

Economic crisis and national attitudes: Experimental evidence from Spain

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This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Hierro, María José, and Guillem Rico. 2019. Economic Crisis and National Attitudes: Experimental Evidence from Spain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42(5): 820-837.
doi:[10.1080/01419870.2018.1432873](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1432873)

Abstract:

How do national economic crises affect citizens' feelings of attachment to the nation? Does a country's loss of economic status trigger expressions of nationalism as is often assumed? Building on insights from social identity theory, we hypothesize that crises of the national economy do not lead to a generalized increase of nationalism but that the effect is conditioned by individuals' perceived socio-economic status. In addition, we explore whether framing national economic difficulties as a result of policies imposed at the level of European institutions enhances the conditional effect of crisis on nationalism. Drawing on data from a survey experiment in Spain, we find that when exposed to messages about the crisis of the national economy, national pride is strengthened among lower-class individuals but weakened among the upper class and that the effects on nationalism are important only if the loss of national economic status is framed in terms of European responsibility.

Keywords: nationalism, patriotism, perceived socio-economic status, status loss, blame attribution, survey experiment

Introduction

Does nationalism increase in times of economic difficulties? How the attribution of responsibilities to a third party and the economic crisis intertwine to shape people's national attitudes?

The commonplace answer to the first question is usually positive: nationalism increases with economic hardship. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence supporting conventional wisdom is fuzzy at best. First, many European countries more seriously hit by the crisis (e.g. Portugal, Ireland, or Spain) have not witnessed the upsurge in support for nationalist parties that media commentators and some scholars raise as evidence of the impact that economic hardship has on nationalism (e.g. Pappas and Kriesi 2015). Second, research on the impact economic conditions have on individual attitudes towards immigration and support for radical right parties provides contradictory insights. On one hand, we know that experiencing labour market competition, layoffs, or financial distress fosters anti-immigrant attitudes (Scheve and Slaughter 2001, Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002, Kunovich 2013, Lancee and Pardos-Prado 2013, Polavieja 2016). On the other hand, the literature on the radical right shows that economic factors are not key in explaining support for nationalist parties (Lubbers and Scheepers 2001, Ivarsflaten 2005, Evans 2005, Klandermans and Mayer 2005) and that the worsening of economic conditions can even undermine support for nationalist parties (Knigge 1998, Bloom 2012, 2013).

In this paper we contribute to the debate by testing the impact economic crises have on national attitudes and propose a nuanced answer to the questions above. We contend that the effect of the economic crisis on national attitudes is contingent on people's perceived socio-economic status. Our expectations are mainly derived from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2001) and Shayo's (2009) model. According to this model, identification is shaped in two dimensions: the status of the group to which people belong and the relative distance (or proximity) to the prototype member of the group. Our paper advances this theory by claiming that the position individuals hold in these dimensions is not static but can change over time as a result of economic crises. Accordingly, we show that people's national attitudes are not fixed and that they can be modified by changes in the economic conditions of the country.

We also examine whether exonerative strategies pointing to the responsibility of a third party (in this case the European Union) for the economic crisis enhance 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 supranational institutions 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' national attitudes. Our intuition is that this strategy turns the EU into a common external enemy. As a result, a stronger sense of nationhood is promoted but only among those who rely on the nation to compensate their lower socio-economic status.

To test the hypotheses above, we conduct an experiment in which participants in an online survey are primed on the loss of status of the nation's economy and on the responsibility the EU has had in this loss of status. The analysis focuses on the case of Spain, an EU member state heavily hit by the recent economic crisis and where national attitudes are more malleable because of the country's history and the presence of alternative national identities, particularly in the regions of the Basque Country and Catalonia.

The results of our experiment appear to confirm, first, that the impact the loss of economic status has on national attitudes is moderated by people's perceived socio-economic status. When exposed to a piece priming the loss of the economic status of the nation, people who self-identify as lower class tend to display higher levels of national pride, but people who self-identify as upper class tend to display lower levels. Second, our results also indicate that the conditional effect of a country's loss of status on individuals' nationalism and self-identification are relevant only when the responsibility for the country's economic woes is put on European institutions.

