

Changes in trust in the parliament and the political parties at the individual level in a context of crisis.

Evidence from a panel survey in Spain (2010-12)

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at changes in trust in the Parliament and the political parties using data from an online panel survey from Spain, which includes 4 waves carried out between 2010 and 2012. I describe intra-individual variation and give an explanation to changes in trust in those institutions in a context of deep economic crisis, with huge ratios of unemployment. The main hypothesis of work relies on the idea that economic personal grievances –situation of unemployment, loss of income– might affect how individuals trust in their political institutions. However, the findings only confirm this situation partially, for which I suggest and alternative explanation: personal economic grievances push individuals to think collectively instead of punishing the institutions for their personal economic situation. The paper is organized as follows: first, I work for addressing the puzzle of political trust, a concept that has been widely used in the literature but still has some problems with regards to the denomination and its measurement. Second, I assess the political relevance of the concept, its trends and consequences. Third, I focus on explaining political trust change at the individual level in a context of economic crisis such is the Spanish case; I address the particularities of this case of study, in both terms of low levels of trust and also a deep economic crisis. Then, I write down the main hypotheses of work, before running the analysis and presenting the results. Finally, I conclude with a discussion section.

Key words: political trust, panel data, Parliament, political parties, Spain, crisis, unemployment.

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This is a work in progress. Any comments and suggestions will be very welcomed.

1. Introduction

Political support, often called “political trust”, is one of the more studied topics in political science. A lot has been said about the concept, the causes, the consequences and the measurement of political trust. However, we know little about what happens with trust in political institutions under specific contexts, such an economic crisis. We know less about to what extent individuals change their trust in those institutions in the short-run, and if the context of crisis might have some effects on that change and in how citizens trust. My expectation is to contribute to a deeper knowledge about these particularities of political trust.

In this paper, I address change in political trust by focusing on trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties in Spain, for the period 2010-2012, a period of deep economic and financial crisis. The main hypothesis of work relies on the idea that economic personal grievances –situation of unemployment, loss of income– might affect how individuals trust in their political institutions. Nevertheless, my findings only confirm this situation partially, for which I suggest an alternative explanation: personal economic grievances push individuals to think collectively instead of punishing the institutions for their personal economic situation.

The paper is organized as follows: first, I work for addressing the puzzle of political trust, a concept that has been widely used in the literature but still has some problems with regards to the denomination and its measurement. I devote special attention to the components of trust, the relation between trust and politics and also I focus on other elements that are related to trust from a theoretical approach. Second, I assess the political relevance of the concept, its trends and consequences. Third, I focus on explaining political trust change at the individual level in a context of economic crisis such is the Spanish case; I address the particularities of this case of study, in both terms of its low levels of political trust and also a deep economic crisis, with ratios of unemployment extremely high, among several other consequences. Then, I write down the main hypotheses of work, before developing the nuances of my data, a panel survey conducted among 2010 and 2013 in Spain, comprising five waves and mostly focused on political attitudes. Also, I present the dependent variable –a constructed index of political trust– and the explanatory variables. Finally, I run the analysis and present the empirical evidence, before giving a substantive discussion in the last section.

2. Conceptualization of political trust

Political trust is a commonly used notion in political science research and yet it is a concept difficult to define and reel off precisely. On one hand, there is a wide range of denominations referring to trust, due to the fact that the literature has dealt with the phenomena differently according to whether the focus is on the object or on the subject of trust or in both of them simultaneously. Also, there is a lack of a systematic approach in what relates to which are the components of political trust. Furthermore, there are a lot of causes and also a great deal of consequences of trust, which translates into a broad spectrum of political and social implications. Also, political trust is related to several other concepts, which we should not confound with political trust. All these nuances are relevant for a proper conceptualization of trust, for which in this theoretical section I pursue to shed some light on the mentioned issues, focusing also in the political relevance of political trust.

2.1. The puzzle of trust

It is widely accepted that citizens' trust is important for the state of democracy and for the correct functioning of the social, economic and political life. Several authors have dealt with the concept and meaning of political trust, its causes and consequences in Western democracies (Norris 1999; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Listhaug and Ringdal 2007; van der Meer and Dekker 2011). Nevertheless, although the agreement on the political relevance of political trust, there is less consensus in the theoretical status of the concept, its current meaning, and the causes and consequences of political trust (Hooghe and Zmerli 2011).

Since Confucius, who considered that there are three essential components of successful government: trust, food and weapons¹, several classic authors –Hobbes, Locke, Smith, de Tocqueville, Stuart Mill, Simmel, Toennies, Weber and Durkheim, among others– have dealt with trust as an essential element in their respective theories of social capital and civil society (Newton 2007; Zmerli and Newton 2011). In modern research, trust has been related to a wide range of things, such as “economic growth, health, happiness, life satisfaction, longevity, educational achievement, democratic stability, and willingness to pay taxes” (Zmerli and

¹ Food is essential because well-fed citizens do not make troubles; trust because in the absence of food, citizens can believe that the problem will be solved by the leaders; and weapons in case neither the food of the trust work (Newton 2007).

Newton 2011, 67). Furthermore, citizens' trust can be linked to different elements of the political system, such are its authorities, the political institutions, or the values and principles of the political community (Easton 1965; Dalton 2004; Marien 2011).

Political trust has been defined as citizens' confidence in political institutions (Catterberg and Moreno 2006), or in a little bit more complex way, political trust is "either trust in particular politicians or trust in the main institutions of government and public life" (Zmerli and Newton 2011, 69). To the extent that there are a lot of institutions compounding the political system, political trust can be approached from different angles, reaching as well different conclusions.

In the attempt of defining trust, and in the process of identifying the main types of trust, several problems arise (Newton 2007). First, trust has no essential meaning (Hardin 1999); actually, trust has in itself several meanings in one, and, as we will see, it is mostly based on expectations about the object of trust; furthermore, and this has been already mentioned, trust is not one single thing, and it has a variety of forms and causes (Levi 1998; Hardin 1999). In addition, the concept of political trust is not the only confusing issue; also its measurement is puzzling, due to the profusion of concepts and indicators (Levi and Stoker 2000; Marien 2011)

Not surprisingly, this complexity in the nature itself of the concept of "trust" has led some authors to use the adjective "puzzle" when referring to it (see, for instance, the work of Nannestad 2008; Zmerli and Newton 2011).

2.2. Components and causes of political trust

In the preceding section I referred to the complexity of trust, which has been sometimes compared with a puzzle. So far, research on political trust does (still) not reach an agreement for a common understanding of the term, either for the category to which trust belongs (Nannestad 2008, 414); probably this situation is due to the difficulty of managing such a complex phenomena. Hence, in this section I compile some of the main elements that the literature has shown relevant when referring to political trust. My purpose is not to make a complete guide, but just to reel off the more recurrent aspects of political trust, with the final aim of reaching a better understanding of the phenomena.

In general terms, Newton considers that trust can be defined “as the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible” (2007, 3/39). Also Levi refers to this idea, by saying that “trust is an action taken in a risky situation but in which there is reason to believe in the reliability of the person being trusted”, and she adds that the sources of this belief can vary: “actual knowledge, institutional sanctions, faith in one’s own judgements, etc” (Levi 1996, 47).

In her definition, Levi introduces two components of trust that necessarily have to be further developed: on one hand, the basis of knowledge; on the other hand, the idea of judgement. In order to start with, and regarding judgement when trusting, Warren relates to the relationship between democracy and trust, and writes that trust “involves a judgement, however tacit or habitual, to accept vulnerability to the potential ill will of others by granting them discretionary power over some good” (1999, 311).

Following Warren’ and Levi’s point, for Levi and Stoker (2000) to trust also implies to make judgements, by which no conditions in the relation towards the object of trust are supported. Furthermore, in the view of Levi and Stoker any judgement can be conceptualized in different ways –trust or distrust– or in a grade, and “trust judgements are expected to inspire courses of action”. Overall, they add that “the trust judgement reflects beliefs about the trustworthiness of the other person (or group or institution)” (Levi and Stoker 2000, 476). In this same line, trust involves no interest’ conflict between myself –the subject– and the object towards I extend trust –a person, an institution, a system– (Warren 1999).

Concerning the notion by which to trust or distrust implies to make presumptions of knowledge (Levi 1996; Hardin 1998), it is important to be aware about the fact that to trust involves having expectations about the future based on past knowledge. Trust², thus, is a rational evaluation of social situations, based on the idea that “the object of trust is *competent, intrinsically committed* (caring), *extrinsically committed* (accountable because of encapsulated interest) and *predictable*”³ (van der Meer and Dekker 2011, 97, citing Kasperson et al. 1992). The latter of these elements, about the reliability or predictability of trust, reinforces the point

² Although the authors refer to trust in persons, in my view their perspective fits as well for political support. Other authors have also used the Kasperson and colleagues’ approach for talking about political trust. See, for instance, the work of van der Meer and Dekker (van der Meer and Dekker 2011).

³ Italics like in the original.

by which past knowledge affects future behaviour because is based on the idea by which the object's past behaviour is consistent (van der Meer and Dekker 2011, 97).

This appreciation is more important under specific circumstances, such an economic recession period, when individuals' trust in political (and also economical) institutions is more needed than ever. In those cases, trust is understood as the expectations people have on the promises institutions do about future (Catterberg and Moreno 2006), surely on the basis of past knowledge.

