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Political engagement and attitudes among young citizens and the crisis: evidence from Southern Europe

Abstract

This article explores changes in the relationship between attitudinal and participatory dimensions of politics, and age in Southern European countries. We argue that attitudes towards the political system and institutions and engagement in politics are not necessarily linked, and that looking at their combination allows defining the ways citizens relate to the political sphere. Indeed, there has been little attention on how the economic crisis has affected this relationship, in particular among the young, one of groups most hit by the crisis in Southern Europe. To address these points, this article develops a typology of citizens and analyses heterogeneities based on age, time and countries. Using all available rounds of the European Social Survey for Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain with data spanning from 2002 to 2017, this article finds that the relationship between citizens and politics has changed over time among the four countries, that young citizens seem to present different patterns, although country differences are not strong in this regard.

Keywords

Attitudes towards political institutions, political engagement, youth, economic crisis, Southern Europe.

Introduction

This article explores changes in the relationship between attitudinal and participatory dimensions of politics, and age in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The economic crisis that hit Southern Europe (Bosco & Verney 2012), had relevant political consequences for the democracies in the region (Morlino & Raniolo 2017). Democratic satisfaction and political trust steeply declined (Muro & Vidal 2017; Quaranta & Martini 2017), contentious politics increased (Flesher Fominaya 2017) and party systems changed with the emergence of challenger parties, bringing citizens back into conventional politics (Della Porta et al. 2017).

While there is evidence that the economic crisis affected political engagement and attitudes (Bartels & Bermeo 2014), we argue that the literature has missed two points. The first is that political attitudes and engagement in politics are not necessarily related. Following the literature on political culture (Almond & Verba 1965; Norris 2002; Welzel & Dalton 2014), we argue that participatory and attitudinal elements can help define the patterns through which citizens may relate to the political system. Political attitudes and engagement can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and thus can be combined. For instance, we argue, following Norris (2002), that while favourable attitudes towards democracy or political institutions may be low, this does not imply citizens retreat from politics completely. This means that one can be dissatisfied with democracy or be distrustful of political institutions, but still be engaged in political participation. In contrast, a citizen can hold positive attitudes towards politics, yet they might be inactive. Finally, one can be distant from politics with regard to both participation and attitudes, denoting a strong political detachment and alienation, or can be positive towards politics, showing positive attitudes and engagement. Looking at this combination, therefore, we assess whether the way of *being a citizen* in Southern European democracies has changed over time, especially during a period characterised by dramatic economic changes.

The second point this article addresses concerns whether younger citizens relate to politics differently than their older counterparts in terms of combinations of political attitudes and participation. The young have often been described in the literature as being less involved in politics, with lower levels of political interest and negative political attitudes compared to the older population (Zukin et al. 2006). Nevertheless, research has shown that younger citizens are not distant from politics *per se*, but that they tend to experience politics in a different way from the older generations (Dalton 2009). They prefer different forms of engagement, have different citizenship norms, political preferences and attitudes. In this regard, recent research on Southern Europe has looked at the patterns of engagement and political attitudes of youth (Anduiza, Cristancho & Sabucedo 2012; García-Albacete, Lorente & Martín 2015; Sloam 2016; Zamponi & Fernández González 2017). Nevertheless, the point this article stresses is that young citizens are also different from older ones with respect to how they experienced the recent economic crisis. In fact, the youth experienced unprecedented economic struggles resulting from rising

unemployment levels and poverty risks that impacted their prospects and, therefore, their ability to become independent in the years of the crisis (Aassve, Cottini & Vitali 2013). In this respect, research on Southern Europe has shown that economic stress and uncertainty worked as a driver for the mobilisation and political dissatisfaction of the younger segments of the population (Thijssen et al. 2015). Yet, there has been little attention paid to the consequences of the economic crisis on the ways young citizens experience politics in Southern Europe, in particular because the four countries reacted differently to these economic changes.

This article contributes towards improving our understanding of how citizens relate to politics and how this relationship changes over time, across countries and within the population at large. In fact, our aim is, on the one hand, to provide a temporal and comparative outlook of a combination of dimensions that have often been associated with political culture, while on the other, given that the economic crisis has been particularly hard on the youth, we explore whether this has had greater consequences on this group, in order to understand whether the young have become more distant or closer to politics in terms of political attitudes and engagement.

Using all available rounds of the European Social Survey from 2002 to 2017 for Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, we find temporal heterogeneities in the distribution of types of citizens in the four countries. We show that after the beginning of the economic crisis the share of alienated and mobilised citizens increased, while the share of passive and allegiant citizens decreased. We also find that, across countries, young respondents are less likely to be allegiant and mobilised, and more likely to be alienated and passive, while these patterns do not change particularly over time across the four countries.

Citizens in Southern Europe at times of crisis

A typology of citizens

The way citizens relate to the political system is a common topic of the literature on political culture. This concept, following Almond and Verba, can be defined as ‘the particular distribution of patterns of orientation towards political objects among the members of a nation’ (1965, p. 13). The study of political culture also carries an important behavioural dimension. As Welzel and Inglehart (2017, p. 292) put it, ‘in so far as certain patterns of political behaviour are habitualised among significant population segments, they can be considered as behavioural manifestations of political culture.’ Thus, scholars have complemented their study of the attitudes of national publics with analyses of different modes of political participation, thereby portraying the ways in which democratic citizenship is understood and practised (Dalton 2000).

The literature presents various arguments on the changes in the attitudinal and participatory dimensions of being a citizen. By the turn of the century, several authors argued that decreasing levels of trust in authorities and conventional political participation were a

symptom of wider civic disengagement and democratic malaise. Putnam, whose work on the sources of the decline in social capital in the United States sparked an intense debate, noted that the last decades the 20th century were marked by the consolidation of comparable trends in the European context (Putnam 2002). Several authors have thus examined the relationship between changing attitudes towards political authorities on the one hand, with the emergence of innovative modes of political participation on the other. Kaase (1999), for instance, finds non-institutionalised political participation is fostered by high levels of interpersonal trust *and* low levels of trust in institutions.

