

According to Torcal and Montero (2006; 2016), political disaffection is a concept with two dimensions: institutional disaffection and political disengagement. The former is related to voters’ lack of confidence in political actors and institutions and the latter to voters’ lack of interest in politics. Although both dimensions are correlated, in the context of the Eurocrisis the lack of confidence grew in parallel with interest in politics, giving rise to ‘critical citizens’ (Norris 2011; Cordero & Simón 2015; Torcal & Montero 2016). In fact, interest in politics increased during the economic crisis (see Figure 2f), moving from 31 per cent in 2008 to 39 per cent in 2015 (CIS, various barometers), while trust in political parties decreased from 3.8 to 2.2 (on a scale that ranges from 0 to 10) in the same period. The concept of ‘old politics’ was popularised in Spanish political discourse and lack of confidence increased among the population, especially among those who had been more critical of the
political elites: young, urban and/or politically sophisticated citizens from the wealthiest regions (Torcal & Montero 2016).

This crisis of confidence also affected the remaining political institutions, such as the Parliament, as well as all political parties and political elites. Political disaffection had already started to grow during the last years of Rodríguez Zapatero's government. However it peaked in 2013, when 45 per cent of the electorate did not trust political parties at all (value 0 on a scale from 0 to 10) and one-third of the electorate considered political parties and politicians to be two of the main problems facing the country (CIS, Studies 2981 and 2984).

This context of political disaffection had an influence on the EP elections in May 2014, when the two mainstream parties obtained their worst results in recent history (the PP obtained 26 per cent of the vote; and the PSOE 23 per cent). Podemos came through as a new and ‘unexpected winner’ in this contest (Cordero & Montero 2015; Cordero & Christmann 2016). Podemos became the fourth Spanish political force and it was noteable that a party created only a few months before the EP elections was able to obtain 1.2 million votes (8 per cent of the vote).

Finally, the political crisis in Spain was also marked by an upsurge in support for Catalanian independence. According to data from the Catalan public survey research centre CEO (Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió –Centre for Opinion Studies), the percentage of Catalans whose territorial preference was for independence almost doubled during the 2010-2013 period, moving from about 20 per cent to 49 per cent in November 2013, when support for secession peaked. The independence issue radically changed the Catalan party system (Orriols & Rodón 2016). In the 2012 and 2015 regional elections, support for the two traditionally big parties, PSC (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya- Catalan Socialist Party, PSOE’s Catalan branch) and CiU (Convergència i Unió –Convergence and Union), substantially decreased in favour of the more extreme parties on the nationalist dimension. One of the parties that benefitted from this process of polarisation was precisely Ciudadanos, which had a clear anti-Catalan nationalist profile.

The Catalan issue also structured Spanish competition in the 2015 general election. On the one hand, the PSOE and especially the PP and Ciudadanos were markedly against a Catalan referendum for independence. On the other, IU and Podemos were also against independence but were open to reaching an agreement with Catalan nationalist parties to hold a referendum in Catalonia. Although the Catalan bid was a relevant component of the
Spanish political crisis, only about six per cent of the Spanish electorate, excluding Catalonia, perceived that the territorial conflict was the most debated issue by candidates and parties during the electoral campaign, (according to the post-election CIS survey).

A Four-way Battle: the 2015 Electoral Campaign

The campaign ‘de facto’ began after the Catalan regional election in late September. Ciudadanos obtained an outstanding result with 17.9 per cent of the vote and 25 seats, and they became the main opposition party in the Catalan Parliament. Conversely, the other emerging party, Podemos, which was included in the coalition CSQEP (Catalunya Sí Que Es Pot, Catalonia Yes We Can), fell well below expectations. Despite some pre-summer polls that predicted that Podemos was in a position to win the Catalan regional election, the party ended up in modest fourth place with only 8.9 per cent of the vote and 11 seats. The electoral results of the Catalan election substantially emphasised the alteration of statewide political dynamics. Just after Ciudadanos’ success in this regional election, the party started to recover in the national polls and during October and November, it not only surpassed Podemos but also started a neck-and-neck fight for second place with the PSOE (see Figure 3).