Reached this point, it is important to note that this appreciation has further implications. First, if we talk about past knowledge conditioning future expectations, it implies that in the act of trust there are involved some kind of cognitive mechanisms. According to Levi, these mechanisms can be of different nature: they can be projections or they can be heuristics. In her words, "a heuristic is a rule one follows without having to calculate in each individual case", meanwhile projection is a "psychological mechanism by which a trustworthy person projects her trustworthiness⁴ to another", in a way that "the more trustworthy one is, the more likely one is to trust" (Levi 1996, 47). My assumption in relation to this point is that the cognitive process is mostly based on heuristics or shortcuts that individuals do about the future expectations from their past knowledge. In any case, both heuristics and projections are learned lessons for any member of a society, as Levi underlines in her study. On the other hand, authors such Blackburn argue that information is important but not the unique source for trusting, and adds a component of shared understanding, in which one trust relies on the other (1998). This latter argument would be in line with the Levi's point, by which being member of a society gives us the capability of using either heuristics or projections for taking the decision of trust (or distrust).

⁴ The use of the word "trustworthy" when defining trust and related ideas is not adequate, according to my perspective. In general terms, I consider that definitions using in their wording a word or a variation of the defining word are not appropriate and even confusing. Nevertheless, it is quite common to find this particular word in the literature about political trust: actually, there are some authors that hold that the distinction between trust and trustworthiness is a very relevant factor. In Levi's view, "only persons can trust or be trusting, but trustworthiness can attach to either individuals or institutions" (1998, 80). Also, the two concepts of trust and trustworthiness have different implications in what relates to which one comes first in the causal relationship among them (Nannestad 2008). Considering that its use is very spread in the literature, and sometimes to avoid it is fairly complicated, in this research I try to use of the term "trustworthy" only when necessary, and I try to use the term "reliable" as a substitute of "trustworthy" when possible.

Second, and in relation to the cognitive origins of trust, we have to assume that those come from the judgements that individuals do, and that any subject of trust –that is, any individual– has in herself an emotional/affective element attached (Jones 1996; Warren 1999).

Third, if we agree that the action of trust is based on expectations about the object of trust in the future, we accept as well that trust has implicit a notion of risk (Levi 1996; Eckel and Wilson 2004; Newton 2007). Hence, to trust is a “fidelity and promise-keeping” action, so what I do when trusting is “risking my interests in the hands of others” (Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007, 38), always under presumptions of knowledge (Hardin 1998), as said. In other words, in the three-path relation between the social, economic and political spheres, citizens’ trust has to be understood on the basis that individuals take a risk when trusting others (Zmerli and Newton 2011). So trust is also a decision and it is seldom unconditional, characteristic that “is given to specific individuals or institutions over specific domains” (Levi and Stoker 2000, 476).

Finally, and in close relation to the three-path mentioned in the previous paragraph, for Levi and Stoker trust has also a relational component because “it involves an individual making herself vulnerable to another individual, group or institution that has the capacity to do her harm or to betray her” (Levi and Stoker 2000, 476). Also, van der Meer and Dekker (2011) consider political trust to be a relational characteristic, nor a personality characteristic of the subject neither an institutional characteristic of the object.

2.3. The relationship between trust and politics and other related concepts

In connection with the relational feature of trust described in the last section, van der Meer and Dekker (2011) deal with three different approaches to the study of political trust. On one hand, there is research on political trust based on the subject of trust. By subject of trust we understand the citizens. This approach pursues to know the general characteristics of the individuals as members of our societies, as well as their specific characteristics in terms of who trust or distrust: their resources, the values they have, and so.

On the other hand, there are studies of political trust that are based on the object⁵ of trust; in other words, based on the recipients of trust, that according to Warren (1999) are the institutions, the authorities or the political representatives. This approach comes close to the recipients of trust by studying the characteristics of the objects of trust and, specifically, their performance. Finally, there is a third kind of approach that mixes both the subject and the object of trust simultaneously.

Despite these approaches for analyzing political trust, the literature about this topic has used similar but also different expressions used for referring to trust in political elements. Some of these expressions are “political support”, “political trust”, “confidence in political institutions”, “political confidence”, “institutional trust”, or any combinations of them. This wide range of forms referring to political trust is probably a consequence of the complexity of the phenomena of political trust in our modern societies, idea that I have already underlined before in this paper.

As said, these expressions are similar but also different. Thus, although it may seem that all these denominations refer exactly to the same phenomena, they do not. Indeed, under each of the listed concepts above, we can find multiple definitions and approaches to political trust or to a specific part of it, depending mostly on how scholars have approached its measurement. Actually, it is very common to find studies dealing with just one part of the broader concept of political trust although they usually refer to the general term “political trust”, which indeed is the term more spread in the literature about this subject.

From a review of the literature about political trust and related issues, I observe that the concepts listed above are mainly defined in broad terms in the literature. Then, and according to the purpose of each researcher, these concepts are further developed and measured according to the specific nuances of approaching the objects of trust, namely the government, the national Parliament, the European Parliament, the courts, the political parties or whatever. In my view, this observation has to do with four elements, three of them already seen in-depth: first, the lack of agreement for a common understanding of the term of “trust” when relating to politics. Second, it has to do with the multiplicity of items that can be labelled as political trust. Third, it is rooted on the difficulties of managing such a complex phenomena. Personally, I consider that this situation can led to confusions because of the conceptual

⁵ Although not every political object or assessment can be an object of trust (Levi and Stoker 2000).

differences that are implicit to each concept, and it also explains the difficulties to solve the problem of the *puzzle* of trust to which I referred before.

The fourth element, only mentioned in previous sections, refers to the lack of agreement about how to measure political trust (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Marien 2011). This has led to confusing situations that arise from the assimilation of a specific part of political trust by the whole concept of political trust. For instance, in the literature we can find the term “political trust” repeatedly associated to “trust in government”, for which political trust then refers to the trust or mistrust that citizens express in relation to this specific organism (Citrin and Green 1986, 432; for a similar perspective, see Hetherington 1998). By using these two terms as interchangeable, we are taking the part –that is, the government– for the whole –that is, the entire political system–.

Several efforts have been done for putting some light between the conceptual differences among what we should not consider political trust but kinds or parts of political trust. Some authors have put their endeavour in this direction. It is the case of Gross *et al.*, whose distinguish between trust in government –the one that they identify with political trust– and a particular form of political trust that is confidence in government institutions, apart from social trust (Gross, Aday, and Brewer 2004).

Moving further in the problems associated to the assimilation of trust in the government with political trust, other issues arise. Thus, as far as the government (satisfaction with governmental performance or trust in the government) has been confound with the whole political system (political trust), also satisfaction with democracy (or support for democracy) has been associated with trust in government and, per extension, with political trust. Hence, a further clarification is needed: we need to distinguish trust in government from support for democracy⁶, keeping in mind that both concepts are just a part of political trust, but not the entire political trust, concept that evolves much more.

⁶ Actually, some authors approach the study of political trust by focusing on citizens’ satisfaction with democracy. It is quite common among scholars using European empirical studies such as the Eurobarometer surveys, the European Social Survey or the European Value Studies (Marien 2011). Likewise the distinction between trust and confidence, we can find as well the terms confidence and support in democratic institutions used sometimes as interchangeable. It is due to their broad meaning about government and representative institutions, as McAllister points out (1999).

About support for democracy, thus, it is a term that is related to democratic legitimacy or *diffuse* support of democracy (Easton 1965), which is basically external efficacy, referring “to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990, 90). Although we will develop this issue of diffuse support later in this piece of work, by now it is necessary to make clear the distinction between satisfaction with democracy and measures of legitimacy of democracy (Gunther and Montero 2004; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007).

In another order of things, some authors consider that we should distinguish between *trust* and *confidence*, in a way that we *trust* persons and individuals, but we have *confidence* in institutions, also separating between the private and the public sphere (Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007). Actually, “confidence in political institutions” refers to the individuals’ sense of how institutions work. In broad terms, it relates to citizens’ judgments about the institutions (Lipset and Schneider 1987; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007), and it is a complex statement based on their capacity to make credible commitments, to do not implement policies unfairly, and based on its competence, with the criterion of transparency and openness (Levi and Stoker 2000). In addition, institutions are presumed to do not have an arbitrary behaviour either to act discriminatorily (Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007). Summing up, confidence in political institutions is a declaration of the citizens about their belief that the institutions will be reliable (Hardin 1998; Levi 1998; Levi and Stoker 2000).

So far, political trust is much more than trust in the government or trust in any other specific institution. It is also linked to –but different– to satisfaction with democracy, similarly to what happens in relation to social trust⁷. Thus, its conceptualization requires to be expanded,

⁷ Social trust would deserve probably a whole dissertation itself for entailing its complexity. Briefly and in a broad sense, it refers to trust in other people (also known as interpersonal trust), and it is mostly understood as the “trustworthiness” of people in general (Levi and Stoker 2000; Gross, Aday, and Brewer 2004). It has a basis of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement, although lacking of intimate knowledge of other members in a society (Putnam 1993). Newton classifies the theories of social trust in small or large-scale communities, being the latter more complex than the former and having three sub-sequent theories: the rational-choice approach, the social-psychological, and the societal approach. Regarding the rational-choice conception pointed out by Newton, trust is part of a calculation. Concerning the social-psychological theories, trust roots in our personality characteristics and in everyday experiences in our daily life, even during the adulthood. With regards to the societal approach, trust is a collective feature of society (2007). With regards to political trust, social and political trust are associated at the individual level (Zmerli and Newton 2008; 2011). Note that although the undeniable connections that we can find with some of the ideas that have appeared before in this research with regard to trust in political institutions, and the fact that social capital theories link both social trust and political trust, we do not have to get confused about the following point: social trust or trust in people is clearly a

including also trust in political actors, institutions and other organizations. In this direction, and under the label “political trust” or any other of the terms listed above, we can find research dealing with trust in the government but also there is research based trust in political institutions. This latter category includes, in turn, a wide range of public institutions, such as the parliament, the political parties, the politicians, the cabinet, the police, the courts, the law, the civil service, the military and the public bureaucracies, the United Nations, among others. Thus, all these institutions constitute de broader category of “trust in political institutions”, which, in turn, constitutes a part of the general “political trust” concept. In words of Listhaug and Ringdal “trust in political institutions is part of a wider concept of political trust” (2007, 3).