Whether such developments in political culture are ultimately positive or negative for the quality of democracy remains open to debate. Both Norris (2002) and Dalton (2014) provide positive interpretations of this evolution as they portray contemporary citizens as being more prone to participate in a variety of ways, including through more demanding modes of political action in order to hold authorities accountable. Torcal and Lago (2006), on the other hand, show that the increase in political disaffection is associated with a growing gap between the elites and the public.

The preceding discussion helps us frame the different ways by which citizens in democracies can relate to their political systems. We can distinguish two distinct dimensions (Torcal & Montero 2006). The first concerns attitudes towards institutions and the extent to which citizens trust and display a positive orientation towards the democratic regime. The other dimension deals with the extent to which individuals engage with politics. By having them interact it is possible to get a more nuanced understanding of the link between citizens and politics (Norris 1999).

The combination of these two dimensions generates a two-by-two typology defining profiles of citizens, which we briefly describe as follows. ‘Allegiant’ citizens are those who display positive attitudes towards the political system and institutions and high levels of participation. ‘Mobilised’ citizens espouse a participatory approach to politics, but they nevertheless exhibit lower levels of trust or satisfaction with political institutions and the democratic regime than those in the preceding category. ‘Passive’ citizens, on the other hand, show positive political attitudes, but tend to avoid political engagement. Finally, ‘alienated’ citizens combine lower levels of engagement with negative attitudes towards the system. The four types are therefore patterns through which citizens relate to the political realm: two types, the alienated and the allegiant types, represent citizens who retreat from politics or who are fully involved in it, also from an attitudinal and participatory point of view. The other two types, the passive and mobilised types, represent in-between styles: one favouring the attitudinal and the other the participatory links with politics.

Citizens’ attitudes and participation at times of crisis

At this point, the key question we would like to address is to what extent the distribution of the four types has changed over time and across countries. Research about political culture in Southern Europe is abundant (see Torcal & Magalhães 2009). However, little attention has been paid to how the combination of the two dimensions may have changed after the Great Recession, which has been hypothesised to bring major challenges to the relationship between citizens and their political systems in Southern Europe and elsewhere (Bartels & Bermeo 2014). Recent literature has looked at these two dimensions independently, neglecting their connections.

Regarding the attitudinal dimension, the literature indicates that levels of satisfaction with democracy and trust decreased substantially in Southern Europe in the aftermath of the economic crisis, although they have somewhat recovered since (Kriesi 2018). Cordero and Simón (2016) argue that in peripheral countries the crisis might have fuelled support for attitudes in favour of national sovereignty and democratic rule as opposed to harsh externally-imposed economic programmes. Teixeira, Tsatsanis and Belchior (2014) find that in addition to specific support, diffuse support for democracy also declined in Greece during the crisis, while Quaranta and Martini (2017) and Muro and Vidal (2017) show that the macro-economic conditions are associated with citizen satisfaction with democracy and political trust.

In respect of the comparative patterns of political participation, the clear consequence of the economic crisis in the four countries was an increase in contentious politics, although the literature has noted some important differences. In Italy and Portugal, mobilisations as a consequence of the economic crisis were limited, with the protests in Portugal being defined as ‘mild’ (Accornero & Ramos Pinto 2014). The movements that emerged during the years of austerity did not encounter a sufficiently open political opportunity structure because of the emergence of a coalition committed to austerity policies. In addition, protest was channelled mostly through left-wing parties, unions and other more traditional organisations (Fernandes 2017). In Italy, mobilisations took place at the beginning of the crisis, yet the cycle of protest soon ended (Zamponi 2012). This was because the mainstream left-wing parties did not oppose the austerity measures and supported the technocratic government that was enacting them. However, the feeling of dissatisfaction was channelled through the emergence of protest or challenger parties, such as the Five Star Movement (M5S – Movimento 5 Stelle) and the Northern League (Lega Nord), which called for an increase in institutional participation (Della Porta et al. 2017). In Greece mobilisations reached their peak between 2010 and 2012 (Karyotis & Rüdig 2018), following which SYRIZA attracted many dissatisfied voters and channelled the discontent (Mosca & Quaranta 2017). In Spain, the mobilisations were largely against austerity and the established parties and organisations that were held responsible for the economic crisis (Anduiza, Cristancho & Sabucedo 2012). It was in this context that a protest party, Podemos, emerged to capitalise on the discontent (Orriols & Cordero 2016). Spain is also characterised by

the enlargement of the participation repertory, which contributed to an overall increase in engagement (Feenstra 2015).

The distribution of citizens within the proposed typology across countries and multiple points in time can be expected to be contingent upon the start of the economic crisis. Previous research has shown that even before the crisis there was a significant variation in how widespread dissatisfaction and distrust were in the countries being studied (Torcal & Magalhães 2009) as well as the patterns of political participation (Fernandes et al. 2015). Following the cues of previous research on the role of the economic crisis on citizen attitudes and participation, which basically argues that the decline in macro-economic conditions have important repercussions on both (Muro & Vidal 2017; Hernández & Kriesi 2016), we can expect that the share of passive and allegiant citizens decreased during the crisis as the number of mobilised and alienated citizens grew (Kriesi 2018). In fact, this literature has underlined the idea that dissatisfaction and distrust has grown in the four countries (Muro & Vidal 2017; Quaranta & Martini 2017), while participation has grown, yet with differences relating to the nature of this form of engagement (Morlino & Raniolo 2017).

