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# **Economic Crisis and Nationalist Attitudes: Experimental Evidence from Spain**

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# **Economic Crisis and Nationalist Attitudes: Experimental Evidence from Spain**

## **Abstract**

How do national economic crises affect citizens' feelings of attachment to the nation? Does a country's loss of the economic status trigger expressions of nationalism, as is often assumed? Building on insights from social identity theory, this study hypothesizes that crisis of the national economy will not lead to a generalized increase of nationalist attitudes, but that the effect will be conditioned by individuals' self-perceived social class. Additionally, we explore whether framing national economic difficulties as the result of policies imposed at the level of European institutions enhances the conditional effect of crisis. Drawing on data from a survey experiment in Spain, it is found that, when exposed to national economic crisis, nationalist attitudes are strengthened among lower class individuals but weakened among the upper class, and that the effects are higher if the loss of national economic status is framed in terms of European responsibility.

**Keywords:** identity, nationalism, social class, blame attribution, status loss, survey experiment

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# **Economic Crisis and Nationalist Attitudes: Experimental Evidence from Spain**

## **Introduction**

How do economic crises affect individuals' attitudes towards the nation? Does people's attachment to the nation increase in times of economic difficulties? Do people become more proud of being part of the nation when the economy deteriorates? And how does the framing of the crisis and the attribution of responsibilities to a "third-party" intertwine with the economic crisis shaping people's nationalist attitudes?

The commonplace answer to these questions is usually positive: nationalism increases in difficult economic times. For example, in a recent review of research on the relationship between macroeconomic changes and social identities, it was suggested that "the European Union may be vulnerable to fracturing into national identities, as a result of strains from the economic crisis" (Abrams and Vasiljevic 2014, 321). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence supporting conventional wisdom is, at best, fuzzy. First, many of the European countries that have been more seriously hit by the crisis (e.g., Portugal, Ireland, or Spain) have not witnessed the upsurge of support for nativist or nationalistic parties that media commentators and some scholars raise as evidence of the impact that economic hardship has on nationalism (Pappas and Kriesi 2015). Second, the few works conducted on this topic provide an ambiguous answer to the questions above. A comparative analysis by Ruiz Jiménez, Echavarren, and Aquino Linares (2016) shows that individuals' degree of attachment to the nation has decreased in countries where GDP has experienced a drop; however, at the same time, the increase in the levels of unemployment appears to be associated with an increase in feelings of national attachment.

This paper examines the above-mentioned questions, and it proposes an answer to them that challenges conventional wisdom. The paper contends that the effect of the economic crisis on people's nationalist attitudes is contingent on people's socio-economic status. People in the lower social class, who feel more similar to the representative agent (the median citizen) in their nation, should be less affected by the loss of status of the nation. In contrast, people in the upper social class, who feel less similar to the representative agent (the median citizen) in their nation, should become

less proud and less identified with the nation when the nation's economic standing decreases. These expectations are mainly derived from Shayo's (2009) social identification model. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2001), this model argues that people's identification is shaped in two dimensions: the status of the group that individuals belong to, and the relative distance (or proximity) to the prototype member of the group. People primarily identify with two groups: those of class and nation. However, people who have less to be proud of for their social class will turn to the nation, while people who are pleased and satisfied with their socioeconomic status will not feel this need to turn to a different social group.

The paper also examines whether exonerative strategies pointing to the responsibility of a "third-party" (the European Union, in this case) for the economic crisis enhances the impact that the loss of status of the nation is expected to have on individuals' attachment to the nation. Previous research has analysed quite extensively the factors that contribute to holding supra-national institutions and, in particular, the EU, responsible for national economic conditions (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). Less is known, however, about the spill-over effects that such blame-shifting strategies have on citizens' nationalist attitudes. This paper also addresses this question.

To test the above hypotheses, the paper conducts an experiment in which participants in an online survey are primed on the loss of status of the nation's economy. The analysis focuses on the Spanish case, an EU member state that has been heavily hit by the recent economic crisis, and in which national pride and identification can be seen as more malleable due to the country's history and to the presence of alternative forms of national identification, particularly in the regions of the Basque Country and Catalonia.