2.4. Trust in the institutions of representative democracy: the Parliament and the political parties

As we have seen in the previous section, political trust has been often measured by asking for citizens’ trust in government. In other occasions, scholars have focused on satisfaction with democracy as a way of measuring political trust. Sometimes citizens are asked about their trust in the incumbents, as well as a way of approaching political trust. Another extended method to measure political trust is by focusing on citizens’ trust in the political institutions. In any case, all the mentioned approaches deal with one part of the broader concept of political trust.

My focus in this research lies on the particular support or confidence in the institutions of representative democracy. Specifically, I develop trust in the parliament and in the political parties. The reasons motivating this approach are two-fold.

First, I follow David Easton’ approach to political support and his distinction between ‘specific support’ and “diffuse support” (1965; 1975). Although the multiplicity of criticism that the Easton’ distinction has risen since its formulation⁸, his study is still highly adequate

differentiated concept from citizens’ confidence in institutions (Newton 2007; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007). A literature review about the relationship between social and political trust can be found in Levi and Stoker (2000, 493–495).

⁸ Indeed, the Easton’ classic distinction between specific and diffuse support has been full of criticisms. For instance, some authors have said that although the distinction can be useful, the fact is that “the trust index contains elements of both types of support” because the government (specific support) is composed by

and relevant in our current days. Thus, Easton differentiates among the support for the incumbent, that is, the support for the “political authorities and authoritative institutions” denominated “specific support” (1975, 439); and “diffuse support”, that is support for the system or the regime, which “refers to evaluations of what an object is or represents” (1975, 444).

In words of Hetherington, Easton’ “specific support refers to satisfaction with government’ outputs and the performance of political authorities, while diffuse support refers to the public’s attitude toward regime-level political objects regardless of performance” (1998, 792). My interpretation, thus, is that Easton’ distinction between specific and diffuse support is a way to divide the typologies of political support in the following two: support in the government vs. support in the parliament and political parties.

Second, my approach to trust in the institutions of the representative democracy –namely, the parliament and the political parties– is coherent with a point that I made before: trust in the government, on one hand, and trust in Parliament and trust in the political parties, on the other hand, have been approached differently in the literature. Furthermore, as the same Easton says (1975), the division of support between specific and diffuse is useful provided that they are able to be both theoretically justified and empirically tested. Hence, although these three objects of trust to which I refer here –that is, the government, the parliament and the political parties– are all of them institutions, the government has some nuances that make it different from the two others; these nuances need to be discussed here.

In order to begin with, and following the arguments reeled off by Easton (1975), specific support or trust in the government is linked to the satisfaction that citizens’ have from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities. In the same line, although Hetherington (1998) relates to the broad term of “political trust”, being defined as a basic evaluative orientation toward the government, its trust varies according to how well the

institutions (diffuse support) (Hetherington 1998, 792). This may arise some confusion, as I have already underlined earlier in this research. Also, it has been said that Easton’ distinction might be too hard in some circumstances because citizens cannot distinguish between basic support for democracy and government’ performance, which may imply problems of interpretation (Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007). Once again, it is a classic problem when dealing with political trust research. Furthermore, Easton suggested that to isolate empirically both concepts of diffuse and specific support might be quite difficult to do, although being the differences in theoretical terms very evident (Easton 1975; see also Gunther and Montero 2004). However, I am strongly convinced that this point can be overcome to the extent that surveys about political attitudes differentiate the political institutions as separate organism in their questionnaires. Thus, current standard survey techniques facilitate to follow the Easton’ distinction between specific and diffuse support.

government is performing according to the citizens' expectations; that is, according to citizens' judgements.

With regards to the definition of specific support introduced in the last paragraph, we understand by political authorities "all public officials from chief executives, legislators, judges and administrators down to local city clerks and policemen, as well as the institutions, such as legislatures or courts, of which they are part" (Easton 1975, 438). Thus, according to Easton we relate more to the individuals –political authorities– compounding the government than to the government –the institution– itself. When citizens are asked about their trust in government, on one hand, or their trust in parliament, on the other hand, each of the institutions may evoke to different perceptions, to different imaginary. According to Easton, hence, the reference to the government evokes to those individuals conforming the institution, the members of the government, meanwhile the reference to the parliament of the nation evokes the institution itself. In my perspective, to refer to the institution or to the individuals compounding the institution makes a great difference. This particular nuance entails that for addressing trust in the government (or specific support) we must follow a different path, attending apart from the institution their members, personally.

By accepting these considerations, we also accept Easton' perspective by which citizens' are able to be aware of what the political authorities do in their day-to-day activities, which are taken in the name of the entire political system. Also, citizens have to put in relation their needs, wants and demands with the political authorities' behaviour. What is important here is the citizens' perception, even vague, about their needs and demands being fulfilled. Even more relevant, citizens have to interpret in such a way the causality process between their needs and demands. In this perspective, once the demands are put into the system, citizens have to perceive that demands are met for extending their (specific) support towards the government⁹. Thus, specific support is a response to the authorities' outcomes, even if citizens cannot name the members of the government either describe their functions.

⁹ One major criticism to the distinction between specific and diffuse support is based on the expectation that citizens are aware about their political environment and that they can develop their political awareness and link their demands with the political outputs. However, according to Easton' point of view, "this not undermine the validity of the idea of specific support" (1975, 441), to the extent that support is not only based on the capacity of members to be aware of the links between their demands and the political outcomes, and it is such a more complex phenomena, as seen.

In order to summarize, and in words of Easton, specific support “is directed towards the political authorities and authoritative institutions; (...), assumes that members have sufficient political awareness to be able to associate satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the perceived behavior of these authorities (...); it is possible only under conditions in which (...) the members (...) entertain (...) that the authorities can be held responsible for what happens in the society; (f)inally, this kind of support varies with perceived benefits or satisfactions” (Easton 1975, 439).

Thus, from the conceptual nuances and features of the Easton’ distinction between the support towards the government –specific support– and the support towards the parliament and the political parties –diffuse support–, I consider suitable for my research purposes to focus in the specific trust in the institutions of the representative democracy, that is, the parliament and the political parties.

3. The political relevance of political trust: trends and consequences

There is vast literature concerned with the consequences and implications of different levels of political trust on the good health of democracy (see, for instance, the work of Hetherington 1998). The debate about the consequences of political trust is three-fold: on one hand, there is some debate about the trends that, in fact, political support follows; on the other hand, there is also discussion about which are the explanations for such patterns and trends of trust; finally, there is also a debate about the implications that higher or lower levels of trust might have on our democracies.

In order to begin with, recent research on political support, however, has not reached a clear conclusion about whether exists or not a decline: Klingemann and Fuchs, conclude that there is not such a declining trend in Western democracies (1995), meanwhile more recently, the work of Dalton indicates the contrary (2004). Other authors find out that there is some evidence that political trust is suffering from erosion in new and stable democracies over the last decades (Hetherington 1998; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal

2007; Newton 2007, among others). At the same time, others talk about public scepticism about not only politicians but also governments (Torcal and Montero 2006).

A part from the trends we can observe, to which I will refer later in this research, it is true that not all the countries rate the same levels of political trust, so it varies from country to country. Thus, political trust has been found to be high in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, and quite low in Central and Eastern Europe, and in Southern Europe the levels of trust in political institutions are also low and are less stable than in Northern European democracies (Fuchs, Guidorosso, and Svensson 1995; Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Listhaug 2006; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007; Listhaug and Ringdal 2007; Bovens and Wille 2011; van der Meer and Dekker 2011; Marien 2011).

In general terms the consideration is that in those societies where trust is higher, the healthier the democracy is, to the extent that trust is necessary for the stability, viability and vitality of democracy (Hardin 1999; Warren 1999).

About the reasons and explanations after the decline of political trust, some scholars consider that the observed decline is part of a trend of scepticism and civic disengagement, with affections to the “global democracy” (Catterberg and Moreno 2006, 32 referring to Putnam (2002)). Other authors underline that support for some institutions are cyclical, alternating periods of “hope and fear” (Norris 1999, 7, referring to democratic government).

Newton highlights that it is not surprising to consider that political trust, like social trust, are generally connected with social, economic and political circumstances, and actually, different levels of trust can be found across societies, precisely due to their social, economic and political circumstances (Newton 2007). Essentially, how citizens perceive the economic environment is working has a statistically significant relationship with confidence in parliament, at least in Norway, as Listhaug (2006) shows in her work.