Four days after the Catalan election, prime minister Rajoy announced in a televised interview that the general election would be held on 20 December 2015, the last possible day. Rajoy’s argument for choosing such an unusual election date (Spain had never had a general nor regional election day in late December before, except for the 1989 regional election in Galicia) was that otherwise ‘we would have to constitute the new parliament almost in the middle of the Christmas holidays’ (Casqueiro 2015). This date also allowed Parliament enough time to pass the budget bill for 2016. This bill was indeed approved just a few days before the dissolution of Parliament and included a number measures with potential ‘pocketbook voting’ effects due to the increase in public pensions and public sector wages. The PP Spokesman Rafael Hernando mused that: ‘it is the budget bill of the economic recovery, the “icing on the cake” for a difficult legislature’ (Garea 2015).
Figure 3 Electoral Predictions for the Main Parties throughout 2015 and Results of the 2015 General Election.

*Source:* Kiko Llaneras (El Español) using Electrograph, Electomania, TNS and GAD3.

*Note:* polls are represented in dots. The x axis shows the date (from January 2015 to the general elections of 20th December 2015). The lines show the weighted moving average with exponential decay (three days parameter). The Figure 3 does not show any data for the final week of campaigning because Spanish law bans the publication of electoral polls during this period. The election-day surveys can be published once all polling stations are closed.

The electoral campaign officially started on 5 December 2015 and was followed with intense interest. People who described themselves as being ‘very’ or ‘fairly interested’ in politics, according to the CIS surveys, reached 38.5 per cent, the highest value in the CIS series and about six points higher than the two previous general elections. Uncertainty around the electoral results (high levels of volatility were expected in the context of a political and economic crisis) helped to enhance the relevance of this election campaign. In addition, two of the most important contending parties stood in a general election for the first time (Podemos and Ciudadanos)³. Moreover, Pablo Iglesias (Podemos), Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) and Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) were first-time candidates for prime minister. All this (high volatility and uncertainty together with new actors and parties) suggests that the campaign could have played a decisive role in electoral behaviour in the 2015 general election. In fact, 45.4 per cent of the electorate decided their vote during the electoral campaign, with
35 per cent choosing the week before the contest (CIUPANEL 2016). Furthermore, the analysis of our panel data shows that 12 per cent of those who decided and expressed their vote before the electoral campaign changed their minds before the election, by voting for a different party.

Throughout the campaign all the polls indicated that the PP was the front-runner, although it was not clear whether it would be able to form a government. The incumbent party pursued a low-profile strategy, reducing public exposure of the candidate Mariano Rajoy. The party strategy was summed up in the slogan ‘España en serio’ (Spain taken seriously), which aimed at getting across the message that the PP was the only serious and reliable party to rule Spain in difficult times.

Furthermore, the second and third positions were highly contested in the polls. The battle for second position was initially between the PSOE and Ciudadanos, which became a strong rival after its outstanding performance in the Catalan regional election. However, Ciudadanos fell in the polls during the two weeks before the election and the election-day polls placed it in fourth position, far below Podemos and the PSOE. The actual results of Ciudadanos were even worse than the polls had predicted (see Figure 3). Ciudadanos’ Executive Committee later recognised that they had made key strategic mistakes during the campaign. According to the party’s internal assessment, Ciudadanos followed a failed strategy that presented the party as if it were the incumbent rather than a challenger. It also recognised that the party had a weak territorial structure, a fact that generated irregular performance across the different regions (Mateo 2016).

Lastly, just before the electoral campaign Podemos was in bad shape. The party performed poorly in the September Catalan regional election and its vote share in the polls had been falling since January 2015. The party finally decided to form part of different electoral coalitions in Catalonia, Galicia, and Valencia, where there were successful left-wing regional parties and movements (so-called ‘confluences’). These electoral coalitions gave Podemos the opportunity to reverse the trend and start recovering its vote share in the polls. This recovery was initially the product of a simple mathematical effect of adding the vote share of Podemos to the remaining regional parties that were part of these new coalitions. However, this helped the party to design one of the main mottos of its campaign: ‘the comeback’ (‘remontada’, in Spanish). Indeed, the party took advantage of the feeling that it was becoming a stronger force and a few days before the election, the party was in third position, very close to the PSOE. In fact, as we show in Figure 3, the two polls published on the election day forecast that Podemos would finally reach second place in the vote share.
Four candidate debates took place during the campaign. Existing evidence shows that the previous debates in Spain had a significant impact on vote choice. According to Fernández-Albertos and Martínez-i-Coma’s estimations (2014), the 2011 debates helped Mariano Rajoy to increase his approval rating by 0.5 points (on a 0 to 10 point scale) and among those who watched the debates the probability of voting for the PP went from five to ten percentage points. This effect is analogous to that found for the 2008 general election debates (Fernández-Albertos & Martínez-i-Coma 2010).