The results of our experiment appear to confirm, first, that the impact that the loss of national economic status has on nationalist attitudes is moderated by people's perception of their own socio-economic status. It is shown that, when exposed to the loss of the economic status of the nation, people who feel they belong to a lower social class tend to express higher levels of nationalist attitudes, while people who feel they belong to an upper social class tend to express lower levels. Our results also indicate that the conditional effect of loss of status on individuals' nationalist attitudes is more

pronounced when the responsibility for country's economic woes are put on European institutions.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we expand on the theory outlined in this introduction and present the different expectations that can be derived from it. Next, the Spanish case is introduced. Then, we describe the design of the experiment conducted to test our hypotheses. The results of the analysis are included next. The final section summarizes the main findings of the paper and discusses their implications.

### **Theoretical framework**

Identification with social groups has been defined as a social preference with two dimensions: proximity and status (Shayo 2009). People prefer to identify with groups whose members resemble them, and they prefer to identify with high-status groups rather than with low-status groups. The idea that status and proximity are relevant aspects shaping identity relies on social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner 2001; Turner 1982). Individuals self-categorize as members of a group on the basis of the characteristics they share with it, and they become identified with the group by virtue of these same characteristics.<sup>1</sup>In addition to proximity, status is also an important determinant of social identification. Individuals prefer to belong to groups which have a higher status, and this can be possibly explained because their belonging to this type of group conveys a higher group self-esteem (Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk 1999). This implies that when individuals believe that the lower-status position of the group is legitimate and cannot be changed, they tend to disidentify with that group and seek to gain psychological entry to a high-status group (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995, 260).

Although people can identify with many groups, two of the more preeminent groups in contemporary societies are the nation and the social class (Shayo 2009). The way in which individuals place themselves in the dimensions mentioned above in relation to these two groups necessarily affects their identification with them. Specifically, poorer people tend to identify more strongly with their national group than wealthier people, because the former perceive their nation as having a higher status than

the social class they belong to (the status dimension), and because they feel closer to the median citizen, i.e., the prototypical member of the nation (the proximity dimension) (Shayo 2009).

Shayo's explanation leans on two assumptions: First, that the median citizen in the national group is closer to the poor citizen than to the wealthy citizen; and secondly, that the nation is always a high-status group for poor people. His argument is, however, a static one, since it does not take into account the fact that exogenous shocks, such as economic crises, can alter the distance between groups in society and modify both the nation's and individuals' status over time.

In many countries, growing inequality has widened the gap between the rich and the middle-classes, making income distribution more negatively skewed and pushing the median income downwards (OECD 2008). Economic crises can aggravate this problem, so that the impoverishing of the middle-class contributes to reducing the distance between the poor and the median citizen. As a consequence, poor people's identification with the nation is reinforced in times of economic hardship.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the relative status of a group is shaped in comparison to other groups (Hogg and Abrams 1998). Group comparison emphasizes the positive elements of the in-group and the negative elements of the out-group, and leads to in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament 1971; Billig and Tajfel 1973). The status of a group or, for the purpose of this research, of a nation does not only vary across countries, it also changes over time. Again, exogenous shocks, such as economic crises, can modify the status of a nation in comparison to other nations, hindering the international and internal prestige of the nation, and depreciating the appeal of the nation as an object of identification.

From this discussion, we can argue that the impact on nationalist attitudes of the loss of economic status for the nation will be moderated by the subjective economic background of the individual (Hypothesis 1). Specifically, we expect that people who belong to the lower social class will be less affected by the loss of status of the nation as they turn closer to the mean citizen, an individual who has also been impoverished due to the crisis. Likewise, wealthy people or people belonging to the upper social class

should become less attached to the nation because, since the mean citizen has also lost status, they become more distant to the typical member of the nation.

This prediction is consistent with group conflict theory, which has established that those individuals who are more exposed to ethnic competition, due to their vulnerability in the job market, are also more likely to exhibit ethno-nationalist attitudes (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Ortega and Polavieja 2012; Kunovich 2013; Lancee and Pardos-Prado 2013; Polavieja 2016). Because economic crises intensify socio-economic vulnerability, ethno-nationalist responses should spread under conditions of recession, especially among those who are more seriously hit by the economic crisis. Therefore, according to the group conflict theory, nationalist attitudes should increase during hard economic times, and the crisis should particularly affect those who are in a more vulnerable situation.<sup>3</sup>In the paper we do not test this argument directly as we focus on individuals' self-perceived social class rather than on their vulnerability in the job market. However, the tight link between individuals' self-perceived social class and vulnerability can serve to indirectly corroborate the expectation derived from the group conflict theory.