Authors such as Catterberg and Moreno describe what they consider are the two pillars that explain the decline of political trust at the individual level: on one hand, a shift in value priorities (point also supported by Norris 1999, who stresses the increasing critical positions of citizens towards the democratic institutions); on the other hand, a growing attachment

toward democracy. Catterberg and Moreno consider these two elements are in interaction with the decline of political trust in established democracies¹⁰.

Among the implications that political trust might have in our modern societies, there are mainly three elements that are recurrent in the literature about political support: democratic legitimacy, political disaffection and political participation.

In order to begin with, to find out a low level or a decline in the levels of confidence in political institutions, is seen usually as a symptom that something is going wrong in what refers to the legitimacy of the (democratic) system. However, the situation has not to be seen necessarily as a severe threat (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995). Indeed, such extreme condition would need to be complemented with other conditions, to the extent that, as said, political trust is a broad concept, so the legitimacy of democracy is based in much more than in the level of trust in the political institutions.

Theories of trust are basic for the understanding of modern societies (Newton 2007, 4). In our advanced democracies, trust in the political institutions is linked to success, to the extent that the higher the levels of trust people have on their institutions, the higher the perception that those institutions are working correctly, and the lower the chances for non-democratic forms of government to receive support, and also less likely is the use of coercion (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Listhaug and Ringdal 2007). In words of van der Meer and Dekker (2011, 95), “trust in the political system is crucial to warrant the legitimacy of the system: political trust functions is the glue that keeps the system together and as the oil that lubricates the policy machine”. Nonetheless, as van der Meer and Dekker state, a good democracy needs also critical and questioning mistrust. However, “political trust and its complement, distrust, are universal characteristics of every political system” (Rose and Mishler 2011), so both are expected to coexist in any kind of political system, not only democracies. As a consequence,

¹⁰ Even Spain is sometimes not considered yet as an established democracy, in this particular case the authors consider Spain, altogether with Portugal, as an established democracy because in their view their political systems are the oldest of the third wave of democratization described by Huntington (1994) and also because the democracy is of the most consolidated among the countries conforming the so-called “third waves democracies”. However, note that their expectations are to find out a recovery trust in the future both in Portugal and Spain. Talking about the particular Spanish case, the scholars expect an increase in political trust after a decline in trust in the Spanish Parliament since the 1980s until mid-1990s, something that matches with the pattern followed by the other new democracies (Catterberg and Moreno 2006). However, political trust is also in decline, at least in the particular case of Spain.

political trust is a core point for the functioning of any political system, for a “working” society.

According to Listhaug and Wiberg, a low level of confidence in political institutions indicates that something is not functioning correctly, but not necessarily implies a hazard to the system’ legitimacy (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995, 299). Even the appreciation, in any case a low level or a decrease in the levels of confidence in political institutions implies that citizens view institutions negatively. If this typology of political confidence decreases to the extreme case that we can talk about institutional disaffection, then the problem could become quite serious because institutional damage is really difficult to be repaired (Listhaug 2006). However, this is an extreme of “legitimacy crisis (which does) not appear and suddenly vanish (...); basic political loyalties are not easy to shake; but, once lost, faith in the validity of existing institutions should not be easily regained (Citrin and Green 1986, 452).

To the extent that political trust and the indicators of trust in political institutions are in close relation among them, such an extreme situation would have further implications related to the whole system. This is why some authors, such as Hetherington, underline that this might be problematic for governance, in the way that a low level of trust in one institution usually carries to have also low levels of trust in other institution, and so (Hetherington 1998). Not in vain trust has been considered a crucial element for facilitating democratic governance (Tyler 1998).

I have already pointed out some elements with regards to political disaffection, concept that we have to distinguish from political dissatisfaction and from democratic legitimacy –because the basic attitudes towards the political system are different–, as Montero *et al* (1997) point out. Actually, these authors consider that trust –and, even better, distrust– is one of the symptoms¹¹ for detecting the presence of political disaffection in a society.

Dissatisfaction towards several political and economic objects and perceptions of system inefficacy conform political discontent (Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997, 136). Additionally, disaffection is measured not only by confidence in representative institutions, also by internal political efficacy and trust in politicians (Torcal and Montero 2006); to which Listhaug includes a fourth “problematic area”: attachment to political parties (2006, 216).

¹¹ According to the authors, some of the other symptoms are: political disaffection, altogether with disinterest, inefficacy, cynicism, distance, separation, estrangement, frustration, rejection, alienation, and so.

Moreover, and paraphrasing Hetherington –who relates to the phenomena of political satisfaction just in its negative consideration, that is, dissatisfaction (Hetherington 1998, 791)–, my argument is that political trust is of great importance because rather than simply reflecting satisfaction or dissatisfaction with incumbents and institutions, political trust contributes to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with incumbents and institutions. For this reason, confidence in political institutions also compromises the capability of those institutions to succeed.

Another relevant factor in our democracies is political participation. Following Levi and Stoker, trust influences participation in two different ways: on one hand, the trusting' individuals participate more than the distrusting –to the extent that distrust discourages interest in politics–; on the other hand, it seems that distrust fosters involvement in politics (for a review on this point, see Levi and Stoker 2000, pages 486-488). With regards to the problematic of a low voter turnout, authors such as Hardin suggest that we can interpret it as an evidence of the failure of the government on receiving support; but, in contrast, a low turnout might be a sign that government has not create distrust and opposition. In other words, low turnout ratios can be understood in a positive or in a negative way in what specifically relates to confidence in government (Hardin 1998, 24).

In sum, and mentioning again the work of Levi and Stoker, we can conclude that the way in which citizens judge their institutions influences on whether citizens participate in politics, how do they participate, whether they support the institutional reforms, and also it has influences on whether citizens trust their co-citizens (2000, 501). Thus, the centrality of political trust for a working society (Putnam 1993; Almond and Verba 1989) has put the concept in the core of the theories of political participation, mobilization and activism (Levi and Stoker 2000; Gross, Aday, and Brewer 2004), converting political trust in a phenomenon of great importance for the correct functioning of any democratic systems.

At this point, it is quite clear that different levels and trends of political trust have social and political consequences, also in other areas of the political life not directly mentioned in this work, such are the public policies and its development –specifically, those policies related to the social protection and social services–. Some authors go even further in the consequences of a low political trust associating it with the performance of illegal behaviors such as the consumption of illegal substances (see, for instance, the works of Lindström 2008; and

Marien and Hooghe 2011). In those given situations, the implicit background is that citizens feel that they can no longer trust their institutions, so they have no reason to follow the established social rules (Hooghe and Zmerli 2011).

4. Political trust change at the individual level in a context of economic crisis: the case of Spain

In this section, the purpose is to point out the main mechanisms by which change in the levels of trust in Parliament and political parties can be explained at the individual level, that is, change in trust in those public institutions within individuals in the short-run. The case of study is Spain, a country immersed in a deep crisis.

4.1. A context of deep economic crisis: the case of Spain

The economic and financial crisis started at the same time all around the European Union at the same time. Meanwhile some of them rapidly recovered from the downturn and overcome the crisis situation; others still have problems of huge unemployment and increased economic downturn. Precisely, this is the case of Spain, which is a country immersed in a very deep crisis.

In Spain, after a period of rapid growth that extends until 2007 and with a GDP per capita at the level in the average of the EU-27 (Aceleanu 2013) –which has been labelled as “the Spanish economic miracle”– (Etxezarreta et al. 2011), a period of very deep crisis started, extended until our days and without a clear end by now. From then, Spain’ levels of unemployment have reached very high levels: the current ratio of unemployment is of about the 27% –surely, a non-enviable record, considering that it is one of the major unemployment ratios in the EU and because in 2007, under the “economic miracle”, the unemployment in Spain was approximately of the 8%–. Furthermore, this 27% of unemployment is worst for

young people under the age of 25, for which raises the 60%¹². The unemployment rate is the highest in the European Union (Aceleanu 2013).

There is no doubt about the fact that a situation like this has several consequences not only in the economic sphere but also in the social and the personal sphere of the Spanish citizens. Indeed, experts consider that, although it is not direct, there is a link between unemployment and poverty (Malo Ocaña 2011, 18). Indeed, poverty can lead to distrust (Inglehart 1999) and “it is safer to trust others if one has a margin of economic security” (Inglehart 1999, 89, citing Banfield 1958).

Moreover, it is not just the extended situation of unemployment; there is also a big proportion of long-term unemployed, leading to frustrating situations and having several other consequences. Probably one of the most known consequences among the population because its number has increased rapidly in the last months and the television and the newspapers have largely paid attention to it are the evictions. Although they cannot be quantified, as Mateo and Penadés underline (2013, 163), it is estimated that there were of about 75.000 evictions in the first term of 2012, according to a publication in the website of the “Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca” (2012).

Protest has also risen as a consequence of the crisis. According to Mateo and Penadés, the number of protest in 2012 is the highest since 2003, when this kind of information started to be compiled. Furthermore, in the last times two general strikes have taken place, and also remarkable it that the general situation of crisis has raised as well the number of protest in the streets. Most of the protest had the crisis in their background. (2013).

4.2. Trust in the parliament and the political parties in Spain

Apart from the particularities of the economic crisis of Spain, it is also important to develop which are generally the levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties in Spain, and its evolution along the last years.

¹² Source: Encuesta de Población Activa (EPA), 1st term 2013 (consulted on May 2013).