The two most relevant debates were broadcast by the major TV channels (the other two debates took place in the previous weeks, but were broadcast mainly via the Internet, radio and several small TV stations)\(^5\). Both debates obtained almost 50 per cent of audience share, which represented more than nine million viewers. Although they were the two most watched TV programmes of the year, the debates did not reach the same audience levels as the candidate debates in previous elections. For instance, in 2011 and 2008, about 12-13 million people watched the electoral debates on television (between 54 and 59 per cent of the audience share).

In the first of the two major debates (on 7 December 2015), Rajoy declined the invitation to appear and decided instead to send the deputy prime minister and government spokesperson Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, because he said that ‘[the prime minister had] received more than thirty invitations to participate in debates’ (El Mundo 2015). Rajoy only accepted to take part in one debate: the classic face-to-face with the main leader of the opposition, the socialist Pedro Sánchez on 14 December. After this debate, the press highlighted the aggressive strategy of Sánchez in attacking Rajoy, a strategy that managed to partially regain the interest of the population in the race between the two traditional mainstream parties.

**Election Results: The End of the Two-Party System**

With a relatively modest turnout of 69.7 per cent, about 3.6 points below the average, the PP and PSOE remained in first and second positions respectively, but they jointly fell to 50.7 per cent of the total vote share. The mutation of the Spanish party system that had begun in the 2014 EP elections finally materialised at national level. As shown in Table 1, the PP lost one out of three voters when compared to the previous general election. The PSOE, which in 2011 had already obtained the worst result in its history, continued to fall from 28.8 to 22 per cent of the vote share. With such poor results from the two mainstream parties, the party
system became significantly more fragmented – with the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) rising from 3.3 in 2011 to 5.0 in 2015. For the first time since the restoration of democracy, a third political force attained 20.7 per cent of the vote and a party that only a few months before had been restricted to the Catalan arena -Ciudadanos- managed 13.9 per cent. Both results seemed to put an end to the two-party system that had characterised Spain since the seventies.

### Table 1 Electoral Results of the 2011 and 2015 General Election (GE) and of the 2014 European Election (EP) (in column percentages)

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<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciudadanos</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU/UPC</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPyD</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regional parties</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CiU/DiL</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNV</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>5.4*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERC/EPDD</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EH-Bildu/Amaiur</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNG/NOS</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>2.1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other parties</strong></td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total turnout</strong></td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blank/invalid votes</strong></td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on data from the Spanish Ministry of Interior (http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es).

*Results obtained by a Coalition. CEU (Coalición por Europa-Coalition for Europe; Convergència i Unió-Convergence and Union; Partido Nacionalista Vasco-Basque Nationalist Party; Coalición Canaria-Canarian Coalition). LPD (Los Pueblos Deciden-The People Decide; Basque Country United, EH-Bildu — Euskal Herria Bildu; BNG — Bloque Nacionalista Galego).

However, the PP and PSOE were not the only parties that suffered significant losses. The left-wing IU, lost nearly half of its votes and UPyD (formed in 2007) failed to obtain parliamentary representation. This is also true for almost every Basque, Canary, Catalan and Galician non-statewide party from both the centre-right and the left, which suffered significant losses in votes. Among them, the most resounding defeat was for that of DiL (Democràcia i Llibertat - Democracy and Freedom), which lost almost half of its voters and seats. The only exception was ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya - Republican Left of
Catalonia), which more than doubled its vote share and tripled its number of seats compared to the previous election.

The success or failure of the four main parties was not uniform across the territory. The PSOE became the first party in Andalusia and Extremadura, the two regions with the highest unemployment rates. Podemos and its regional branches came first in the Basque Country (in votes but not in seats) and Catalonia, the two regions in which the PSOE and PP obtained their worst results. Ciudadanos was not able to come first or second in any region, although it obtained better results in Madrid, the most populous district. Meanwhile, the PP remained the strongest party in terms of number of votes in the remaining thirteen regions.