Beyond the social identity theory, previous research can also orientate our predictions regarding the role that economic crises play on nationalist attitudes. Brubaker (2011, 96) has argued that the relationship between economic crisis and ethno-nationalist attitudes is not a direct one, but that it depends on how "economic troubles are framed or interpreted." Nationalist attitudes may appear as a response to institutions, such as the EU, that are presented as "imposing an unjust and punitive regime of austerity on the national economy" (Brubaker 2011, 95). This claim is supported by recent research on the Greek case showing that "the rhetoric of mainstream political and media elites has been instrumental in framing responses to the economic crisis in patriotic terms" (Glynos and Voutyras 2016, 201). Systems of multilevel governance, such as the EU, blur the lines of responsibility for the economic situation of member states, creating strong incentives for governments to engage in credit-taking and blame-shifting strategies (Anderson 2006). Blaming the EU and the austerity measures imposed by European institutions for contributing to the decline of the country's economy has become a widespread narrative among both elites and voters in countries badly affected by the crisis (e.g., Teperoglou, Freire, Andreadis, and Viegas 2014). This frame of the economic crisis has an obvious positive externality for

governments: it exonerates them for the bad shape of the nation's economy, offsetting the importance of economic voting. However, this strategy can have other spill-over effects. Signalling the EU as an external enemy that has imposed unfair austerity measures on the national economy, damaging the country's status, can also encourage nationalism. This strategy of "diversionary nationalism" may therefore contribute to preventing the emergence of social uprisings, and appeasing citizens' negative assessment of the government (Solt 2011).<sup>4</sup>

The attribution of responsibility for the economic crisis to the EU can be expected to heighten the hypothesized impact of the country's loss of economic status on people's national identification and other nationalist attitudes, contingent on citizens' perceived socioeconomic status. In general terms, any strategy aimed at protecting the status of the nation can be expected to be more prevalent among those for whom membership in that group is more highly valued – that is, lower-class individuals. Unlike wealthier people, who already belong to a high-status group (social class), poorer people have more reason to preserve the status of the nation in order to promote a positive social identity and self-esteem. Moreover, social identity theory predicts that the identification with a low-status group will be higher when the low status of the group is perceived as unstable and illegitimate (Tajfel and Turner 2001; Ellemers, Wilke, and van Knippenberg 1993). In the specific case we are dealing with, blaming the EU will likely convey the impression that the loss of economic status for the nation is unfair. But again, the perception of the unfairness of this loss of economic status can vary across economic groups. Specifically, poor people or people belonging to the lower class, who are the ones more strongly affected by the crisis, should be more likely to feel this situation as unfair and illegitimate than wealthy people or people belonging to the upper or upper-middle class, who have been less touched by the crisis. Indeed, recent research found that individuals with a perceived low socioeconomic status were more likely to blame globalization factors and to stress moral concerns when explaining the financial crisis (Leiser, Bourgeois-Gironde, and Benita 2010).

Accordingly, we hypothesize that blaming the EU will heighten the differential effects of the loss of economic status for the nation on nationalist attitudes, conditional on individuals' self-perceived social class (Hypothesis 2). Specifically, we expect that making the EU responsible for the crisis will enhance the negative impact of the loss of

status of the nation on nationalist attitudes among people belonging to the upper social classes, while it will enhance the positive impact of loss of status among people belonging to the lower social class.

### **Spain as a case study**

The Spanish case is a multifaceted case of study for different reasons that might thwart the test of the hypothesis posed above but enrich the paper's findings and add some interesting nuances to the questions mentioned in the introduction. In the last few years, Spain has experienced a very severe economic crisis which has had serious consequences for the prestige of the Spanish nation and for the economic condition of its median citizen.