We contribute to previous research examining the effect that economic crises have on political attitudes in different ways. First, we focus on national attitudes as opposed to related phenomena, such as attitudes towards immigration or support for radical right parties, which have received more attention in the literature. Second, we use an experimental design to isolate the effect economic crisis has on these attitudes. Finally,

we analyse how the attribution of responsibilities to the EU, a strategy that political elites have often used during the present economic crisis, has affected pride and nationalism. Our findings show that national pride and nationalism can be enhanced even when the economic crisis is not framed in terms of ethnic competition.

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, followed by the design of the experiment conducted to test our hypotheses and the results of the analyses. In the final section we summarize the main findings of the paper and discuss their implications.

Theoretical framework

Identification with social groups has been defined as a social preference with two dimensions: status and proximity (Shayo 2009). People prefer to identify with high-status groups because it conveys higher self-esteem (Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk 1999). In addition to status, proximity is a key determinant of social identification. 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.

Although people can identify with many groups, two of the more preeminent groups in contemporary societies are the nation and the class (Shayo 2009). The manner in which individuals place themselves in the above dimensions (proximity and status) in relation to these two groups shapes their identification with them. Specifically, people who self-identify as lower class tend to identify more strongly with their national group than those who self-identify as upper class because the former perceive their nation as having a higher status than the socio-economic group to which they belong (the status dimension) and because they feel closer to the prototypical member of the nation (the proximity dimension) (Shayo 2009).

The argument posed by Shayo (2009) leans on two assumptions: first, that the nation is always a high-status group for poor people; and second, that the median citizen in the national group is closer to the poor citizen than to the wealthy citizen. His argument is,

moreover, a static one, and omits the possibility that these dimensions can be modified over time. But what happens when the economic status of the nation is damaged as a result of an economic crisis? We believe that economic crises can alter people's placement in these dimensions. Crises hinder the international and internal prestige of the nation, and they also alter the image individuals have of the prototypical individual in the nation. As we argue next this has important consequences for people's identification.

In many countries, growing inequality has widened the gap between the middle class and the upper class, positively skewing income distribution and pushing the median income downwards (OECD 2008). Economic crises can aggravate this problem so that the impoverishment of the country translates into the impoverishment of the prototypical citizen. This contributes to reducing the perceived distance between members of the lower class and the prototypical citizen, at the same time contributing to increasing the perceived distance between those who self-identify as higher class and the typical citizen.¹ As a result, identification with the nation should be reinforced among those who self-identify as lower class and undermined among those who self-identify as upper class.

The impact the loss of economic status of the nation has on national attitudes is, therefore, moderated by the subjective socio-economic position of the individual. Specifically, people who self-identify as lower class will be less affected by the loss of status of the nation as they turn closer to the country situation, which has also been impoverished as a result of the crisis. Likewise, people who self-identify as upper class should become less attached to the nation as they become more distant from the country situation (Hypothesis 1).

Framing theory provides a complementary mechanism through which crises can impact national attitudes. The way political actors frame the crisis may crucially affect its influence on nationalism. In line with this idea, Brubaker (2011, 95) has argued that nationalism may be enhanced when supranational institutions are presented as "imposing an unjust and punitive regime of austerity on the national economy". 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 deeply 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 economy, offsetting the importance of economic voting. To our knowledge, however, its spill-over effects on national attitudes have not been tested before.

The attribution of responsibility for the economic crisis to the EU can be expected to intensify the impact that the nation’s loss of economic status has on people’s national attitudes, contingent on individuals’ perceived socio-economic 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. Unlike upper-class people, who already belong to a high-status group (social class), people who self-identify as lower class have more reasons to preserve the status of the nation in order to promote a positive social identity and self-esteem.