This heterogeneous distribution of votes is also significant in terms of its translation into seats. The Spanish electoral system, albeit proportional in theory, generates large misrepresentations. The 350 members of the parliament are distributed among 52 districts, almost half of which are of a small magnitude (five or less seats). This characteristic punishes third and (especially) fourth placed parties, as effective thresholds tend to be high in these small districts. As in previous elections (Gunther 1989; Bosch 2014), the electoral system benefited the PP and PSOE, who were over-represented by 6.4 and 3.7 percentage points respectively compared to perfect proportionality. By contrast, the Spanish electoral system punished Ciudadanos (under-represented by 2.5 percentage points), IU (3.1) and to a lesser extent, Podemos (0.95).

Table 2 shows vote transfers between the 2011 and 2015 general elections using the post-electoral wave of the CIUPANEL panel database (vote transfers between the 2014 EP elections and the 2015 general elections are shown in Table 3 of the online appendix)\textsuperscript{8}. The smaller parties suffered the most significant losses. Regional nationalist parties both on the left and the centre-right were able to maintain only half of their electorate. The former transferred votes mainly to Podemos while the latter lost its support to left-wing nationalist parties. The fast spread of Podemos has drastically undermined the electoral base of IU, which lost three out of four former voters. Some 44 per cent of its former voters switched to Podemos, and 11.2 to PSOE. In addition, the smaller parties were unable to mobilise a large segment of their supporters, who abstained in this general election. Interestingly, it seems that a significant proportion (57.9 per cent) of those who did not vote for any party in 2011 were unable to find a convincing option among the new political offerings and decided to abstain again. Among those who abstained in 2011, a considerable 16.6 per cent found Podemos an attractive option to vote for.
However, in absolute terms the most important vote transfers came from the PP and PSOE. As shown in Table 2, among these parties, 67.5 per cent of the PP’s former voters and 59 per cent of PSOE’s remained loyal. Nevertheless, a non-negligible 13.9 per cent of PP voters in the 2011 election switched to Ciudadanos in 2015 (almost half of its voters came from the PP, as shown in Table 2 of the online appendix), while 18.5 per cent of PSOE former voters ended up switching to Podemos. Transfers from PSOE to Ciudadanos were much more modest (6.5 per cent).

### Table 2 Votes in the 2015 General Election (GE) by Previous Votes in the 2011 GE (in vertical percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vote GE 2015</th>
<th>Non-voting</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>PSOE</th>
<th>IU</th>
<th>UPyD</th>
<th>EQUO</th>
<th>Compromís</th>
<th>Nationalist Left</th>
<th>Nationalist Centre-Right</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-voting</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>334</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podemos</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciudadanos</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist Left</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist C-Right</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1,284</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Bold percentages represent ‘loyal’ voters. Weighted by 2015 General Election results.
Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.

### Explaining Vote Choice

As we described above, the political agenda during the 2011-2015 legislature was particularly marked by the economic crisis, corruption scandals and the political crisis. In order to corroborate whether these factors were behind how Spaniards voted in the 2015 election, we carried out a multinomial logistic model using the post-electoral wave of the CIUPANEL data. The survey was conducted online between 22 December 2015 and 11 January 2016, with a sample of 2,264 respondents. The dependent variable is vote choice, including abstention (the reference category), the four main statewide parties (the traditional PP and PSOE plus the two new parties, Podemos and Ciudadanos) and an additional category for ‘other parties’.

The model includes three economic-related variables: retrospective evaluations of the economic situation (from 1 'a lot worse' than last year to 5 'much better'), whether respondents are worried about not being able to pay the bills, and whether respondents are labour market outsiders (unemployed or with a temporary contract). We expect the economy
to play a relevant role in this election, as in the previous contest (Fraile & Lewis-Beck 2014) and in other countries also affected by the financial crisis (Bosco & Verney 2012; Magalhães 2014; Hernández & Kriesi 2016). Following the traditional arguments on economic voting and the recent literature on the electoral effects of the Eurocrisis, we expect those showing negative evaluations and who were most worried about their personal economic finances to be less likely to vote for the incumbent. We also expect those individuals who were most affected by the economic crisis (unemployed or with temporary contracts) to vote for the opposition and new parties to a greater extent (Morgan 2011; Fernández-Albertos 2015; Cordero & Christmann 2016; Hernández & Kriesi 2016).

Following the arguments discussed in the previous sections, one of the main characteristics of the 2015 general election was political corruption. Thus, in our model, we also include perception of corruption in government (from 0 'not widespread at all' to 10 'very widespread'). We expect the latter variable to decrease the likelihood of voting for the incumbent party, the PP.