Regarding the levels of confidence in the political institutions in Spain, it seems that the Spanish case does not only have low levels of trust in their political institutions than other countries; also Spain does not differ in the declining trend in political trust explained before. Thus, even Spain is one of the “third wave democracies” (Huntington 1994), which were found to have a spread democratic support in the late nineties by Klingemann (1999), citizens levels of confidence towards institutions are in decline.

The Spanish institute CIS (*“The Spanish National Institute of Statistics”*) conducts periodically studies in which they ask citizens to report their levels of trust in several institutions. They ask their citizens to state their level of trust in a 0-10 scale¹³ (see Graph 1). We observe the evolution of trust in the Spanish parliament and trust in the political parties by considering the mean of trust for each period in which data is available.

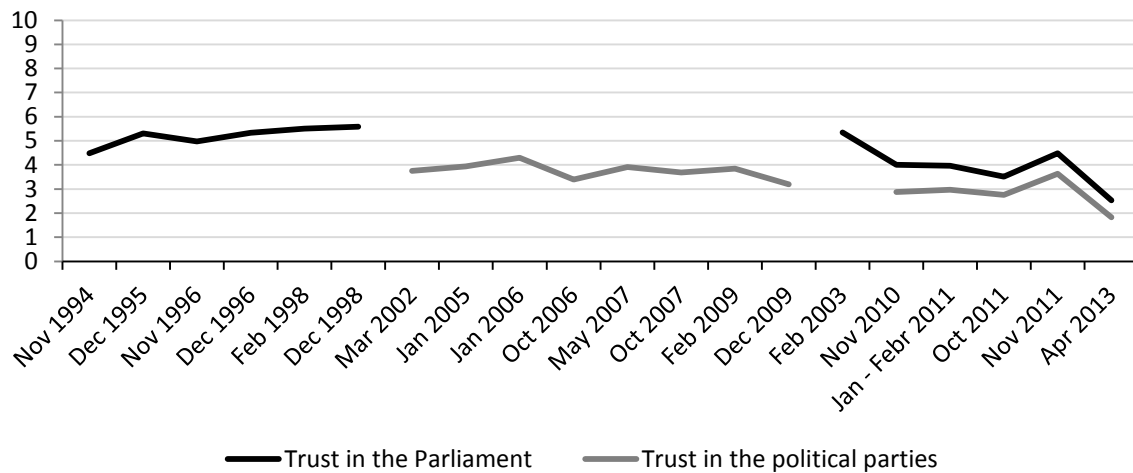
Regarding trust in the Spanish Parliament, it increased in the 1994-1995 period. Later, in 1996, it slightly decreased under the “approved” level of trust, which is the 5-point in the scale. After that year, the mean of trust in the parliament increased a little, always staying under the 6-point in the scale.

For the following period in which there is data available, we observe a clear decrease in the mean of trust in parliament. In 2003, it takes an approved (5.35), until reaching a 3.5 in late 2011. Then, the mean somehow recovers its position but the last observation scores the lowest mean ever seen: in April 2013, the mean of trust in the Spanish Parliament reaches 2.53.

Concerning trust in the political parties, in the first period for which data is available, 2002-2009, the mean oscillates in one point among the 3.4 and the 4.3. From October 2006 on, the tendency is a decline. About the last period 2010-2013, the evolution in the mean of trust in the political parties displayed in the graph is similar to the mean of trust in the parliament. Thus, the tendency is to decline, with a recover in November 2011. Likewise trust in the parliament, the lowest level of trust observed coincides with the last observation in time, corresponding to April 2013, in which the mean of trust in the political parties is of 1.83.

¹³ The original question in Spanish is as follows: “A continuación, me gustaría que me dijese el grado de confianza que tiene Ud. en una serie de instituciones, utilizando una escala de 0 a 10 en la que 0 significa que no tiene Ud. 'ninguna confianza' en ella y 10 que tiene 'mucha confianza'.”

Graph 1. Evolution of the mean of trust in Parliament and trust in Political Parties. Spain, 1994-2013



Notes: The means on the institutions trust-scale are presented. The scale ranges from 0 to 10, and a level of trust of 5 is needed for an “approval” of the institution.

There are some years for which there is no available data (apart that the serial has no observations for every year, and that in some cases there are two observations per year, we also find that there is a gap in the data for the period among 1998 to 2003 for trust in the Parliament; and that also data is missing until 2002 and from 2009 to 2010 for trust in the political parties).

Source: Own elaboration from “CIS database” (Base de datos del CIS), www.cis.es

Undoubtedly, Spaniards show very low levels of trust along time, but the last observations indicate an abrupt decline¹⁴. In my view, this situation is due to the general discontent with the institutions performance in the last months. Thus, this particular discontent has to be added to the per se low levels of trust of the Spanish citizens towards their political institutions. For some authors, the situation of economic crisis in Spain has lead into crises of social and political representation, as well as into a drop in the quality of democracy (Mateos and Penades 2013).

4.3. Change of trust in the Parliament and the political parties at the individual level in a context of crisis

¹⁴ This finding is consistent with other research: Medina, using longitudinal data for Catalonia (Spain) observes also this abrupt decline in the levels of trust not only for the two institutions here analyzed; furthermore, she also describes such a pattern for several other institutions: city councils and “diputacions” (a local institution), the court, the public administration, the police, and also the European Union and the central government and the Generalitat de Catalunya, among others (2013).

This research is concerned primarily with political attitudes change, which has to be understood as a change in political considerations that can be both positive or negative (Zaller 1992). Particularly, the aim of this research is limited to the change of trust within Spanish individuals towards their political institutions, namely the Spanish parliament and the political parties, in the specific context of deep economic crisis, for the period 2010-2012.

Literature about political attitudes has suggested that political attitudes are mostly stable along time. The “impressionable years” model, for instance, denies people’s capabilities for learning during their life; and the aging stability hypothesis, considers that age should make people be more stable in their political attitudes (Jennings 2007). However, it is shown than in some cases political attitudes change, for which this assumptions might be not true. Thus, people are open to change, so political attitudes, including trust, might change along time in a same individual. Actually, and following a rationalist approach –to some extent in contraposition with the so-called “political culture” approach (Almond and Verba 1989)–, we would say that “individuals construct and reconstruct their political responses and behaviour on the basis of the combination of available information, resources and constraints” (Whitefield and Evans 1999, 131). Indeed, there is some evidence in the case of Finland, Sweden, New Zealand and Japan about the fact that “real world problems caused citizens to revise their political opinions”, as Holmberg points out (1999).

We have seen in previous section that political trust is considered to be an action based on the belief about the future behaviour of the institutions in relation to our knowledge about their past behaviour. Thus, it has implicit the notion of risk, and also a judgement component, by which we accept that the object of trust might behave not as we expect, although our presumption is that the object’s past behaviour is consistent.

I have mentioned as well that under some specific circumstances, individuals’ confidence is more needed than ever, and that trust in those circumstances –I refer to situations such an economic crisis– is even less seldom unconditional towards the institutions object of trust. All these nuances lead us to think that under some circumstances, in which the environment is affecting as well the personal life of citizens, political attitudes may suffer changes.

In any country in that given situation of deep crisis, the role of the public institutions in solving problems and providing what citizens require is crucial. In this vein, perceptions of

how public institutions are performing their roles in a context of economic crisis might be different with regard to each individual. The crisis effects vary from person to person, but in current days, individuals can easily feel to be filled with a sense of grievance.

In the current economic situation in Spain, to experience a reverse in the good work of the economy at the personal-level is not an isolated event, like it used to be in the past. Even though unemployment is a phenomenon that is not new, it has never been as spread among the Spanish population as it is in our days. Contrarily, it is perceived as a direct consequence of the crisis. This situation can easily lead to a general feeling of frustration, not only at the personal-level because of a situation of economic loss or unemployment, but also at the collective-level, because of the general economic situation of the country.

With regards to the individual-level effects of the crisis, unemployment has several psychological effects on the individual, which in turn can be related to the feeling of being involved in the social and political environment. When there is a loss of economic resources, there is also a loss in other factors and sources, such as the extent to which the individual is interested in politics or his political efficacy (Schur 2003). Thus, individuals can feel incompetent in both internal (Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990, 290) and external political efficacy (which refers “to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (ibídem 1990, 290).

This idea concords with the consideration of Zmerli and Newton about that winners are trusting, in a way that “the better the system works, the more trustworthy citizens are and the more trust people are likely to express in each other” (2011, 70). So it is a circular situation, in the way that those individuals that are under the “winners” category –that is, “those in dominant or majority groups, people of high class, status, income and education, the happy and satisfied, and individuals who benefit from better health and post-materialist security” are those that more frequently express to have social trust (2011, ibídem), idea that can be extended to political trust.

In this sense, the higher the personal grievances suffered because of the crisis, the higher the decline in the level of trust in political institutions. This argument is reinforced by the approach of Citrin and Green (1986), who consider that economic success –and decisive

leadership– are sources for increasing political trust. Also, Listhaug found that confidence in parliament has a statistically significant relationship with economic evaluations (2006, 237)

This argument suggests that it is reasonable to expect that those citizens whose personal economic situation has been altered due to the general economic environment of deep crisis, namely unemployment or loss of income, will be as well those accusing more the decline of trust in parliament and political parties. Thus, those individuals whose personal economic situation is better are also more prone to express higher levels of trust towards the political institutions of their society. On the contrary, the expectation is that those individuals which personal economic situation is worst would tend to express lower levels of trust; in sum, to be unemployed or a loss in income may explain change in the levels of political trust. In this direction points out the work of Margalit, who proved that political preferences are affected by job loss (2011). On the other hand, unemployment has been associated with low trust (Brehm and Rahn 1997). Additionally, trust has been associated with *satisfaction with own's life as a whole*, that is subjective well-being, happiness, and so (Inglehart 1999).