During the early years of the 21st century, the Spanish economy experienced an unprecedented growth that was overly dependent on a non-productive sector: the housing market. In 2008, when Spain was first touched by the international financial crisis, the housing bubble burst and the Spanish economy encountered many difficulties. Unemployment rose from 8 per cent in 2007 to 26 per cent in 2013, and Spanish GDP fell by 6.3 per cent in seven years (between 2007 and 2014). As a result, Spain went from the 9th position to the 14th position in the world economies ranking (according to World Bank data), and the status of the nation deteriorated. In parallel with this process, the percentage of people who became part of the lower social class increased substantially, which in turn displaced the median citizen (the representative member of the nation) to the lower social class (Goerlich 2016). Altogether, these changes make Spain a proper case to examine how economic shocks affect people's nationalist attitudes.

In addition, Spain is a case study in which nationalist attitudes can be seen as more malleable, due to its recent history and to the presence of alternative forms of territorial identification in the Basque Country and Catalonia. After Spain's transition to democracy, Spanish identity was generally perceived as a discredited identity due to the legacy of the Franco regime (Balfour and Quiroga 2007). The low-status image of the Spanish identity started to change in the 90's with the conservative governments of the Popular Party (PP). The PP governments vindicated the Spanish nation and the Spanish

identity (vis-à-vis various regional identities), while encouraging a sort of “constitutional patriotism” (Núñez-Seixas 2001; Muñoz 2009, 2012). Despite this change, left-wing people have continued to have a difficult relationship with the Spanish identity. This complex relationship has been maintained until today (Ruiz Jiménez, González-Fernández, and Jiménez Sánchez 2016).

Nuisances with the Spanish nation and the Spanish identity are most prominently present in Catalonia and the Basque Country. In these regions, sizeable proportions of the people hold alternative national identities, and hardly feel any attachment to Spain. Moreover, in recent times Spain has gone through a very deep territorial crisis. In parallel to the economic downturn, the independence movement has gained relevance in Catalonia to achieve a significant level of support (nearly 48 percent of voters in the 2016 election to the regional parliament cast votes for openly secessionist parties). In line with the above reasoning, the rise of the pro-independence movement can be interpreted as a consequence of the loss of status of the Spanish nation, which is now a less likeable object of identification as compared to Catalonia, a richer region than the mean. At the same time, the secessionist movement may have also influenced people’s nationalist attitudes in the rest of the country. Thus, Spanish nationalism could have been reinforced outside Catalonia as a reaction to the rise of Catalan pro-independence sentiments. Nevertheless, the experimental design set up for this research allows for the impact of economic crisis vis-à-vis other potential explanations, such as the territorial crisis, to be teased out.

### **Experiment design**

As mentioned in the introduction, the focus of interest in this paper is to assess whether the loss of national economic status and the attribution of blame to the EU modify feelings of attachment to the nation, nationalism, and national pride. But for Ruiz Jiménez et al. (2016a), to our knowledge, no previous research has empirically examined the impact that economic crisis has on nationalist attitudes. In this study, we adopt a different strategy to the one followed by those authors and we rely on a survey experiment where the loss of the economic status of the nation and the responsibility of the EU in this loss of status are primed.

The experiment was embedded in an online survey carried out between the 1st and the 7th of June 2016 on a sample of 741 residents in Spain, aged 18 and older. The sample included quotas for sex, age groups, and educational attainment. After answering a series of questions related to the participants' socio-demographic characteristics and basic political attitudes, the survey respondents were administered the experiment. After the experiment, participants were asked a series of questions measuring the dependent variables. A final set of additional socio-demographic questions followed and, after completing the survey, respondents were debriefed.

In the experiment, the participants were randomly assigned to three different conditions.<sup>5</sup> Respondents in the control group did not receive any kind of information. The first treatment group was presented a short text containing information on the loss of status experienced by the Spanish economy in the last few years (2007 to 2014), and on its effects on economic activity and employment. As previously mentioned, this treatment was intended to prime the loss of economic status by the nation. The other treatment group received exactly the same text but, in addition, it also received information on the role that the budget cuts imposed by the European Union have had on the decline of the Spanish economy. This information was placed at the beginning of the text, and the aim of the treatment was to provide a specific frame of the economic crisis, making the EU responsible for the country's economic woes. Both treatments were presented in an aseptic manner in order to prevent participants in the survey from thinking about the source of information and the credibility of the information provided. After receiving this information, respondents assigned to the treatment groups were also asked to convey their opinion on the information just received. This request was expected to reinforce the impact of the priming (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 here.