Finally, it is expected that those most politically disaffected individuals to be more prone to vote for the new parties (Podemos and Ciudadanos), while those most satisfied with the political situation to remain loyal to the traditional parties (PSOE and PP). We measure political disaffection with: satisfaction with democracy (from 1 'not satisfied' to 4 'very satisfied'), a 0-10 scale of political trust index9, and whether respondents participated in any demonstrations during the previous year.

The models include other politically relevant factors: left-right ideology, preference for devolution (both using a 0 to 10-point scale), age, sex and education. According to the information shown in Figure 1, we expect higher levels of support for Podemos among left-wing voters, for the PSOE among centre-left voters, for Ciudadanos in the central positions of the ideological scale and for the PP among the centre-right and right electorate. The preference for devolution has traditionally been a significant explanatory factor in the electoral behaviour models in Spain, not only to discriminate between the vote for nationalist and non-nationalist parties, but also among the statewide parties. We expect those who are less in favour of devolution to be particularly correlated with voting for the PP and Ciudadanos. Contrarily, we expect Podemos voters to show more positive attitudes towards greater levels of political autonomy for the Spanish regions.

In Table A1 in the Appendix, we show the estimates of the multinomial regression model, but in order to easily interpret our results, we plot on Figure 4 the average marginal
effects (AMEs) for our three economic-related variables. The AME is calculated as follows: it first estimates for each observation of the dataset the marginal effect of a given variable on our dependent variable (vote choice) and, second, it averages all the marginal effects calculated in the previous step. Intuitively, the AME compares the probability of voting for the different parties between two populations that only differ on one trait (i.e. being unemployed vs being employed) but they share the remaining characteristics of the sample (Williams 2012).

![Figure 4](image-url)  
**Figure 4** Average Marginal Effects of the Economic Variables.  
*Note:* Bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals.  
*Source:* Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.

The results of our multinomial regression model show that in the 2015 election, the economy played a significant role in explaining the substantial electoral losses suffered by the incumbent. As shown in Figure 4, those voters with more positive retrospective evaluations of the economic situation were more likely to vote for the incumbent PP and less likely to vote for the main party of the opposition, the PSOE. However, the economic perceptions played no role in explaining the vote for the new parties of the system. Indeed, the AMEs of Podemos and C’s, despite showing the expected negative sign, are not distinguishable from zero.
Thus, our results show that the Great Recession marked once again the 2015 election, but only between the two traditional actors of the party system. In the previous 2011 election, a substantial proportion of PSOE losses (then, the incumbent party) were also explained by the poor economic conditions and by voters’ dissatisfaction with the austerity policies carried out by the PSOE (Fraile & Lewis-Beck 2014; Torcal 2014).

While we find clear evidence of sociotropic voting in the 2015 election (based on the perceptions of the general economic situation), the model fails to find any support for pocketbook voting (based on self-perceptions of the personal economic situation). Individuals’ personal finances (measured by the variable 'being worried about being able to pay the bills') turned out to be insignificant. Moreover, those who were unemployed or who had a temporary contract of less than one year were not less likely to vote for the incumbent PP. In fact, they were more prone to support the conservative government. Interestingly, labour market ‘outsiders’ also tended to vote more for PSOE, but not for Podemos. This finding is not in the line with Fernández-Albertos’ argument that Podemos increasingly became attractive among economic losers (2015). Our results show that those who were unemployed or with temporary contracts were more likely to vote for the parties from the traditional Spanish two-party system and less likely to vote for Ciudadanos. Conversely, Podemos’ electoral support did not respond to economic grievances. As we show below, it is more correlated with the political crisis than the economic situation.

The multinomial regression model shows that the Rajoy government was not only held accountable for the economic situation, but also for the corruption scandals (see Figure 5). As expected, the variable that measures voters’ perceptions of how widespread corruption is in government is negatively correlated with voting for the PP. The party that benefited from government corruption scandals was not the main opposition party (PSOE), which also suffered corruption scandals, but the newcomer Podemos. In the case of the other new party in the system, Ciudadanos, the AME of government corruption is not statistically significant.
According to our multinomial logit model, the emergence of Podemos is better explained by the political crisis than by the economic. Certainly, neither economic grievances nor perceiving a bad economic situation were behind Podemos’ (nor Ciudadanos’) success. Instead, Podemos was more attractive among those less satisfied with how democracy works and who perceived that corruption in government was widespread. Voters with greater confidence in political institutions were more likely to support the PP and PSOE. Although the AMEs of political trust for Podemos and Ciudadanos are not statistically significant, the pairwise comparisons between these two new parties and the two traditional parties reach the \( p<0.05 \) level of significance (see models shown in Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the online appendix, in which our multinomial regression model is replicated using different reference categories of the dependent variable).