It should be noted that that the four countries were not all equally affected by the economic crisis (Bosco & Verney 2012). It seems uncontroversial to state Greece was the country in which the crisis hit hardest. Greece went through a complex bailout process, and governmental action was supervised by supranational institutions. While the social impact of the crisis preceded the implementation of the bailout programme, the austerity measures contained in the former also contributed towards the major disruptions in the life of ordinary Greeks (Della Porta et al. 2017). Like Greece, Portugal was also subject to external financial assistance (Bosco & Verney 2012). Still, the effects of the adjustment seem to have been attenuated in Portugal by such factors as its welfare state (Fernandes 2017). Moreover, a consistent recovery followed the adjustment period (Fernandes et al. 2018). In Spain, after a period of great expansion, falls in unemployment levels and government surpluses, the economic crisis broke, hitting credit and the banking system, leading to high levels of private debt, negative growth and very high rates of unemployment. In Italy, the crisis broke in the context of an economy that was already growing slowly and in which there were deep-rooted structural problems (Bosco & Verney 2012). A particularly sharp increase in the number of mobilised and alienated citizens can thus be expected in those countries in which the crisis was particularly severe, as in Greece, or where it followed a period of economic growth, as in Spain, as opposed to where the crisis was contained, as in Portugal, or where economic performance was already low, as in Italy.

The political attitudes and engagement of young citizens

Youth and politics

Young people have always been considered different compared to their older peers in terms of their relationship with politics (Zukin et al. 2006). Here, we want to examine whether young people in Southern Europe have become even more different with regard to their links with politics during the crucial period after 2008, while also considering country differences in this relationship.

Since the end of the 1990s there has been growing concern about the relationship between young citizens and politics. There is evidence that young adults vote less today than they did in the past (Franklin 2004; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell 2007), are less likely to join political parties (Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke 2012) and that they are more active in protests (Norris 2002; Dalton 2009). With regard to political attitudes, Norris (1999) argues that in contrast to more conformist previous generations, younger cohorts could be better understood as being critical towards, rather than detached from, democracy, therefore displaying both attachments to and dissatisfaction with it. Recent comparative work has corroborated this trend showing that in a significant number of countries the share of ‘allegiant’ citizens is waning at the expense of the proportion of ‘assertive’ citizens, in particular because of generational patterns (Welzel & Dalton 2014).

Two positions can be found in the literature. On the one hand, it is argued young people are not distancing themselves from politics or becoming less democratic, but rather they are switching from citizenship based on civic duty to one based on engagement (Norris 2002; Dalton 2009). The claim is that ‘depoliticisation’ refers only to a certain kind of engagement based on input politics and predefined political actors, ideologies and classes, as well as on an abstract idea of democracy. On the other hand, it is noted that ‘depoliticisation’ runs in parallel with a ‘repoliticisation’ based on political involvement, governance and specific outputs (Fawcett & Marsh 2014, p. 182).

The reasons identified for the changes observed so far in young people’s political engagement vary. During the 1980s and 1990s it was related to the rise of cognitive mobilisation (Dalton 1984) and post-materialism (Inglehart & Welzel 2005). More recently, others have focused on the emphasis of neoliberalism on self-interested individualism and market efficiency, which have discouraged participation in politics and the public sphere (Stoker 2006). According to Franklin (2004), lower levels of turnout are related to the competitiveness of elections held at the time citizens first enter the electorate and how embedded they are in the social structures that mobilised them. The lowering of the voting age also had a negative impact on turnout by increasing the costs of voting.

Almost two decades after this debate gained prominence, it has not yet been settled. Uncertainty remains in the processes underlying the changes in relationships between young citizens and politics. Some argue differences between the young and their older peers in respect of how they relate to politics are not always clearly evident and that changes seem to be taking

place across all age groups (Schnaudt & Weinhardt 2018). Other scholars add that it is also not clear whether changes in the political attitudes and engagement of young citizens are part of a general phenomenon or whether trends are heterogeneous in different countries (Sloam 2016). In this regard, there is little evidence on the attitudes and engagement of young citizens across Southern Europe, in particular at times of economic crisis. We discuss this point and possible expectations below.

The role of the economic crisis

While general changes in the relationship young citizens have with politics have been discussed in the literature, the role of the economic crisis has yet to be assessed, in particular in the context of Southern Europe. In this respect, there are indications that some changes in the political engagement of the younger generation began before the crisis. For example, it has been shown that already before the crisis, post-democracy generations in Southern Europe identified less with any political party and that this phenomenon had been in progress for a decade (Lisi 2015). Also, according to European Social Survey data from 2010, the attitudes of young people towards politics in Southern Europe (i.e. Greece, Portugal and Spain) were characterised by low levels of political interest and trust in politicians. More specifically, among respondents aged 18-24, trust in politicians had a mean value of about one in Greece and three in Portugal and Spain on an 11-point scale, while those reporting being very interested in politics amounted to 4.4, 4.0 and 4.3 per cent, respectively (ESS 2012). Earlier findings also suggest that the attitude of young people in Southern Europe are distinct from that of young people in other European regions, especially in terms of political trust (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld 2008).

In terms of engagement, the engagement of young people in civic and political activities was rather low across Southern European before the crisis. Young people in Italy, Greece and Portugal exhibited participation rates below the EU15 average in the period 2002–10, with Portugal coming lowest in terms of youth participation. Spain was slightly above average in total, in eighth place among the fifteen ‘old’ European Union (EU) member states. As expected, there were differences among countries, with Greece and Italy having greater voter participation than issue-based engagement. On the other hand, young people in Portugal and Spain showed greater participation rates in issue-based forms of participation, like petition-signing, boycotts and demonstrations. In sum, the electoral participation of young people in Italy, Spain and Greece is not much lower than the participation of the rest of the voting population, but it is much lower in Portugal, where only around four in ten young people vote (Sloam 2016).

However, the various degrees of lack of political interest and low political participation of the young up to the crisis, did not necessarily have much to do with traditional political apathy, as widely discussed in the relevant literature (Pilkington & Pollock 2015). It was in the immediate wake of the outbreak of crisis that the young seemed to re-enter the political scene,

as during the crisis, the level of protest engaging young Europeans increased (Sloam 2014; Zamponi & Fernández González 2017). This has become especially evident in Spain, Italy (Sloam 2016, pp. 526–528), and Greece, where the crisis functioned as an important resocialisation factor that changed fundamental characteristics of the young as political actors (Pantelidou-Maloutas 2016).