The Spanish case is a hard case for testing the hypotheses posed above due to pre-treatment. Spanish people have been extensively exposed to news related to the bad shape of the economy and the role the EU has played during the economic crisis. This implies that people are highly aware of the loss of status of the Spanish economy, and a number of them attribute part of the responsibility of the crisis to the austerity policies

imposed by the EU.<sup>6</sup> Pre-treatment makes very difficult any effective manipulation of people's beliefs on this matter. Consequently, the first treatment must be understood as merely as an additional prime of the loss of the economic status of the country. The second treatment both primes this loss of status and provides a framing for this loss of status, whereby the EU is ascribed as at least partial responsibility for it. This said, it is worth noting that pre-treatment problems also determine how we must interpret the magnitude of the treatment effects. Hence, in situations in which we find a strong pre-treatment problem, we should interpret the effect of the treatment as the marginal effect of one additional exposure to the treatment, rather than as the full effect of the treatment (Druckman and Leeper 2012). The estimated effects resulting from our experiment are thus conservative; real-world effects of experience of the economic crisis may arguably be thought to be substantially higher than those reported below.

Nationalist attitudes are multidimensional: they tend to be highly correlated but, at the same time, tap into aspects of the relationship between the citizen and her nation that appear to be clearly distinct (e.g., Kosterman and Feshback 1989). Participants in the survey were asked about three kinds of nationalist attitudes: their identification with Spain, their Spanish nationalism (*españolismo*), and their national pride. National identification can be defined as individuals' subjective emotional and cognitive sense of belongingness and attachment to the nation (Hierro 2013). National pride is seen as a consequence rather than as a measure of individuals' national identity, that gauges the positive affection people have towards their nation (Smith and Kim 2006). Finally, *españolismo* is understood as a direct measure of Spanish nationalism. While the concept of *españolismo* has been linked to traditional versions of Spanish nationalism, today it appears to have experienced some normalization (Muñoz 2012). Unlike national identification and pride, nationalism involves an intergroup comparison that reflects national superiority and downward bias towards other national groups (Kosterman and Feshback 1989). However, because all these measures assume positive feelings towards the national in-group, we expect for all them to be similarly affected by our crisis treatments.

These three variables were introduced in the survey to assess the impact of the treatments on participants' nationalist attitudes. The exact wording of the questions is contained in Table 2. Both the extent of participants' identification with Spain and the

degree of their Spanish nationalism were assessed using eleven-point scales running from 0 to 10. National pride was measured using a four-point scale, which we coded between 0 and 10 in the analysis for comparability.

TABLE 2 here

## **Results**

In this section, we present the results of the analyses carried out on the variables of interest: national identification, national pride, and Spanish nationalism. Each of the dependent variables is regressed on the treatments (the control condition being the reference group), the self-perceived social class, and the interaction between treatment and class. This social-class indicator measures the subjective social status of respondents, using a five-point scale ranging from lower social class (0) to upper social class (4).

The models also include three covariates: ideology, region of residence, and age. The inclusion of these variables, all of which were measured within the pre-treatment section of the questionnaire, is done on the basis of their anticipated effect on the dependent variables and is aimed at increasing the efficiency in the estimation of treatment effects by reducing nuisance in the variance (Franklin 1991; Mutz and Pemantle 2015). Previous research has shown the robust importance of these three variables as predictors of national pride, national identification, and nationalism in Spain (Muñoz 2009, 2012). As noted above, left-wing people in Spain still have a complicated relationship with the Spanish nation (Ruiz Jiménez et al. 2016b), so it is important to include ideology as a factor affecting the nationalist attitudes of people with different ideologies. This variable was measured in the survey using an eleven-point scale running from 0 (left) to 10 (right). In order to capture the idiosyncrasies of nationalist attitudes in some specific regions, the model also includes region dummies for Catalonia and the Basque Country. These dummy variables account for the heterogeneity of the feelings of identification and national pride within the Spanish territory. Differences in the socialization processes of the generations that were educated during the Franco dictatorship and the generations that were educated after the

transition to democracy explain a significant part of the variance in nationalism, attachment to the nation, and national pride (Muñoz 2009, 2012). To capture the effect of differences in the socialization process that Spaniards have gone through, we have also included respondents' age as a covariate in the analyses. Table 3 presents the summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables.<sup>7</sup>