Although my main argument has been already stated, surely there are other elements explaining political trust at the individual-level. Following Zmerli and Newton quotation about the idea that winners are trusting (2011 (see quotation some paragraphs above)) the suggestion is that the more the institutions perform effectively in managing the economy, the more likely the citizens will trust those institutions. This idea is supported by several other authors (see, for instance, McAllister 1999; Miller and Listhaug 1999; van der Meer and Dekker 2011; Rose and Mishler 2011). In other words, according to how well (or bad) citizens perceive their institutions perform both politically and economically, their levels of trust or distrust will vary. This point suggests, thus, that political trust is more a consequence rather than a cause of institutional performance.

Additionally, and recovering the idea stated before about that trust is based on previous knowledge about future actions, it is linked the idea by which the perception about future is also relevant in explaining trust towards political institutions. In this direction, those individuals whose perception about how the economy will work better in one year will be also those individuals trusting more the political institutions in the present. Contrarily, those individuals whose expectations are that in one year the economic situation will be worst will be as well the individuals trusting lower in current days. Moreover, political trust it is not just

about future, it is also about the current situation. In this sense, those individuals whose evaluation of the economy in the present is worst, would tend to be also the individuals trusting less in their political institutions.

In addition, political trust is “most frequently expressed by those who win politically in that they identify with the party (...) in government” (Zmerli and Newton 2011, 71). In other words, those individuals that identify with the party in power, or that voted for it, would be also more likely to express higher levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties than those that did not.

Despite referring solely to trust in the government, Listhaug and Ringdal develop an argument in concordance with the approach of Zmerli and Newton. Listhaug and Ringdal observe that “the standard model to explain variations in political trust at the individual level include two main categories of independent variables: political distance and performance evaluations” (2007, 6). The reasons for selecting those variables are, in their view, quite clear. On one hand, and regarding to political distance, the idea is that the higher the distance between government and the citizens, the greater the chances to find out a decline in trust. On the other hand, the better the citizens consider the government is performing, the greater the chances they trust on it (Listhaug and Ringdal 2007). In my view, both arguments are consistent and also valid for my research purposes. Thus, if a citizen has given her support to the party in power in the polls (voted for the government, that is, specific support (Easton 1975)), we can expect this individual feeling more comfortable, generally speaking, with the other public institutions. also Fuchs *et al* support this idea, saying that “there is little reason for citizens whose party is in power to believe that democratic mechanisms are not functioning as they should”, and they add, “particularly when the mechanisms work to their advantage” (Fuchs, Guidorosso, and Svensson 1995, 347).

Furthermore, those citizens who reveal to be close to a party, no matters which, will also evaluate better the political parties –in general terms, as institution– and, extensively, the parliament. In this direction goes the work of Listhaug, who says precisely that the expectation is " that citizens who feel close to parties will have greater confidence in political institutions than those who are not aligned with parties" and, more specifically, she adds that "party members have greater confidence in parliament than those who are not members" (2006, 238).

5. Research questions and hypotheses

From the arguments exposed above, in the empirical analysis I expect to answer two research questions. First, I attempt to address whether or not there is a change and a decline in the levels political trust of the Spanish citizens at the short-time level, by focusing in trust in two political institutions: the Parliament and the political parties. Thus, the assumption is that there is, *de facto*, change in trust in those institutions. Hence, a first hypothesis of work arises:

H₁: Citizens levels of trust towards the Parliament and the political parties change at the short-time level.

Second, I pursue to give some explanations for the individual-level variations in trust in the Spanish parliament and trust in the political parties in Spain, for the accounted period 2010-2012. As explained in previous section, there are some arguments that encourage the idea by which personal economic circumstances may shape the citizens' levels of trust in their political institutions. The idea is that trust in political institutions tends to be variable within individuals according to their personal economic situation. We have seen the mechanism by which those individuals with the highest socio-economic status and incomes are the most trusting in institutions, according to the "winners" idea pointed out by Zmerli and Newton (2011). Also, we have seen that in the specific context of a deep economic crisis, the reverse situation is expectable. More specifically, the argument explained above is that among those citizens whose personal economic circumstances have suffered from a downturn in the current context of crisis (loss of income, unemployment) will accuse greater decline in their levels of trust towards the political institutions. Previous research mentioned above support this idea, to the extent that both unemployment and loss of income have been associated with low trust.

Accordingly, I test the following hypothesis of change in trust in the political institutions in a context of economic crisis:

H₂: Individuals whose personal economic circumstances –loss of income, unemployment– have suffered from a downturn during the economic crisis, would change their political trust towards lower levels of trust.

Furthermore, political trust has been linked to satisfaction with life as a whole, in a way that the higher the level of subjective satisfaction an individual has, the higher her level of trust towards political institutions.

H₃: The higher the levels of satisfaction with life as a whole that an individual has, the more likely she is to trust high the parliament and the political parties.

Regarding the institutions' performance, the expectation is that the perception of how well (or bad) institutions perform both politically and economically, the greater (or lower) the political trust individuals will have towards them. In this sense, I will test the following hypothesis:

H₄: The higher the perception that the institutions are performing effectively in managing the economy, the more likely the citizens will trust those institutions.

As said, political trust is based on both evaluations of the current situation but also about future situation. In this regard, future expectations about the economic performance are also relevant, in the sense that those individuals whose perception about the economy in one year is worst, would be also those whose levels of political trust are lower.

H₅: The worst the expectations about the economic performance in one year, the lower the levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties.

On the other hand, those individuals who voted for the party in government are expected to express higher levels of trust towards the parliament and the political parties. In the same direction, those individuals who feel attached to any party (no matters which), will also express higher levels of trust towards those institutions. The reasoning behind these assumptions is that when the distance between the government and the citizens is higher, it is more likely to find out low levels of political trust. Furthermore, to support the party in government will lead the individual to feel closer not only to the government, which is logical, but also to the other political institutions compounding the political system such are the parliament and the political parties. Concerned with these ideas, two further hypotheses arise:

H₆: Individuals that voted for the party in power will express higher levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties than those that did not support the party of government.

H₇: To be attached to a political party, regardless of which political party, increases the general level of trust towards political institutions, particularly towards the parliament and the political parties, than those who do not feel close to parties.

6. Analysis of trust in parliament and political parties in Spain, 2010-2012

Likewise the extended debate about the conceptualization, denomination, causes and consequences of political trust, there is also debate about how to measure political trust (Nannestad 2008; Marien 2011). My approach in this research at the changes in trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties at the individual-level in Spain is double. First, I analyse transitions between waves, which is a classic way to assess stability or change when working with panel data (Kuhn 2012). Second, after constructing an index as a measure of the trust in institutions of representative democracy, I use regression analysis to assess to what extent unemployment has impact on the reported levels of confidence in political institutions, as stated in the hypotheses. The period object of study is the years 2010-2012.

6.1. Case study: Spain

As seen in previous sections, Spain as a case study has basically two particularities that turn the case of study in a specially relevant and interesting case for my research purposes.

I refer, on one hand, to the particular economic context of crisis that the country is suffering, with several consequences not only in the economy, also on the personal life of Spanish citizens. One of the more visible and relevant costs of this crisis is probably unemployment, which recently reached a level of 27% (first term of 2013).

On the other hand, I relate to the low levels of political trust that the country has, and a declining trend is observed for both trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties, with an abrupt decline in the last times¹⁵.

As stated earlier in this research, apparently there is a link between these two phenomenons of huge economic crisis and low levels of political trust, in what the latter appears to be a consequence of the former at least in what refers to the last years, once started the economic crisis, and particularly since 2011 on.

6.2. Data

To test the hypotheses presented in the previous section, I base my research on panel data of the Research Group “Democracy, Elections and Citizenship” – Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), collected altogether with the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), to which from now on I would refer as “Polat”.

The panel “Polat” is mostly about political attitudes, and consists on interviews to the same people within a three years interval between the first wave and the last one¹⁶: for the first wave, the field work was between November and December 2010. In 2011, two waves were conducted in May and in November –the second and the third wave–. The fourth wave’ interviews were conducted in May 2012. Finally, the fifth wave fieldwork corresponds with May 2013.

In the first wave of the panel “Polat”, 2,100 individuals participated, being this amount of people the original sample. In the second survey, a 13.67% were lost. From the second survey to the third one, a 14.24% of the individuals did not participate, and a 9.14% among the third and the fourth wave. So far, a 62.95% of the initial respondents answered the four waves.

¹⁵ See Graph 1 in previous pages.

¹⁶ However, note that the data I use here corresponds to the four out five waves of the panel, due to the fact that fifth wave was not available at the moment of performing these analyses. This research will be updated once the last wave will be available, hopefully in the near future.

Finally, 1,717 individuals reported their confidence on the Spanish Parliament, on the Spanish Government and on the political parties in the two out four available waves¹⁷.

Panel data has the special property to allow researchers to follow-up the same individuals along time, and also allows establishing causal mechanisms, for which its use here is the best possible approach to test the specified hypotheses.