The economic crisis could have been a turning point for youth living in the countries most affected by it. That is why changes in how the young relate to politics might have changed in Southern Europe. We argue there are at least two reasons for looking at this potential change. First, young citizens, being in their formative stage, might be more impressionable (Mannheim 1952). Second, we know that during their transition to adulthood, or in the early years of this life stage, young people are more responsive to their socio-economic environment than older cohorts (Franklin 2004). Third, the economic crisis in Southern Europe hit this age group much harder than it did the rest of the population. Therefore, we could expect that the distribution of types of citizens could be even more different among the group of young citizens across the four countries after the beginning of the crisis.

Figure 1 shows that youth unemployment has been above the European average in all four South European countries. The percentage of young people at risk of poverty has also increased and reached high levels, just like those of youngsters that are ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET). We can see that youth unemployment grew after the beginning of the economic crisis, especially in Greece and Spain, and the trends rose importantly in all four countries with respect to the European average. In Greece, Italy and Spain the percentage of young people at risk of poverty also rose more than the European average, while the rise was lower in Portugal. Eventually, a similar scenario can be seen for the NEET rate, which might suggest increased vulnerability among the young segment of the population.

[Figure 1 here]

Soler-i-Martí and Ferrer-Fons (2015) have shown that whether young people occupy a central or a peripheral position in the social space is one of the most decisive variables for explaining political passivity. As in Southern Europe, the young have ‘borne the brunt of cuts in public spending’ (Sloam 2016, p. 522), which has consequently diminished their opportunities to, among other things, access education, housing and to create a family. It is likely, therefore, that the young have changed the way they look at politics in terms of satisfaction, trust and political engagement. In addition, as the economic crisis affected the opportunities of the young, there have also been consequences for their life-cycle transitions, which are known to be important to how the youth experience politics (García-Albacete 2014). These factors suggest

that, given the economic crisis has worsened the already peripheral position in society young people hold, we should expect changes in the relationship this younger generation have with politics compared to their older peers. We believe young people may have had two main reactions after the crisis. The first is an increase in engagement and political dissatisfaction and distrust, therefore we should expect the share of mobilised young citizens to increase over time. The second is an increase in alienation, meaning young people become more distant from politics and abandon engagement. In addition, if the economic crisis is important for understanding the relationship between young people and politics, greater differences between young and old citizens with respect to how they combine political attitudes and engagement could be expected, particularly in countries such as Greece and Spain which have been particularly badly hit by the economic crisis and where young citizens suffered most, while narrower difference could be found in countries showing more resilience and which provided broader government safety nets or informal networks, as in Portugal and Italy.

Research design

Data

We explore change in types of citizens in Southern Europe using a pooling of eight rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) for Greece, Italy Portugal and Spain. The ESS is a repeated cross-sectional survey conducted from 2002 to 2017. Unfortunately, survey data have not been collected in all countries with the same frequency. While for Portugal and Spain there are eight available rounds, there are only four for Italy and Greece. Nevertheless, the ESS is the only survey that allows us to consider a relatively long time span and to look at how attitudes and political engagement change across time and age groups in Southern Europe that also considers the years before and after the economic crisis. We used 24 surveys, selecting respondents aged between 18 and 85, yielding to a sample of 39,403 respondents.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is a typology of respondents that classifies them according to their attitudes towards democracy and political institutions on the one hand, and political engagement on the other. For attitudes, we used four indicators measuring satisfaction with democracy and government and trust in parliament and politicians on a scale ranging from 0 (no satisfaction, trust) to 10 (full satisfaction, trust). Indicators of satisfaction and trust have been used in recent research on political support as proxies of citizen evaluations of democracy and political institutions (see Newton, Stolle & Zmerli 2018), therefore a summary measure would capture the extent to which citizens express positive attitudes towards the functioning of democracy as a whole and its representative bodies. We build a score of citizen evaluations using factor scores from a factor analysis. All items have high loadings (0.68, 0.70, 0.80 and

0.78, respectively), with the reliability of the measure confirmed by a high Cronbach's alpha (0.83).

The engagement dimension is captured by using six items. We use items measuring if the respondent is interested in politics, displayed a badge, worked for parties, boycotted products, signed petitions and attended demonstrations. As the items are dichotomous, we measure the dimension of engagement using the scores of a two-parameter logistic item response theory model. Therefore, we assume a unidimensional structure of political participation that measures engagement quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Scoring low means engagement in few forms of participation, while scoring high means engagement in many forms of participation. The model coefficients indicate that the items have good discrimination power (De Ayala 2008), thus they allow us to distinguish respondents with different levels of participation. Mokken scaling also supports the presence of a unidimensional scale (the Loevinger's coefficient is 0.405).

We use the means of the two scores¹ to measure the attitudinal and the engagement dimensions as the thresholds for inclusion in the four types of our typology of citizens: a) if the respondent shows low engagement and low satisfaction/trust we label them as 'alienated'; b) if the respondent show low engagement and high satisfaction/trust they are 'passive'; c) if the respondent shows high engagement and low satisfaction/trust they are 'mobilised'; and d) if the respondent shows high engagement and high satisfaction/trust they are 'allegiant'. Figure 2 shows the typology and its distribution across the four countries. We can see that there is variability across the countries in terms of how citizens relate to politics. In Greece and Portugal, alienated respondents are the majority (about 32 and 39 per cent), while in Italy and Spain allegiant respondents are more likely (28 and 33 per cent). Regarding the passive and mobilised types, we can see there are fewer differences across the countries: however, passive respondents are more likely in Greece, while mobilised respondent are more likely in Spain.

[Figure 2 here]

Independent variables

The independent variables of interest are age, time and the respondents' country. Age is measured using a categorical variable distinguishing respondents in three groups (18-35, 36-65, >65).² Time is the year in which the survey data was collected, which allow us to distinguish between the years before and after the beginning of the economic crisis. Eventually, country dummies capture each of the four countries of interest.