Moreover, social identity theory predicts that identification with a low-status group will be higher when the low status of the group is perceived as unstable and illegitimate (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995, 260; Tajfel and Turner 2001; Ellemers, Wilke, and van Knippenberg 1993). In the case at hand, blaming the EU will likely convey the perception that the loss of economic status for the nation is unfair, yet this perception of unfairness will vary across economic groups. Specifically, people who self-identify as 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 people who self-categorize as belonging to the upper class, who have been less touched by the crisis. In fact, recent research shows that individuals with a perceived low socio-economic status were more likely to blame globalization factors and to emphasize moral concerns when explaining the financial crisis (Leiser, Bourgeois-Gironde, and Benita 2010).

Accordingly, blaming the EU will heighten the differential effects of the loss of economic status of the nation on national attitudes, conditional on individuals' perceived socio-economic status. 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 national attitudes among people who self-identify as upper class, while it will enhance the positive impact among people who self-identify as lower class (Hypothesis 2).

National attitudes, however, are multidimensional: they tend to be highly correlated but at the same time tap into aspects of the relationship between citizens and their nation that appear to be clearly distinct (e.g. Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). The literature has consistently drawn a distinction between patriotism and nationalism as positive and negative manifestations of national identification. Whereas patriotism entails pride and love for one's own country, nationalism refers to beliefs of national superiority (chauvinism), a desire for dominance in international relations, and intolerance of external and internal difference (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989; Li and Brewer 2004). Thus, although in-group self-esteem is present in both manifestations, patriotism—unlike nationalism—does not imply out-group derogation and prejudice (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989; Blank and Schmidt 1993; De Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Li and Brewer 2004; Huddy and Khatib 2007). To the extent that nationalism implies blind, unconditional love to the nation and the view that it is superior to others, we should expect it to be unaffected by the loss of the nation's economic status. By contrast, we would expect the loss of national status to enhance patriotism but only among those for whom the nation is a more valuable object of identification than their social class (Hypothesis 3). On the other hand, by signaling a common external enemy, the EU frame should increase out-group hostility (i.e. nationalism) (Hypothesis 4).

Our expectations challenge the unconditional expectation derived from the diversionary theory of nationalism. According to Solt (2011), states invest in nationalism to divert citizens' attention from the high levels of inequality and to prevent social unrest, but they cannot allow targeting only those groups more negatively affected by inequality. Instead, all citizens are "inoculated" with nationalism (Solt 2011).² Applied to contexts of economic hardship, Solt's theory implies that national attitudes would equally increase across social groups when the country experiences economic difficulties.

Our predictions can be also interpreted in relation to ethnic competition theory, which has established that individuals more exposed to ethnic competition because of their vulnerability in the job market are more likely to exhibit ethno-nationalist attitudes (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Scheepers, Gijsberts, and Coenders 2002; 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 in a more vulnerable situation, particularly unskilled workers and the unemployed. Although one could argue a tight link between individuals' self-perceived social class and vulnerability in the job market, these are not functionally equivalent. Accordingly, the effect of the economic crisis on national attitudes should be conditional on self-perceived social status regardless of the individual's position in the job market.

Spain as a case study

The Spanish case is a multifaceted case study for reasons that might thwart the test of the hypotheses above but enrich the paper's findings and add some interesting nuances to the questions posed in the introduction. During the last few years, Spain has experienced a very severe economic crisis with serious consequences for the prestige of the Spanish nation and for the economic condition of its prototypical citizen. These circumstances make Spain a proper case to examine how economic shocks affect people's national attitudes.

During the early years of the 21st century, the Spanish economy experienced an unprecedented growth 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 hitting very seriously the Spanish economy (Royo 2009). Unemployment rose from eight per cent in 2007 to twenty-six per cent in 2013, and the Spanish GDP fell by 6.3 per cent in seven years (between 2007 and 2014). As a result, Spain went from the ninth position to the fourteenth position in the ranking of world economies (according to World Bank data).

Starting in 2010, Spanish governments – the left-wing PSOE government, first, and the conservative PP government, next – implemented a series of adjustment policies that aimed to counter the effects of the crisis. To excuse the implementation of these policies, the two parties adopted at times a discourse that used the EU obligations as a justification. Podemos, a radical left party that emerged during the economic crisis attracting a sizable number of voters, also blamed the EU economic policy for the economic situation in Spain, and the media contributed to the generalization of that frame.