6.3. Dependent variable

This paper focuses on political trust as a function of confidence in the Spanish parliament and confidence in the political parties, as explained in the section “2.4 *Trust in the institutions of representative democracy: the Parliament and the political parties*”. These two items follow a standard operationalization and both of them were originally formulated in the same terms: “*How strongly you personally trust each one of the following institutions?*”, followed-up by a list including the institutions. Each variable is a 11-point scale, where categories go from the 0-point in the scale meaning “no confidence at all” to the 10-point in the scale meaning “a great deal”.

To the extent that political trust attitudes reinforce each other due to the fact that both are related and all of them have implications for the proper governance (Hetherington 1998), I construct an index of political trust based on trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties. The new constructed variable, a composite scale, has mainly two advantages: on one hand, the number of dependent variables keeps in one; on the other hand, variability is larger and extensively the results are more reliable than single indicators separately.

6.4. Explanatory variables

The main explanatory group of variables in this research are measures of economic position. As stated in the previous sections, my main interest lies on explaining political trust changes paying attention to the individual economic factors accounting for variations in trust levels.

¹⁷ The question about trust in the Spanish parliament and trust in the political parties appears in wave 3 to 5, although data from wave 5 is not still available, as said.

Thus, on one hand, I take into account three measures of objective economic position: a drop in income, unemployment and lose of job (different of unemployment because it refers to those individuals employed in previous wave).

Table A2 (in the appendix) contains the descriptive of sample respondents, by wave, for the explanatory variables employment status and income. It is shown that the percentage of unemployed respondents increases wave to wave, and that the percentage of those losing their job (among previously employed) is quite relevant: 5.74% of the respondents lost their job in wave 2 in relation to wave 1; a 7.23% suffered it in wave 3 in relation to wave 2 and a 6.06% in the last two waves analyzed.

On the other hand, I account for the subjective feeling concerning economic conditions; in this case, I work with two variables, such are the current economic satisfaction and the future expectation about the work of the economy in one year.

Among the independent variables analysed, there is also a set of political attitudes: political interest, vote for the party in government, performance and ideology (measured in terms of the left-right scale). Furthermore, closeness to a political party is considered.

Also, I work with several control variables, in which there is include the level of studies, and respondents' age. Satisfaction with life as a whole is also considered.

Note that all the explanatory variables (see Table A1 in the Appendix) considered are time-variant and the regression analysis is a fixed-effects regression, which aim is to eliminate the person specific constant just addressing by using within person variation. In this way we can account for the causes of changes within a person.

7. Results

This section is divided in two parts. First, I address a descriptive part in which the amount and directionality of change in trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties at the individual-level are assessed. Second, I develop regression analysis with the purpose of measuring change in trust in the parliament and the political parties at the individual-level and

assess the causality of this change, also figuring out whether or not the hypotheses of work fit for the Spanish case and the available data.

7.1. Description of the changes

In some previous research¹⁸ based on the “Polat” database I have shown that there is a big deal of change –of about the 70%– in trust on the Spanish parliament. The amount of change for the political parties is a little bit lower but also quite important, of 61%. Another relevant finding consists on observing a great amount of observations changing to lower values on the scale. That is to say that the variation across observations is not only really significant but also follows a similar pattern, experiencing shift towards lower levels of trustiness along time. Concretely, by examining transitions across waves and along time for addressing change within individuals, we observe that considering trust in the Spanish Parliament, a 46% of the observations move to low values on the scale, that is, have a negative change. About the political parties, it is slightly small, but still quite high, of the 37%. In view of these results, summarized in Table 1, we can say that there is a big amount of gross change and that this change is mostly towards negative evaluations.

TABLE 1. CHANGE ACROSS TIME AND DIRECTION OF CHANGE FOR TRUST IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT AND TRUST IN THE POLITICAL PARTIES (%)

And how strongly you personally trust...	Gross change	Positive change / movement to high values	Negative change / movement to low values	Observations
The Spanish Parliament	71	24	46	1,717
Political Parties	61	24	37	1,717

This table has been built from the examination of transitions within individuals along time. I have used the data from each variable for the 4th first waves of the Panel “Polat”, period 2010-2012.

Moving forward in the description of the changes, we look at the two variables of trust in political institutions, parliament and political parties, more in detail. Concretely, and following the example of Miller and Listhaug (1999), I show that at the short-term level,

¹⁸ The previous research to which I refer to was presented at the 7th International Conference of Panel Data Users in Switzerland on February 14th and 15th, 2013 (University of Lausanne), titled “Changes in political attitudes. Evidence from a panel survey in Spain (2010-12)”.

economic expectations affect political trust. Table 2 display the change in the mean of political trust by change in the national economy expectations for the period analyzed.

TABLE 2. CHANGE IN POLITICAL TRUST BY CHANGE IN THE NATIONAL ECONOMY EXPECTATIONS, 2010-2012

Change in National Economy Expectations	Change in the mean of Political Trust
Better to worse	-0,31
Better/Same to worse	-0,80
No change	-0,33
Worse/Same to same/Better	-0,46
Worse to better	0,08
Total sample	-0,49
n (observations)	3.696

Notes: The first column *Change in National Economy Expectations* refers to changes in the expectation the economy will do in the future when asked. For a matter of clarification, the “Better to worse” means that when the respondent was interviewed in the first time they said that the economic situation in one year will be “Better” meanwhile in the second time they were asked for the same issue, their response moved to “Worse”. Thus, the second column *Change in the mean of Political Trust* indicates the extent to which the mean of trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties altogether, that is, the constructed index, changed in the mentioned period. Finally, by *total sample* I refer to the global change in the mean of trust in the parliament and trust in the political parties in Spain for all the panel respondents.

Then, I also we look at how political trust is distributed by considering five-categories of answers instead of the 11-point scale. I contemplate two periods in time, namely t_1 and t_2 (November 2011 and May 2012). In these two points in time, and broadly speaking, the majority of the observations are concentrated in the two negative evaluations –that is, in “no confidence at all” and “negative evaluations”– and in the mid-position –the “neutral evaluations” category–.

Comparing the levels of confidence in t_2 in relation to t_1 , there is an increase of observations in the two more negative evaluations. Furthermore, these two categories are the categories that increase more in the period analyzed. Accordingly, the other categories loose observations in all cases, by which their sign is negative (see Table 3).

We observe the described pattern especially for trust in the Spanish Parliament. For the particular case of confidence in the political parties, the model is similar, with the particularity that most of the observations are concentrated in the category “no confidence at all”, which is

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also the category that increases most from t_1 to t_2 . Due to the amount of observations in such category, the other categories have a negative sign.

TABLE 3. DISTRIBUTION OF THE TRUST IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES 2011-2012 (%)

	Spanish Parliament			Political parties		
	t_1	t_2	$t_2 - t_1$	t_1	t_2	$t_2 - t_1$
No confidence at all	24.91	32.96	8,05	50.53	58.65	8,12
Negative evaluations	29.31	31.51	2,2	29.00	26.91	-2,09
Neutral evaluations	36.08	29.64	-6,44	17.99	12.64	-5,35
Positive evaluations	8.49	5.47	-3,02	2.02	1.63	-0,39
A great deal	1.21	0.41	-0,8	0.45	0.17	-0,28
N		1,717			1,717	

Once described the aggregate change, and looking for further detail about the distribution and magnitude of wins and losses, I approach to the change and observed movements within Spanish individuals in the levels of trust in Parliament, on one hand, and trust in the political parties, on the other hand. Tables 4 and 5 display intra-individual change for the two points in time analyzed.

TABLE 4. CHANGES IN TRUST IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2011 AND MAY 2012 (ROW %)

		Trust in the Spanish Parliament in t_2					Total
		No confidence at all	Negative evaluations	Neutral evaluations	Positive evaluations	A great deal	
Trust in the Spanish Parliament in t_1	No confidence at all	69.19	18.96	10.43	1.42	0.00	(493)
	Negative evaluations	33.59	43.44	20.85	2.12	0.00	(580)
	Neutral evaluations	14.05	33.01	47.06	5.56	0.33	(714)
	Positive evaluations	7.64	20.83	44.44	25.69	1.39	(168)
	A great deal	14.29	19.05	23.81	28.57	14.29	(24)
	Total	(566)	(541)	(509)	(94)	(7)	

Source: Panel "Polat", November 2011, May 2012
N = 1,717

Regarding Table 4, about changes in trust in the Spanish Parliament, we observe a high amount of stability among those trusting less the institution (69%). Also, for all the categories

observed, from t_1 to t_2 there is a shift towards negative evaluations that is much more important than the shift towards positive evaluations. As observed before, most of the observations are placed in the two more negative positions, and also in the neutral evaluations, being the more positive evaluations a minor.

Similar patterns than the described above follow the changes in trust in the Spanish political parties (Table 5). In this particular case, the number of observations in the negative positions is larger in comparison with trust in the Spanish Parliament. Nonetheless, and like in the previous case, there is a clear movement towards negative positions for all the categories of study and for the period analyzed (t_1 to t_2).

TABLE 5. CHANGES IN TRUST IN THE POLITICAL PARTIES BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2011 AND MAY 2012 (ROW %)

		Trust in the political parties in t_2					
		No confidence at all	Negative evaluations	Neutral evaluations	Positive evaluations	A great deal	Total
Trust in the bank political parties in t_1	No confidence at all	72.33	20.75	6.60	0.31	0.00	(733)
	Negative evaluations	33.07	52.26	14.04	0.62	0.00	(717)
	Neutral evaluations	15.28	38.08	42.23	4.40	0.00	(469)
	Positive evaluations	14.58	12.50	60.42	12.50	0.00	(54)
	A great deal	33.33	0.00	16.67	33.33	16.67	(6)
	Total	(740)	(620)	(325)	(31)	(1)	

Source: Panel "Polat", November 2011, May 2012
N = 1,717

At this point of my research, I can confirm the first hypothesis of work, in which I stated that " H_1 : Citizens levels of trust towards the parliament and the political parties change at the short-time level".