TABLE 3 here

Table 4 reports the models' results, obtained using linear regression estimation.<sup>8</sup> To start with, the table shows the positive and significant effect of the usual suspects on the dependent variables: the impact of age, ideology, and the region of residence is statistically significant and in the expected direction. The older the respondent is and the more right-wing oriented she is, the more identified with Spain she declares to be. Respondents living in Catalonia and the Basque Country show a lower degree of identification with Spain than those living in other regions. These results are consistent across the three dependent variables.

TABLE 4 here

The results for the interactions and their constitutive terms are in the expected direction across the three models. The interaction coefficient between perceived social class and loss of the economic status of the nation (without reference to EU responsibility) is statistically significant only in the national pride model, but not in those for national identification and nationalism. On the other hand, the effect of the interaction between perceived social class and the EU-blame treatment is statistically significant on all three dependent variables. That is, social class appears to moderate the effect of status loss on national pride, such that the higher the perceived status of the individual, the more negative the effect of the crisis prime on his or her national pride. Likewise, when combined with a blame-the-EU frame, the positive effect of status loss on respondents' identification, pride, and nationalism tends to reverse as their perceived social status increases.

For ease of interpretation, Figure 1 presents the average marginal effect of each of the two treatments conditional on individuals' subjective social class. Among

respondents who feel they belong to the lower social class, the neutral status-loss prime significantly increases their national pride, compared to lower-class respondents in the control condition ( $p < 0.05$ ). To the contrary, among those who feel they belong to the upper social class, the neutral status-loss prime significantly *decreases* national pride, compared to the control condition ( $p < 0.10$ ). The same pattern emerges for national identification and nationalist feelings, but in these cases the effects are not statistically significant at either extreme of the social-class scale. As concerns the EU-blame treatment, the charts show that the effects are also the opposite for people with different economic status, and statistically significant in all three models (at the  $p < 0.10$  level at least): those who feel they belong to the lower social class feel more proud of being Spanish, more identified with Spain, and more nationalist. By contrast, those who feel significantly they belong to the upper class feel less proud, less identified, and less *españolistas* ( $p < 0.10$  at least).

FIGURE 1 here

Two further aspects are worth mentioning from Figure 1. First, the fact that none of the treatments has a significant effect on the group of individuals who place themselves in the middle class. This is reasonable if we take into consideration that individuals in this group are closest to what we have named the “median citizen” of the nation and, therefore, identify with equals. Second, the results also suggest that the EU-blame treatment accentuates the effect of being exposed to a piece of information that primes the loss of the economic status of the nation. Blaming a third party, the EU in this case, for the loss of economic status of Spain appears to awake feelings of unfair treatment, but only among individuals with a lower economic status. Those who have not been touched by the economic crisis do not appear to feel the unfairness of this situation in a similar way.

## **Discussion**

Attachment to the nation has been often presented in the literature as a source of legitimacy and diffuse support for the political system (Easton 1965; Norris 1999). Maintaining citizens’ attachment to the nation becomes even more crucial in hard economic times to secure the continuity of democracy and to counteract the loss of

legitimacy and trust for political institutions that derives from economic crises (Polavieja 2013; Torcal 2014).

This paper's general goal was to assess the effect that national economic crisis has on nationalist attitudes. More specifically, the paper has analysed how messages that prime the loss of the economic status of the nation, alone and in combination with a blame-shifting frame putting the responsibility on a third party (the EU), influence people's national identification, national pride, and nationalism. Using experimental evidence, the paper has shown that EU-blaming messages are more effective than neutral status-loss primes, and have heterogeneous effects on people with different economic backgrounds. People who belong to the lower social class identify more strongly with Spain, become more nationalist, and more proud to be Spanish when information related to the national economic downgrade is framed in terms of out-group responsibility. The effect is the opposite among people who belong to the upper or upper-middle class.

These results appear to suggest that people with a low socioeconomic status seek shelter in the nation in times of economic difficulties, whereas people with a high status turn their backs on it. This result lends support to Shayo's theory, but adds relevant nuance in showing how the economic crisis is framed and, in particular, how the strategy of out-group blaming can reinforce and encourage the we-feeling and the nationalism of the disadvantaged.