We also include various controls that have been claimed to be important predictors of political engagement and attitudes towards democracy and political institutions (Norris 1999, 2002; Newton, Stolle & Zmerli 2018). We include gender, as it has been shown that levels of

political participation and political attitudes are lower for women than they are for men. We also include education (in years, top-coded at 25 years). It is argued that education is a resource for political participation and that more educated citizens tend to have more positive attitudes towards democracy and political institutions. We add other variables capturing elements of the socio-economic status of the respondents. We use a dichotomous variable that measures feelings about household income (positive vs. negative) and two dichotomous variables measuring whether the respondent is in paid work or whether they are still in the education system. Eventually, ideological position on the left-right scale is also an important predictor of both attitudinal and engagement dimensions. We include a variable measuring on a 0 (left) to 10 (right) scale recoded in four categories ('don't know/missing' as reference, 'left' as 0-3, 'centre' as 4-6 and 'right' as 7-10). Information on the variables and descriptive statistics are reported in the online appendix.

Models

As the dependent variable is a categorical variable with unordered categories, we use multinomial models to predict the probability of belonging to each of the four types. First, we estimate a baseline model including all the independent variables that will allow us to find how the four types are distributed across age groups, countries and years. Then we include an interaction between age and time, to obtain a general overview of whether age differences in the types change over time. Second, as our interest is to explore the country heterogeneities in the association between time, age and types, we run separate models for each country. This step allows us to look at age and time differences across countries and at whether age differences change over time across countries, so to assess all sources of heterogeneity in the four types of citizens simultaneously. As estimates from multinomial models are quite complex to interpret, especially when using interaction terms, we rely on predicted probabilities (Long 1997). Estimates are reported in the online appendix.

Findings

We begin our discussion by focusing on the relationship between age and time with the dependent variable. In Panel (a) in Figure 3 we can see that, across the four southern European countries, being young is associated with a higher probability of being alienated, i.e. having low satisfaction and trust and low political engagement, and of being passive, i.e. having high political trust but low political engagement.³ On the other hand, the probability of someone being allegiant, i.e. having both high political engagement and higher political attitudes, is at its lowest among young people and increases with age, with those over the age of 65 being most likely to belong to this specific category. Young respondents are also more likely to be passive, i.e. showing lower levels of engagement and higher satisfaction and trust, compared to the other

two groups, although differences are not particularly marked. A similar pattern can be seen for the mobilised group of respondents, where we see that young respondents are less likely to be mobilised, i.e. being engaged and less trusting/satisfied, compared to the middle-aged group. These initial findings paint a picture that depicts young respondents as being more detached from politics, which confirms previous research (Quintelier 2007). We show that young citizens are more likely to be both dissatisfied with and mistrustful of the political realm *and* disengaged, pointing at an important problem about how preferences and needs are transmitted to the political system.

[Figure 3 here]

As for the development of these attitudes across time for all four countries as a whole, we can see by looking at Panel (b) of Figure 3 that the years before the crisis were mostly characterised by allegiance and passivity. Therefore, before the beginning of the crisis, citizens in Southern Europe tended to be politically satisfied and trusting, whether engaged or disengaged. In short, what distinguished citizens before the crisis was their level of political engagement. After the crisis, with the increase in dissatisfaction and distrust, the scenario changes and we see that alienation and mobilisation increase in the years after 2008. This might indicate that citizens belonging to the passive group, are becoming more dissatisfied/distrusting and also alienated and thus distant from politics at both an attitudinal and engagement level. Similarly, the share of mobilised citizens might have increased because of the rise in dissatisfaction and distrust and because we can see that the share of allegiant citizens falls after 2008, although there is a peak in 2016 (which corresponds to Portugal only, see Appendix) and then again a drop in 2017. Therefore, these results indicate that the economic crisis seems to have mainly brought about a shift in political trust and satisfaction, confirming results in the literature (Muro & Vidal 2017).

This scenario is the same when examining each age category separately over time, across the four countries and net of control variables, as shown in Figure 4. We can see that differences in the types due to age do not change over time. In two cases, the alienated and allegiant types, we see that there are different likelihoods of young respondents belonging to the two groups compared to other respondents. Young respondents are more alienated and less allegiant over time compared to their older counterparts, especially in the years immediately after the start of the economic crisis. With regard to the other two types, trends are very similar, and no difference can be detected among the age groups. The findings are also an indication that any effect the crisis had on the respondents' relationship to politics was not particularly limited to young people. Despite this evidence of a period effect affecting all age groups, young people in Southern Europe seem to have become especially alienated and less allegiant in the wake of

the crisis, and the differences with their older counterparts did not decline in the following years.

[Figure 4 here]

It should always be born in mind that major political developments did not unfold at the same time in each of the four Southern European countries being studied and that it is, therefore, important to focus on the differences between them. We ran separate analyses for each country to look at the contextual differences. Panel (a) in Figure 5 reports the likelihood of belonging to each of the four types by age groups and countries. We see that young respondents are more alienated than their older counterparts in all countries. Nevertheless, the differences in alienation are more marked in Greece, while the most alienated young respondents are in Portugal. Young respondents are similar in terms of political passivity. We also see that only in Italy do young respondents show higher levels than other respondents, while in the other countries differences are small or non-existent. Instead, the probability of being a mobilised citizen does not change substantially across the age groups, except in Portugal where young respondents are less likely to be mobilised. Finally, young respondents are less likely to be allegiant in all countries, although in Greece the probability is lowest at around 0.11, rising to 0.14 in Portugal, 0.19 in Italy and 0.29 in Spain.

The trends in the distribution of types across age groups are quite different if we look into the countries. Panel (b) in Figure 5 shows the likelihood of belonging to each type over time, by age group and country. We see that between 2008 and 2012, alienation was on the rise in all countries in the population at large. The rise is evident in Greece (although we do not have data for the following years) and in Italy, and less so in Spain and Portugal. In the case of Portugal, we see that the increase is limited to the years immediately after 2008, while in the following years there is a substantial fall in the probability of being alienated. This might be due the growing satisfaction and trust the Portuguese have shown in more recent years (Fernandes et al. 2018).