Spain is a case study in which national attitudes can be seen as more malleable because of its recent history and the presence of alternative forms of territorial identification in the Basque Country and Catalonia. For many years, Spanish identity was perceived as discredited 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 nineties with the conservative governments of the Popular Party (PP), which 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, adherents of the left wing continued to have a difficult relationship with the Spanish identity (Ruiz Jiménez, González-Fernández, and Jiménez Sánchez 2016).

Nuisances in the Spanish nation and the Spanish identity are most prominently present in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where sizeable proportions of the people hold alternative identities and hardly feel any attachment to Spain. Moreover, in recent times Spain has undergone a very deep territorial crisis. Parallel to the economic downturn, the independence movement has gained relevance in Catalonia, achieving a significant level of support (nearly 48 per cent of voters in the 2016 regional parliament election cast votes for openly secessionist parties). Aligned 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 region richer 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. The experimental design

set up for this research allows identifying the impact of economic crisis vis-à-vis other potential explanations, such as the territorial crisis.

Experiment design

In this study, we rely on a survey experiment in which the loss of the economic status of the nation and the responsibility of the EU in this loss of status are primed. By manipulating the status of the nation's economy, we convey an idea that the socio-economic status of the prototypical citizen has also declined.³

The experiment was embedded in an online survey carried out from June 1–7, 2016, on a sample of 741 residents in Spain, aged 18 and older.⁴ After answering a series of questions related to the participants' socio-demographic characteristics and basic political attitudes, the survey respondents were administered the treatment; then the dependent variables were measured. A final set of additional socio-demographic questions followed, and after completing the survey, respondents were debriefed.

Participants were randomly assigned to three different conditions.⁵ 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 suffered by the Spanish economy in the last few years (2007 to 2014) and its effects on economic activity and employment. The other treatment group received the same text as well as information on the role that the budget cuts imposed by the EU 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 to prevent participants in the survey from thinking about the source of information and its credibility. 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 prime (see Table 1).

(Table 1)

The Spanish case is a hard case for testing our hypotheses due to pre-treatment. People have been extensively exposed to news related to the bad state of the economy and the role the EU has played in the economic crisis. As a result, people are highly aware of the loss of status of the Spanish economy, and some of them attribute part of the responsibility for the crisis to the austerity policies imposed by the EU.⁶ Pre-treatment makes very difficult any effective manipulation of people's beliefs on this subject.

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 experiencing an economic crisis may arguably be substantially higher than those reported below.

To capture different national attitudes, participants in the survey were asked three questions (see supplemental appendix). To measure patriotism, understood as positive affection towards one's nationality, we asked respondents the extent to which they feel proud of being Spanish, coded using a four-point scale, ranging from "not at all proud" to "very proud". Nationalism was gauged using a direct measure of *españolismo* ("spanishness"), where respondents were asked to place themselves on an eleven-point scale ranging from lowest to highest *españolismo*.⁷ Unlike national pride (i.e. patriotism), nationalism involves an intergroup comparison that reflects national superiority and downward bias towards other national groups (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). Finally, we also included a measure of identification. This question asks participants the extent to which they identify with Spain on an eleven-point scale running from "not at all" to "completely". Where national identification, thus measured, exactly stands in relation to the dimensions of patriotism and nationalism is less clear; hence our expectations regarding the effect of experimental manipulations on this variable are less certain. Li and Brewer (2004) have argued that national identity may be directed toward shared in-group attachment (patriotism) or out-group derogation and intolerance (nationalism) depending on the circumstances. As noted above, identification with Spain still carries negative connotations because of its association with the Francoist regime, and the existence of alternative national projects in some regions of the country renders it a far from neutral form of identity. Empirically,

identification with Spain appears to be more strongly correlated with nationalism ($r=0.85$) than with national pride ($r=0.56$), further suggesting that this variable is closer to the nationalist dimension than to that of patriotism.⁸

Results

Each of the dependent variables is regressed on the treatments (the control condition being the reference group), perceived social class, the interaction between treatment and class. For comparability, all dependent variables are coded between 0 and 10. The self-perceived social-class indicator measures the subjective socio-economic status of respondents, using a five-point scale ranging from lower social class (0) to upper social class (4).⁹