The breakup of the Spanish two-party system is partly explained by the different vote patterns between generations. The two new players in the party system were particularly successful among the younger electorate, while the PSOE and especially the PP were among more senior voters\(^{10}\). Also, as in previous general elections (Anduiza et al. 2014), there were more socialist party supporters with lower levels of education in comparison with other parties. The traditional left-right ideology was also relevant in the expected direction: the left

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**Figure 5** Average Marginal Effects of the Political Variables.

*Note:* Bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals.

*Source:* Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.
is associated with voting for Podemos and the PSOE and the right with Ciudadanos and PP. Our multinomial model does not show significant differences between the ideological profile of Podemos and the PSOE’s electorate. However, differences between these two parties emerge if we include the left-right ideology as a categorical variable\(^{11}\). Finally, the effect of preference for devolution is also statistically significant. As expected, voters less favourable to decentralisation of powers to regions were more likely to vote for the PP and especially for Ciudadanos. As we already mentioned in previous sections, the fact that pro-union positions are correlated with voting for Ciudadanos is far from surprising. Before the party became a nationwide phenomenon in 2015, Ciudadanos already existed in Catalonia as an anti-Catalan nationalist party.

**Explaining Vote Transfers to Podemos and Ciudadanos**

In this section we analyse the determinants of the two most important flows of votes between 2011 and 2015: (i) from the PP to Ciudadanos and (ii) from the PSOE to Podemos. We estimate two logistic regression analyses (shown in Table A2 in the Appendix). The first compares the profile of the PP loyal voters (1) vs voters who switched to Ciudadanos (0); the second compares the PSOE loyal voters (1) vs those who finally switched to Podemos (0). The explanatory variables are the same as those included in the model of Table A1. We consider a ‘loyal’ voter an individual who both recalled voting for PP/PSOE in 2011 (using the first wave of our panel) and voting for PP/PSOE in 2015 (using the last wave of our panel a few weeks after the election)\(^{12}\).

Despite the fact that these are recent events, there is growing scholarly literature on the association between the Eurocrisis and the rise of new parties (Torcal 2014; Bermeo & Bartels 2014; Fraile & Lewis-Beck 2014; Hernández & Kriesi 2016). Our models show that transfers were not mainly structured based on economic voting logic. As we show in Figure 6, neither sociotropic nor egotropic economic variables seem to explain the vote transfers between the traditional and recently created parties. In fact, as argued in the previous section, being unemployed or having a temporary contract only has a significant impact on voting for PP vs Ciudadanos, but with a sign opposite to the ‘pocketbook voting’ logic. In the case of vote transfers from PSOE to Podemos, neither personal finances nor evaluation of the general economic situation seem to be significant determinants.

In sum, economic voting was not the main driving force behind the breakdown of the traditional two-party system. Conversely, it is rather the political crisis that explains vote transfers to the new parties. Indeed, the decision to switch vote to Ciudadanos and especially...
Podemos is explained by the lack of confidence in political institutions (see Figure 6). According to our models, government corruption is not an important determinant behind defections to Podemos or Ciudadanos. Those who changed from the PSOE to Podemos did so instead because of their dissatisfaction with how democracy was working. Podemos switchers were also active citizens who took part in demonstrations, but this is not the case for Ciudadanos switchers.

Overall, our results indicate that vote transfers from the old to the new parties were better explained by variables related to the political crisis rather than the economic situation, especially in the case of the PSOE vs Podemos. Ideology was also a central factor in explaining why some citizens remained loyal to the traditional mainstream parties while others preferred to switch to the new parties. Specifically, Ciudadanos seems to have successfully occupied a gap in the ideological centre. In fact, even when controlling for other significant factors, the probability of switching to Ciudadanos increases among the less conservative electorate. On the contrary, right-wing voters were more prone to remain loyal to PP. The opposite happens with the PSOE: voters who remained loyal to the socialist party were primarily those with a more moderate ideology.

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6** Average Marginal Effects of the Main Variables Explaining Loyalty to PP (left) and PSOE (right).

*Note:* Bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals.