During the same period, passivity declined in all four countries. After 2008, the probability of being a passive citizen – satisfied and trusting but disengaged – declines. This can be attributed to the rising levels of dissatisfaction and distrust following the worsening of macro-economic conditions. Something that should be noted, however, is that some years after the beginning of the economic crisis, the declining trends halt and start reversing, which might be due to the positive economic changes in more recent years. An inverse pattern can be seen for mobilisation. The probability of being a mobilised citizen increased after 2008 in all four countries, before falling more recently. The likelihood of being an allegiant citizen decreases over time, except in Portugal. Overall, although to different extents, these trends seem to have

changed after 2013, suggesting there might be a period effect that is related to the crisis. However, beyond the trends, we see that alienation grew further in Greece, followed by Portugal and least so in Spain. A similar trend is evident with passivity, which declines most markedly in Greece, Portugal and Italy, and least so in Spain. Finally, allegiance suffers the greatest decline in Greece.

[Figure 5 here]

Here we explore the association between age and the dependent variable, analysing heterogeneity across time and countries simultaneously, net of control variables. Figure 6 shows the trends in the likelihood of being an alienated, passive, mobilised and allegiant citizen by age, over time and across countries. After the onset of the crisis, the probability of becoming alienated increased in Greece, particularly for younger respondents. In contrast, the probability of being a passive respondent decreases over time, and the age differences present in the first two years of observation disappear in later years. Opposite patterns are evident for the likelihood of being mobilised in Greece. Instead, the young are less likely to be allegiant after the crisis, although the difference with the other groups seems to be less marked than in previous years. In Italy, age differences in the types are not very evident, except for the allegiant type. This might indicate that time and, partially, the crisis have not had a different effect on the ways citizens relate to politics among respondents of varying age. Also, in Portugal and Spain, it appears the age differences are small. What seems to occur is that respondents belonging to each age group change their relationship with politics in a similar way. Although there are some significant differences in some years in these two countries, these seem to be not quite substantial.

[Figure 6 here]

Conclusions

This article has argued that the attitudinal and engagement dimensions of politics are critical to understanding how citizens relate to it. Citizens may display varying degrees of political satisfaction/trust and engagement that allow us to understand their position with respect to the political realm. The article had two main goals. The first was to explore whether the relationship between political attitudes and engagement, which we argued define ways of being a citizen and thus the link with the political sphere, changed after the beginning of the economic crisis. Indeed, recent literature on Southern Europe has shown that democracies in the region have suffered the consequences of the economic crisis, although to a varying extent (Bosco & Verney 2012; Morlino & Raniolo 2017). The second goal was to assess whether the way

citizens display different patterns of political attitudes and engagement is different among the young population and whether this difference changed after the economic crisis. In this regard, there are two elements that should be highlighted. First, it is argued that young citizens have a different relationship with politics compared to their older peers (Zukin et al. 2006), resulting in our exploring whether young citizens display different patterns of political attitudes and engagement vis-à-vis their older counterparts. Second, the young are a group that suffered particularly badly as a result of the economic crisis, especially in Southern Europe (Aassve, Cottini & Vitali 2013), with the potential consequence of further social and political marginalisation.

We found that across the four countries there is a great deal of variation in the distribution of the types of citizens over time. The share of alienated and mobilised citizens increased after the beginning of the crisis, likely due to the relative rise in the levels of political dissatisfaction and mistrust (Muro & Vidal 2017; Quaranta & Martini 2017) and, partially, to the increase in especially non-conventional engagement (Flesher Fominaya 2017). Young respondents seem more likely to be alienated and passive and less likely to be allegiant and mobilised, and these patterns do not change much over time across the four countries. Looking into the relationship between age and the types of citizens in the four countries separately, we discovered that young and alienated citizens are more likely to be found in Greece and Portugal, that passive citizens are more frequent in Italy and allegiant citizens are more common in Spain. The cross-country and time analyses show that since the beginning of the crisis, the young seem to display larger differences in how they relate to politics in some contexts, as in Greece, although these differences are less marked in the other countries. This result might indicate that the gravity of the crisis is an important element to be considered when assessing the relationship between age and the dimensions of politics. Indeed, Greece is undoubtedly the country in which the crisis was most severe, with clear consequences for the political system and the lives of citizens, in particular young citizens. While in the other countries the crisis was also significant, it seems that it affected the political patterns of old and young citizens alike.

The study of the interaction between economic strains and political orientations is likely to remain important in Southern Europe even after the peak of the crisis passed. This is especially so for young people, as the region is still marked by relatively high levels of youth unemployment, while precariousness and vulnerability in various realms of life affect younger generations disproportionately. Thus, monitoring how this segment of the population reacts to these continuous challenges and whether these grievances lead to significant changes in the way young citizens relate to their political systems will remain a key task for the foreseeable future.

The engagement and attitudinal dimensions of politics we have considered provide a partial picture of how citizens relate to it because of data limitations. Citizens can also display other attitudes towards politics, such as political efficacy, have a variety of political values and

choose different modes of engagement, ranging from party choice to online activism. Therefore, future research could assess whether the role of age and the economic crisis might affect the relationship between citizens and politics while also considering other dimensions of it.