7.2. Explaining change in the trust in parliament and political parties at the individual-level

From the regression analysis I have run for explaining change in the trust in parliament and political parties at the individual-level, we can confirm some of the hypotheses of work but we have to reject others. Table 6 contains the results of the fixed effects regression analysis performed.

First of all, there is one set of measures, the so-called *objective measures of economic position*, that do not have the expected effect on the constructed index of political trust. Thus, probably the more surprising result is the relative to the situation of unemployment. Such situation, that I thought to have a negative effect on political trust, has not such predicted effect. Contrarily, its sign is positive and it is not significant (0.161). In addition, the H₂ also referred to the loss of income as an explanatory factor for a change towards lower levels of trust. With regard to this variable, its sign is as expected (it is negative, so the fact of have a loss in the personal income affects negatively the level of trust) although it is not significant (-0.091). We cannot confirm either this point; although our theoretical arguments appeared to be quite appropriate and previous research has already find results in the direction of my hypothesis. In short, we reject the following hypothesis: “H₂: *Individuals whose personal economic circumstances –loss of income, unemployment– have suffered from a downturn during the economic crisis, would change their political trust towards lower levels of trust*”.

Other variables have been introduced under the *objective measures of economic position* category. On one hand, there is an objective measure of income, which sign is not as expectable (it is negative) and it is not significant (-0.018). I introduced this variable in order to reinforce the hypothesis H₂, to the extent that according to Zmerli and Newton perspective about the “winners”, those with higher income would be also those trusting more, which can be read as the contrary to the stated hypothesis.

Furthermore, I added a variable for assessing change in the working position by comparing individuals’ status in relation to their previous working status (in the previous wave). Thus, by “lostjob” I contemplate those individuals that were not working in t₂ but did in t₁. In this particular case, its sign does not follow the expectation: it is positive, although close to zero, and not significant (0.045). As said, we have to reject H₂.

Nevertheless, a part from these measures of economic position, I introduced also variables for measuring *subjective feelings about economic* conditions. In this case, both of the introduced

variables work as expected. On one hand, there is a measure about the current work of the economy, which is positive and significant (0.179*). Moreover, the expectation about the economy in one year, that is, the measure about the future, has as well a positive sign, and it is also significant (0.161*). This finding confirms that personal evaluations about the economy, the current and the future, are really important predictors of the current levels of political trust of citizens. By this, we confirm hypotheses 4 and 5: “*H₄: The higher the perception that the institutions are performing effectively in managing the economy, the more likely the citizens will trust those institutions*” and “*H₅: The worst the expectations about the economic performance in one year, the lower the levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties*”.

In reference to the political considerations, the variables work as expected only partially. First, to feel close to a party (to any party) is found to be positive and significant (0,387***), likewise political interest (0.225***), and government’ performance has the expected sign and it is positive (0.213***), likewise interest in politics. However, vote for the party in government (0.196) has the sign as expected but it is not a significant variable. Thus, the effect of evaluate positively the task of the government is not in line with voting for the party in government. Nevertheless, we can accept two hypotheses. First, we accept the hypothesis based on the political parties’ attachment, “*H₇: To be attached to a political party, regardless of which political party, increases the general level of trust towards political institutions, particularly towards the parliament and the political parties, than those who do not feel close to parties*”.

Also, we confirm hypothesis 6, by which “*H₆: Individuals that voted for the party in power will express higher levels of trust in the parliament and the political parties than those that did not support the party of government*”.

With regards to the third hypothesis of work, by which I stated that “*H₃: The higher the levels of satisfaction with life as a whole that an individual has, the more likely she is to trust high the parliament and the political parties*”, we can confirm this extent, because the results of the regression indicate that the higher the satisfaction with life as a whole, the higher the political trust of individuals (0.085***).

TABLE 6. FIXED-EFFECTS REGRESSION ANALYSIS: EXPLAINING INTRA-INDIVIDUAL CHANGE IN TRUST IN THE PARLIAMENT AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN SPAIN

	Coefficients	Standard Errors
<u>Economic considerations</u>		
<u>Objective measures of economic position</u>		
Total income	-0.018	(0.041)
Loss of income	-0.1097	(0.091)
Unemployed	0.161	(0.202)
Lost job (in relation to previous observation in time)	0.045	(0.185)
<u>Subjective feelings concerning economic conditions</u>		
Evaluation of the economy	0.179*	(0.058)
Expectation about the economy in one year (future)	0.161*	(0.065)
<u>Political considerations</u>		
Attachment to a party	0.387***	(-0.107)
Political interest	0.225*	(0.077)
Government' performance	0.213***	(0.030)
Voted for the party in government	0.196*	(0.108)
Left-right scale (0 "right", 10 "left")	-0.105	(0.058)
<u>Personal-life evaluations</u>		
Satisfaction with life as a whole	0.085***	(0.019)
<u>Controls</u>		
Age	-0.278***	(0.068)
Level of education	0.128	(0.081)
<u>Constant</u>		
Constant	8.964***	(2.321)
Observations	3,645	
R-squared (<i>within</i>)	0.1138	

Standard errors in parentheses.

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

8. Discussion

I find rather few traces of such assumptions about that personal economic circumstances push individuals to trust less, at least in what refers to the objective measures of unemployment and loss of income. Contrarily, subjective feelings towards the economy, such as the evaluation of the current economic situation, and the expectation in one year, work as expected.

This finding pushes me to contemplate an alternative approach. The main point of my argument, presented in previous sections, is that the importance of personal economic grievances is plausible to have an impact on the support that individuals give to their representative institutions. The alternative argument I suggest is that supporting political institutions is not really influenced by personal economic grievances and that the connection between economic conditions and politics is based on collective political and economic judgements. Or in other words, personal economic grievances are of relative importance when relating to individuals' support to their political institutions. Thus, to experience grievances in the personal economy instead of creating lower support towards institutions gives an opportunity to individuals to think more collectively and move their orientations according to the general perception of declining personal economic well-being or by unemployment experiences, but not linked to the personal economic situation.

Actually, this suggestion has been found to be true when referring to discontent and political behaviour. Kinder and Kiewiet (1979) found that there is relation between the economy and the political behaviour, although it might not be in the expected direction. Thus, they found that what individuals do under the situation of collective crisis is to think globally instead of thinking egoistically. Then, citizens perform a sociotropic vote instead of a egotropic vote. The authors concluded in their research that congressional voting is rarely based on “perceptions of declining personal financial well-being or by unemployment experiences” contrary to what they call “personal economic grievances explanation”. This suggestion applied to my research purpose would need to be developed in further research.

Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics for the variables in the analysis

Variables	Description	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	N*	Waves
<i>Political trust</i>							
pol_trust	Trust in the Spanish Government and trust in the political parties (index 2 items)	0	10	2,398	2,149	3.696	3, 4**
P5_8_1	Trust in the Spanish Parliament	1	5	2,862	2,495	3.696	3, 4
P5_8_1	Trust in the political parties	1	5	2,148	0,984	3.696	3, 4
<i>Economic considerations</i>							
<u>Objective measures of economic position</u>							
income	Net income	0	10	3,843	1,851	8.170	1, 2, 3, 4
incomedrop	Decrease in income (1: decrease in income, 0: otherwise)	0	1	0,229	0,420	5.433	2, 3, 4*
unemployed	In situation of unemployment (1: unemployed, 0: others)	0	1	0,195	0,396	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
lostjob	Lost job (among previously working)	0	1	0,064	0,244	5.509	2, 3, 4*
<u>Subjective feelings concerning economic conditions</u>							
eco	Evaluation of the economy	1	5	1,882	0,805	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
ecoexpect	Economic expectations in 1 year	1	3	2,116	0,703	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
<i>Political considerations</i>							
polinterest	Political interest	1	4	2,391	0,839	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
performance	Government' performance	1	5	3,912	1,012	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
votegov	Voted for party in government (1: yes, 0: did not vote, not vote for the party in government)	0	1	0,270	0,444	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
Lrscale_	Left-right scale (0 right, 5 left)	1	5	2,635	1,077	8.211	1, 2, 3, 4
<i>Personal-life evaluations</i>							
satisfaction	Satisfaction with life as a whole	0	10	6,084	2,310	3.696	3, 4
<i>Controls</i>							
age	Age in years	16	45	31,888	7,217	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4
study	Level of Education	1	6	4,180	1,934	8.229	1, 2, 3, 4

Notes:

* Observations

** calculated variable, it is the change experienced by individuals from wave to wave, so there is no collected data for the 1st wave.

votegov: refers to the party in power. There is a change in the party in power between the 3rd and 4th wave, changing from PSOE to PP.

Table A2. Descriptive of Sample Respondents, by Wave

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
Employment Status				
Unemployed	15.33	20.06	21.42	21.67
Lost job (among previously employed)	-	5.74	7.23	6.06
Income				
Mean of income*	4,03	3,86	3,80	3,64
Drop in income	-	22.13	22.84	23.71

*Note that the values of *Mean of income* have to be interpreted in the context of a 1-10 scale

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