The models also include three covariates: ideology, region of residence, and age. The inclusion of these variables, all of which were measured in the pre-treatment section of the questionnaire, is based on their anticipated effect on the dependent variables and 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 attitudes in Spain (Muñoz 2009, 2012). As noted above, because left-wing people in Spain still have a complicated relationship with the Spanish nation (Ruiz Jiménez et al. 2016b), including ideology is important. This variable is measured 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. Differences in the socialization processes of the generations educated during the Franco dictatorship and the generations educated after the transition to democracy explain a significant part of the variance in national attitudes (Muñoz 2009, 2012). To capture the effect of differences in the socialization process that Spaniards have experienced, we have also included respondents' age as a covariate in the analyses. Table 2 presents the summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables.¹⁰

(Table 2)

Table 3 reports the results of the models, obtained using OLS estimation.¹¹ 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. Older and right-wing respondents score higher on the national attitudes scales, and respondents living in Catalonia and the Basque Country score significantly lower than those living in other regions. These results are consistent across the three dependent variables.

(Table 3)

The results for the interactions and their constitutive terms are in the expected direction across the three models.¹² 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 nationalism and national identification. The effect of the interaction between perceived social class and the EU-blame treatment is statistically significant on all three dependent variables. That is, perceived 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. Similarly, when combined with a blame-the-EU frame, the positive effect of status loss on respondents' pride, nationalism, and identification 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 self-identify as lower class, the neutral status-loss prime significantly increases their national pride, compared to respondents who self-identify as lower class in the control condition ($p < 0.05$). To the contrary, among those who self-identify as upper class, the neutral status-loss prime significantly *decreases* national pride, compared to the control condition ($p < 0.10$). The model predicts that the national pride of a lower-class respondent increases 0.44 points on the 0–10 scale when exposed to the status-loss treatment while that of the upper class decreases 0.59 points. Although the same pattern emerges for nationalism and national identification, in these cases the effects are not statistically significant at either extreme of the subjective social-class scale.

As concerns the EU-blame treatment, the estimates indicate that the effects are also conditional on respondents' perceived status and statistically significant for all three outcomes at both extremes of the social-class scale ($p < 0.10$ level at least). Thus, compared to individuals who self-identify as lower class in the control condition, lower-class individuals exposed to the EU-blame treatment score 0.52 points higher on the pride scale, 0.91 points higher on the nationalist scale, and one point higher on the identification scale. By contrast, compared to their counterparts in the control condition, respondents self-identify as upper-class and see the EU-blame prime are 0.60 points less proud of being Spanish, 1.54 points less nationalist, and 1.94 points less identified with Spain.

(Figure 1)

Overall, the results appear to align with our theoretical expectations with regard to the different dimensions of national attitudes. Patriotism, measured here as national pride, is affected by a change of the nation's status, such that a loss of status tends to enhance attachment to the national in-group among those for whom, because of their lower social status, belonging to the nation is a source of higher self-esteem. This does not seem to be the case with nationalism. To be activated, the out-group derogation implicit in nationalist feelings requires that an external party is explicitly attributed the responsibility for the loss of economic status, as occurs in the EU-blame treatment. By contrast, blaming an out-group does not appear to accentuate the effect of the status-loss prime on patriotism. Finally, that the results of national identification closely parallel those of nationalism indicates that our measure of identification carries a strong nationalistic charge.

Discussion

This paper's goal was to assess the effect economic crisis has on national attitudes. As far as we are concerned, and despite its positive effect often taken for granted, this is the first attempt to directly weigh it. Particularly, we have analysed how messages that prime the loss of the economic status of the nation, alone and in combination with a blame-shifting frame that puts the responsibility for the crisis on a third party (the EU), influence people's national attitudes. Using experimental evidence, the paper has first

shown that these messages have heterogeneous effects depending on people's perceived socio-economic status. People who self-identify as lower class turn prouder of the nation when they are exposed to messages that prime the loss of status of the national economy; and they turn more nationalist, too, when information related to the national economic downgrade is framed in terms of out-group responsibility. The effect is the opposite among people who self-identify as upper class.