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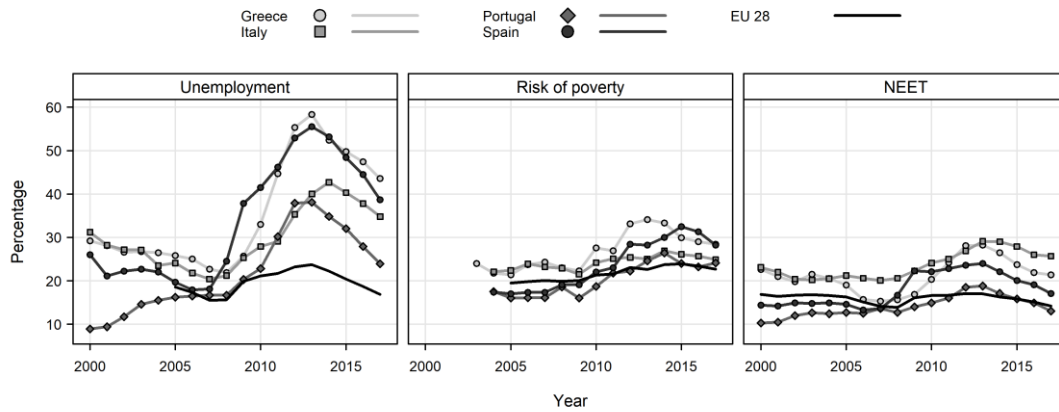
Notes

¹ The two scores have a correlation of 0.079.

² We avoided using a different age group for the younger respondents for three reasons. First, classifying respondents in four groups, thus splitting the younger group in two, would have created cells with fewer observations. Second, research has shown the consequences of the economic crisis are not particularly different within the younger group of respondents aged 18 to 35 (see Aassve, Cottini & Vitali 2013). Third, Southern European young adults are also less likely to be financially independent and more likely to live with their parents than those from other European countries (Arundel & Lennartz 2017).

³ Probabilities presented in the figures are computed at the means of the covariates.

Figure 1. Unemployment rate, risk of poverty rate and rate of being neither in employment nor in education among youth in Southern Europe and in the EU 28.



Sources. OECD: <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/youth-unemployment-rate.htm> (number of unemployed 15-24-year-olds as a percentage of the youth labour force); Eurostat. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/product?code=ilc_li02&language=en&mode=view (18-24 years old at risk of poverty; cut-off point: 60% of median equivalised income after social transfers); Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/product?code=edat_lfse_18&language=en&mode=view (18-24 years old neither in employment nor in education or training).

Figure 2. Types of citizens. Percentages of alienated, passive, mobilised or allegiant respondents in Southern Europe.

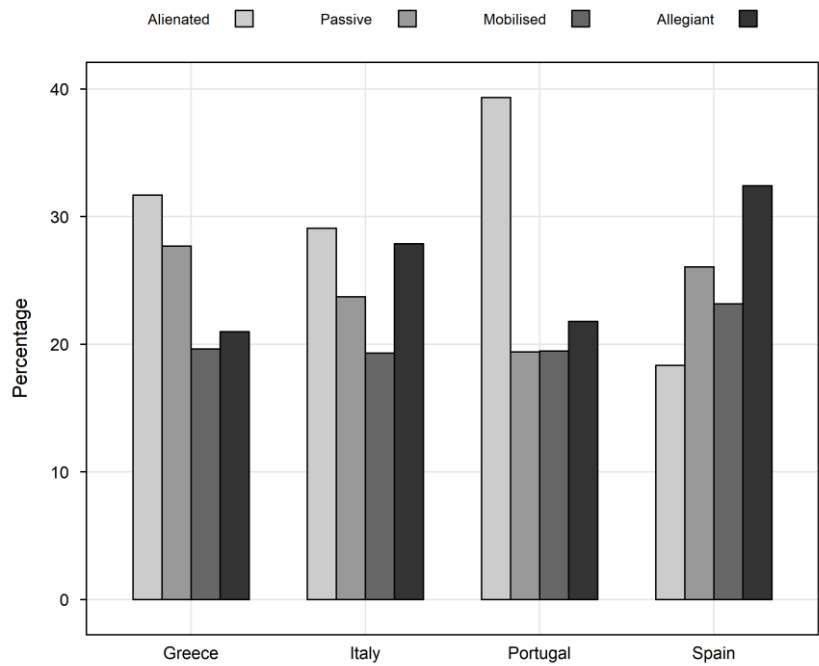
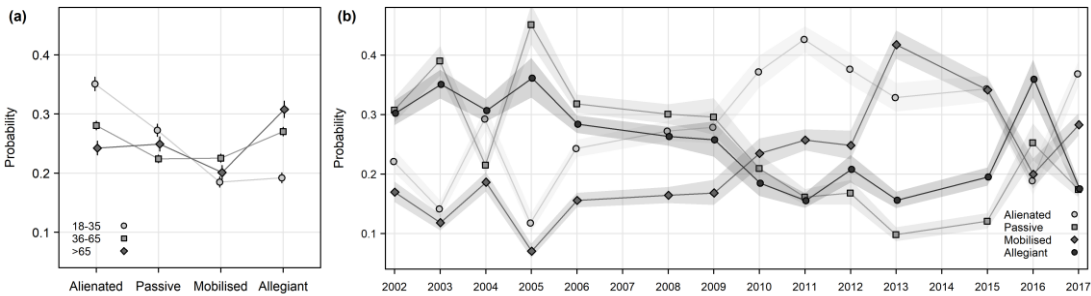
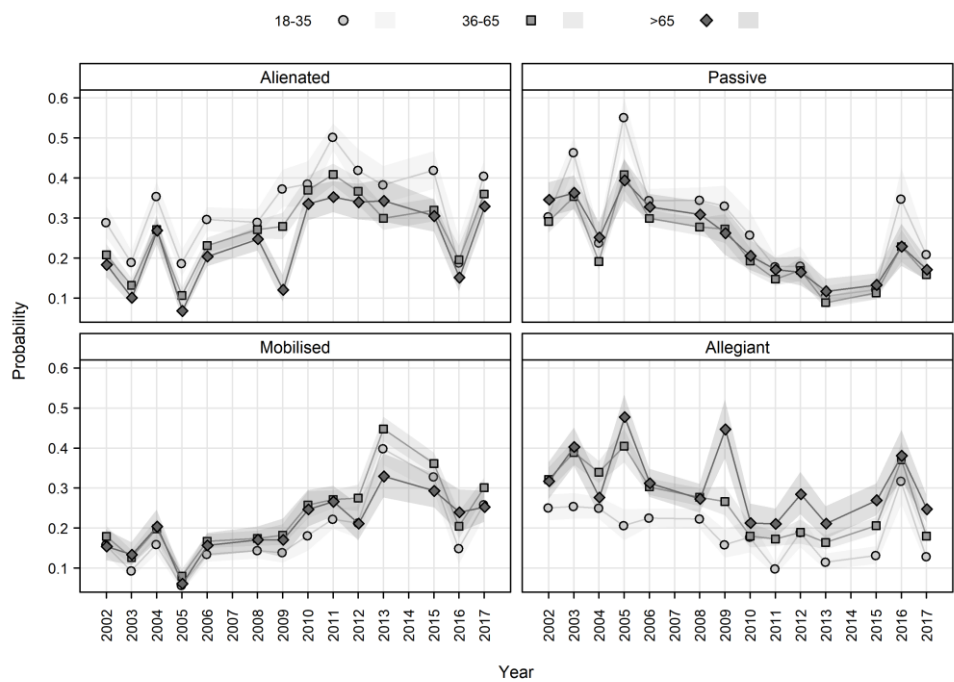