*Source:* Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.
In line with the results of the previous section, swing voters were younger than those who remained loyal to the PP. However, this variable fails to reach any conventional level of significance in the case of PSOE (although it shows the expected sign).

In conclusion, our models show that vote transfers from the PP to Ciudadanos took place mainly among the younger electorate, with long-term employment contracts who had lower levels of political trust. PSOE defections were explained by dissatisfaction with democracy and political institutions in general. Despite these fundamental determinants of the vote, ideology remains a central element in explaining vote transfers. While Ciudadanos mainly attracted former PP centrist voters, Podemos was particularly successful in gaining votes from the former left-wing PSOE electorate.

Conclusions

The 2015 Spanish general election represented the culmination of the transition from the traditional two-party system to a multi-party system. Since 2014, most polls had predicted that the PP and PSOE would no longer monopolise parliament. The irruption of Podemos and Ciudadanos radically changed Spanish political dynamics, since they obtained a significant share of the parliamentary seats. In this paper, we have analysed the individual determinants of voting choices in the 2015 general election, paying particular attention to the emergence of Podemos and Ciudadanos. Our results indicate that corruption and the political crisis were key factors behind Spaniards’ support for these two new parties, especially Podemos. Indeed, Podemos’ success was mainly a symptom of the high levels of political disaffection among the Spanish electorate.

Although the Great Recession also affected the 2015 election, the economy was not the key factor behind voting for Ciudadanos and Podemos. Retrospective economic perceptions made voters less likely to support the incumbent PP and more likely to back the PSOE, but not the two new parties. Therefore, our results seem to indicate that economic voting took place in Spain, but only among the traditional actors of the party system.

The 2015 general election generated a fragmented parliament with no clear majorities. Neither the sum of seats of the parties on the centre-right and centre of the ideological scale (PP and Ciudadanos) nor the sum of the seats on the centre-left and left parties (PSOE, Podemos and IU) were enough to form a parliamentary majority. King Felipe VI appointed the Socialist leader, Pedro Sánchez, as the ‘formateur’, but he was unable to gain sufficient support in parliament to form a government. His attempts to attract support from both the left (Podemos) and the centre-right (Ciudadanos) failed as neither of the new parties wanted
to be part of the same coalition. After five months of unsuccessful negotiations to form government, the King dissolved parliament and announced new general election for June 2016, putting an end to the shortest legislature in recent Spanish democratic history.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank José Ramón Montero, Pablo Simón and the two reviewers of this article and the editors of *South European Society and Politics* for their useful comments. We would also like to acknowledge the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness for its financial support through the project CSO2013-47071-R (PI: Mariano Torcal) and those behind the panel survey CIUPANEL 2016, used in this article.
Endnotes

1 Except Andalusia, governed by the PSOE; Asturias, governed by the FAC (Foro Asturias - Asturias Forum) and the Basque Country, Catalonia and Navarre, governed by the nationalist parties PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco - Nationalist Basque Party), CIU (Convergència i Unió – Convergence and Union) and UPN (Unión del Pueblo Navarro - Navarrese People's Union).

2 The Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP) was 4.1 in 1989, 3.5 in 1993, 3.3 in 1996, 3.0 in 2000, 2.9 in 2004, 2.8 in 2008, 3.3 in 2011, and 5 in 2015.

3 In fact, Ciudadanos took part in the 2008 general elections, although they only obtained very modest coverage and a weak electoral result (0.18 per cent of the votes). Also DiL and the regional coalitions of Podemos were contesting for the first time.

4 In the provincial districts of Catalonia, Galicia and Valencia, Podemos formed electoral coalitions with regional movements. In Catalonia, the coalition ‘En Comú’ (In Common) obtained 12 seats, and became the most voted for party in the region. In the four Galician districts, Podemos formed a coalition with the ‘En Marea’ (In Tide) movement, obtaining six seats and becoming the second party, below the PP. Finally, the ‘Compromís-Podemos-És el moment’ (Commitment-We Can-It is Time) coalition in Valencia ended up as the second party in the region with nine seats, also below the PP. These confluences combined Podemos’ left-wing and democratic regeneration with a more pro-devolution and plurinational agenda.

5 The first 2015 election debate was organised by Demos, a student organisation at the University Carlos III of Madrid on 27 November. Only Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) and Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) accepted the invitation. It was the first time that an election debate had taken place in a university. The second debate was organised by El País on 30 November. The newspaper invited the candidates from the four main parties but the incumbent Mariano Rajoy again declined the invitation.