The strategy of blaming the other has been usually seen as a strategy of governments to avoid voters' punishment at the ballot box (see Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 100–119). This research has shown that blame attribution can also have spill-over effects on citizens' nationalist attitudes, but that these are strongly conditioned by citizens' self-perceived social status. It should be emphasized that our analysis examined the role of crisis in a context where citizens have been extensively exposed to negative news about the country's economic status, which suggests that the effects could be stronger in less pre-treated settings. Further research should examine whether these results can be generalized to other contexts, and explore the relative impact of alternative blaming strategies and moderating factors.

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## Tables and figures

**Table 1.** *Experimental conditions*

Condition	Wording
Status Loss	<p>Please read carefully the following information.</p> <p>Between 2007 and 2014, Spanish GDP fell by 6.3%. As a result, Spain went from the 9th position to the 14th position in the world economies ranking. The decline in GDP has had serious consequences on activity and employment.</p> <p>Now write, please, two or three phrases with your opinion about the information you have just read.</p>
EU Blame	<p>Please read carefully the following information.</p> <p>Because of the harsh cuts imposed by the European Union, the Spanish economy has contracted sharply in recent years. Between 2007 and 2014, Spanish GDP fell by 6.3%. As a result, Spain went from the 9th position to the 14th position in the world economies ranking. The decline in GDP has had serious consequences on activity and employment.</p> <p>Now write, please, two or three phrases with your opinion about the information you have just read.</p>
Control	[no information displayed]

**Table 2.** *Dependent variables wording*

Identification	<p>We all feel more or less attached to the land in which we live, but some feel more attached to some places than others. Using the next scale, to what extent do you feel identified with Spain?</p> <p>0= not at all; 10= completely</p>
Pride	<p>To what extent do you feel proud of being Spanish?</p> <p>1= not proud at all; 4= very proud</p>
Nationalism	<p>The next scale measures the nationalist feeling <i>españolismo</i>. Where do you place yourself?</p> <p>0= lowest <i>españolismo</i>; 10= highest <i>españolismo</i></p>

**Table 3.** Summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables

Variable name	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.	N
Identification	6.68	3.00	0	10	635
Pride	6.10	3.44	0	10	635
Nationalism	6.04	3.07	0	10	635
Subjective Social Class	1.57	0.78	0	4	635
Ideology	4.33	2.62	0	10	635
Age	40.73	12.32	18	68	635
Regions					
Catalonia	0.15	0.36	0	1	635
Basque Country	0.04	0.19	0	1	635
Treatments					
Loss of Status	0.33	0.47	0	1	635
EU Blame	0.33	0.47	0	1	635

Note: Non-Spanish citizens and people born outside Spain have been excluded from the analysis.

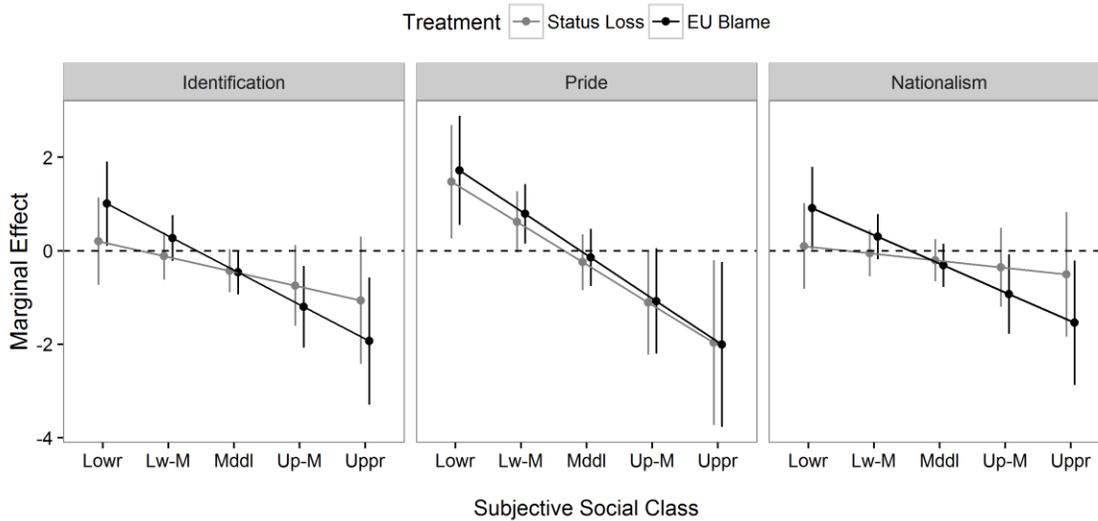
**Table 4.** Exposure to treatments and effects on nationalist attitudes by subjective social class