Figure 3. The association between (a) age and (b) time and the probability of being an alienated, passive, mobilised or allegiant respondent in Southern Europe, with 95% confidence intervals.



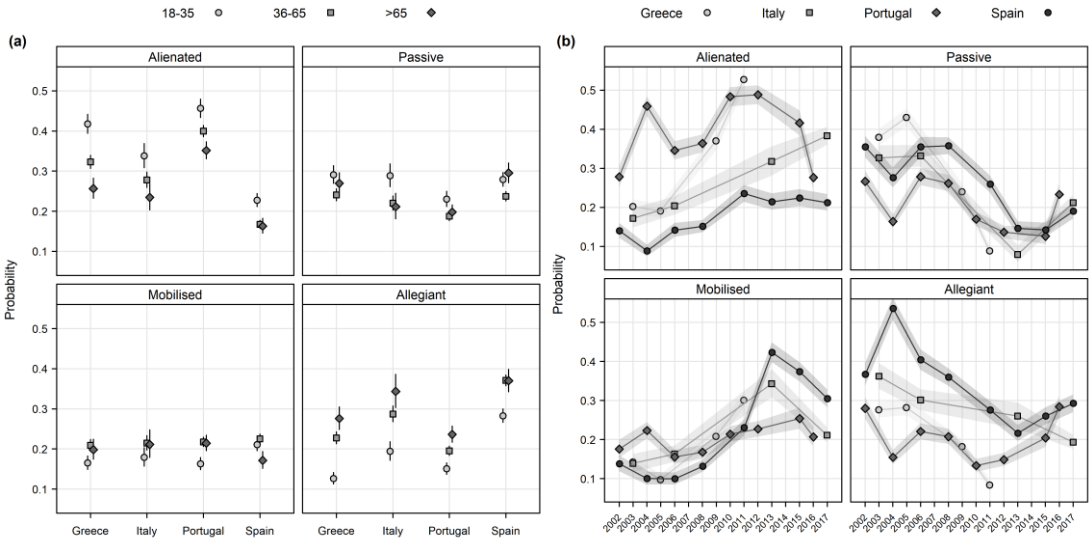
Source: based on the models reported in Table A4.

Figure 4. The association between age and the probability of being an alienated, passive, mobilised or allegiant respondent by time in Southern Europe, with 95% confidence intervals.



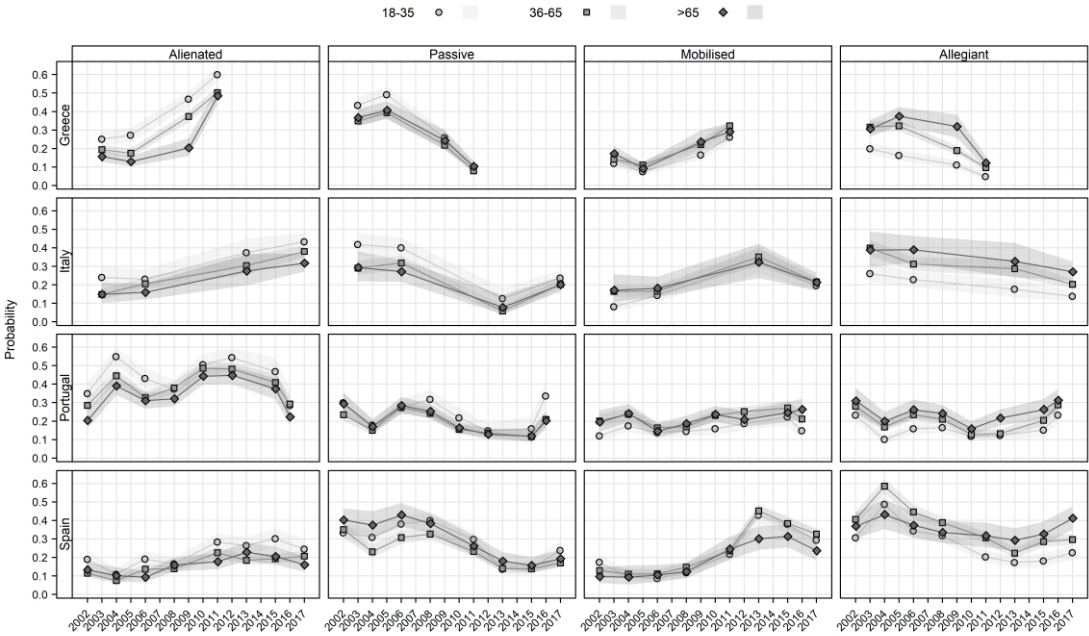
Source: based on the models reported in Table A5.

Figure 5. The association between (a) age and (b) time and the probability of being an alienated, passive, mobilised or allegiant respondent, by country in Southern Europe, with 95% confidence intervals.



Source: based on the models reported in Table A6.

Figure 6. The association between age and the probability of being an alienated, passive, mobilised or allegiant respondent by country and time in Southern Europe, with 95% confidence intervals.



Source: based on the models reported in Table A7.