6 See Mari-Klose (2015) and Rodríguez-Teruel & Barrio (2015) for a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the electoral results of Ciudadanos before the general election.

7 DiL was the electoral brand of CDC (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia- Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya), the principle member of the CIU (Convergence and Union - Convergència i Unió) federation. CIU was dissolved a few months before the election due to discrepancies between the members of the federation.

8 The survey was part of a research project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (CS02013-47071-R), and was directed by Mariano Torcal, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. The survey is also part of the European Election Study, directed by Hermann Schmitt, from the Universities of Mannheim and Manchester.

9 The index is constructed using three items based on trust in parliament, in politicians and in political parties (all using a 0-10 scale). A principal component analysis reveals that there is only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 (Kaiser criterion).

10 For space reasons we do not report the AMEs of the remaining variables of the model, but those interested can find them in Figure A1 of the appendix.

11 In this alternative model, left-wing voters (values zero, one and two on the ideological scale) were more likely to vote for Podemos than those of the centre-left (values three and four). Results available upon request.

12 The first wave, with a sample of 3,916 respondents, was implemented during the weeks before the EP elections. The final wave was carried out a few weeks after the 2015 general election, with 2,639 respondents.
Bibliography


### Table A1 Multinomial logistic regressions for the 2015 General Election (Abstention as Reference Category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) PSOE</th>
<th>(2) PP</th>
<th>(3) Podemos</th>
<th>(4) Ciudadanos</th>
<th>(5) Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.60*</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.41+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
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<td>(0.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.03**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.01+</td>
<td>-0.02*</td>
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<td>Education Secondary (ref: Primary)</td>
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<td>(0.52)</td>
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<td>Education Tertiary (ref: Primary)</td>
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<td>Participation in Demonstration</td>
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<td>(0.20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Corrupted</td>
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<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>Trust in Political Institutions</td>
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<td>0.22**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.14+</td>
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<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
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<td>Economic Sociotropic Retrospective</td>
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<td>-0.38**</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
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<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worried about Bills</td>
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<td>-0.28</td>
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<td>-0.41+</td>
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<td>(0.26)</td>
<td>(0.23)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outsider (Unemployed or Temporary)</td>
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<td>-0.43</td>
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<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
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<td>Left-Right Ideology</td>
<td>0.81***</td>
<td>-0.47***</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.11**</td>
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<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-0.09</td>
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<td>(1.47)</td>
<td>(1.11)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
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**Source:** Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.

**Notes:** Significance (two-tailed) + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.
Table A2 Logistic regressions for those Loyal to the PP and PSOE in the 2015 General Election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Loyal to the PP (vs. Ciudadanos)</th>
<th>Loyal to the PSOE (vs. Podemos)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.56** (0.18)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Secondary (ref: Primary)</td>
<td>-0.82 (0.95)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Tertiary (ref: Primary)</td>
<td>-0.46 (0.97)</td>
<td>-1.04 (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Demonstration</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.47)</td>
<td>-0.86* (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with Democracy</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.87** (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Corrupted</td>
<td>-0.14 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Political Institutions</td>
<td>0.33* (0.13)</td>
<td>0.33** (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Sociotropic Retrospective</td>
<td>0.22 (0.20)</td>
<td>-0.25 (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about Bills</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.41)</td>
<td>-0.26 (0.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider (Unemployed or Temporary)</td>
<td>1.25* (0.58)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.39)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left-Right Ideology</td>
<td>0.53*** (0.14)</td>
<td>0.23+ (0.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preference for Devolution</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.06)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-4.91* (2.22)</td>
<td>-1.85 (1.55)</td>
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N 203 184
ll -90.7 -98.8
chi2 61.53 53.95

Notes: Significance (two-tailed) + p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses. The reference dependent variable category in models 1 to 5 is ‘disloyal to the PP’ (those who expressed their intention to vote for the PP in 2014 but finally voted for Ciudadanos in 2015. The reference dependent variable category in models 6 to 10 is ‘disloyal to the PSOE’ (those who expressed their intention to vote for the PSOE in 2014 but finally voted for Podemos in 2015).

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.
Figure A1. Average Marginal Effects of Different Independent Variables

*Note:* Bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals. In the education figure (bottom left panel) diamonds represent secondary education and dots tertiary education.

*Source:* Authors’ own elaboration based on CIUPANEL, 2016.