	Identification	Pride	Nationalism
Status Loss	0.201 (0.569)	1.474* (0.736)	0.097 (0.556)
EU Blame	1.004+ (0.547)	1.717* (0.708)	0.913+ (0.535)
Social Class	0.251 (0.241)	0.624* (0.312)	0.244 (0.236)
Status Loss * Class	-0.316 (0.326)	-0.860* (0.422)	-0.152 (0.319)
EU Blame * Class	-0.735* (0.320)	-0.932* (0.414)	-0.614* (0.313)
Left-Right	0.452*** (0.040)	0.376*** (0.051)	0.531*** (0.039)
Catalonia	-2.475*** (0.284)	-0.877* (0.368)	-2.616*** (0.278)
Basque Country	-2.682*** (0.537)	-1.148+ (0.695)	-2.451*** (0.525)
Age	0.019* (0.008)	0.022* (0.011)	0.024** (0.008)
Constant	4.148*** (0.545)	2.665*** (0.705)	2.908*** (0.533)
Observations	635	635	635
R <sup>2</sup>	0.310	0.120	0.370

Unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + 0.10

**Figure 1.** *Effect of treatments on identification, pride, and nationalism, by subjective social class*



Note: 90% confidence intervals. Predictions based on the estimations in Table 4.

<sup>1</sup>As the experiments in the minimal group have shown, these characteristics do not need to be objective, but only subjectively perceived (Tajfel 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Solt (2011) has argued that there is not an interacting effect between income inequality and income level. Counter to Solt, Han (2013) has defended that income inequality increases the national pride of poor people but only in countries with many migrants. The two authors equate, as Shayo does, income with social class. This is very problematic as Shayo's original theory is not based on the objective measures of group belonging but on subjective identification. To overcome this problem, we focus on individuals' subjective social class. We contend that individuals' self-placement on a scale ranging from the lower to the upper social class is a more appropriate indicator of individuals' self-identification as member of a social class.

<sup>3</sup> However, other research has claimed that the economy does not play a central role for the voters of nationalistic parties (Ivarsflaten 2005, 2008; Klandermans and Mayer 2005) or for the parties themselves (Mudde 2007). This stand, thus, would reject the argument that ethno-nationalist attitudes are linked to individual or contextual economic conditions.

<sup>4</sup> Although Solt's (2011) theory originally focused on economic inequality, his argument can also be applied to contexts of economic hardship.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix for the detail on the distribution of the treatment and control conditions among participants in the survey.

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<sup>6</sup> In June 2016, 29 per cent of the population considered the situation of the economy to be only fair, 40 per cent considered the economy to be in bad shape, and 28 per cent in very bad shape (CIS, study number 3142). The most recent data on the attribution of responsibilities for the economic crisis comes from a study conducted May–June 2014, after the European elections took place (CIS, study number 3028). This survey includes a question that asks respondents about the degree of responsibility for the Spanish economic situation by different institutions. Twenty-five per cent of the people made the EU fully responsible for the Spanish economic situation, as compared to 41 percent that made the Spanish government fully responsible. The mean values for the eleven-point scales used to assess the level of responsibility of the EU and the Spanish government were 7.5 and 8.2, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> People without Spanish citizenship or born abroad (n=38) are excluded from the analysis, as alternative national identities can be more relevant for them than the Spanish identity. Given that participants in the survey were forced to answer to all the questions, the reliability of the answers of this type of respondent can be lower.

<sup>8</sup> National pride has been also estimated using an ordered logistic regression. However, as the results do not change substantively to those obtained using OLS estimation, we have preferred to report here the latter for ease of interpretation.