The need to find identity shelter in high-status groups and the generalization of frames that emphasize the presence of an external enemy appear to be the two mechanisms at play here. Individuals who self-identify as lower class and who have a more compelling need to find identity comfort in the nation appear to be further affected by frames that point to an external enemy as responsible for the economic crisis. On the contrary, people who are comfortable with their socio-economic group turn their backs on the nation when they receive similar messages. These results lend support to Shayo's (2009) theory, but they add a nuanced twist to the argument: framing the crisis as the responsibility of a third party enhances the relationship between individuals' socio-economic status and nationalism in the context of the crisis.

Two additional points could be made in light of our results. Blaming a supranational institution for the responsibility of the economic crisis is only one of the ways in which political parties can frame economic crises. Political elites can also adopt ethnic competition frames, or they can emphasize that the costs of economic decline are felt by all ethnic groups in society (Bloom 2012). In the case we have analysed here, these frames have been absent from the political discourse. Future research should compare how these alternative frames impact national attitudes depending on people's socio-economic perceptions. In line with previous research, we expect that ethnic competition frames will encourage nationalism among those who are highly exposed to market competition while shared pain frames will decrease it among all groups.

An additional aspect that requires some reflection is the durability of the observed effects. Previous research has discussed the persistence of one-shot survey experiments and has argued that the impact of messages might decay promptly in time. This research has, however, defended the more relevant and persistent impact of repetition and accumulation of similar messages in the real world (Gaines, Kuklinski and Quirk 2007).

In addition, the impact that exposure to this kind of messages has on people's national attitudes should also be stronger in less pre-treated settings. That is, we would expect that the kind of messages we reproduced in our experiment would have a stronger influence on people's national attitudes at the beginning of the economic crisis. In any case, if we accept that national attitudes are malleable and can increase among people who identify as lower class in times of economic downturn, we expect them to be reduced once the economy recovers. This contention would, nevertheless, require further testing, which would in turn necessitate longitudinal data spanning the entire period of the economic crisis and afterwards.

Notes

¹ At least theoretically, higher classes can also be negatively affected in their own economic position during hard economic times. This should reduce the distance between the higher classes and the prototypical citizen. As a result of this process, higher classes' identification with the nation should be increased instead of reduced. To test for this possibility, the perceived economic status of the higher classes should be manipulated. Unfortunately, our experiment manipulates only the economic status of the country, not the economic status of the individuals.

² Counter to Solt, Han (2013) has defended the increase in the national pride of poor people as a result of income inequality but only in countries with many migrants.

³ Note that here we do not manipulate people's perceived socio-economic status but the nation's economic status.

⁴ The sample was drawn from a non-opt-in panel provided by Qualtrics in Spain. Respondents in online surveys tend to be younger and highly educated. To partially correct for this bias, the sample included sex, age, and education quotas.

⁵ See the supplemental appendix for the detail on the distribution of the treatment and control conditions among participants in the survey.

⁶ 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 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.

⁷ Asking people directly about the extent to which they are nationalist might appear odd, but this is a relevant question in the Spanish context, where alternative forms of nationalism (the Catalan and Basque) oppose Spanish nationalism. This and the question about the degree to which the individual identifies with Spain are frequently used questions in Spanish surveys.

⁸ Correlations do not vary substantially across experimental conditions.

⁹ Unlike Shayo (2009), who equates income to social class identification, we use a measure that better captures perceived socio-economic status. Because identification is placed in the domain of the subjective, we rely on an indicator of status that is *subjectively*, instead of *objectively*, constructed: self-perceived social class. Ultimately, Shayo's original theory is not based on *objective* measures of group membership (based on nationality, or income) but on *subjective* measures of identification. We have also tested whether the effects of our treatments are conditional on people vulnerability in the job market (using respondents' employment status, level of education, and household income). Results indicate that, unlike subjective social status, these variables do not moderate treatment effects.

¹⁰ The final number of cases included in the analyses is reduced to 635 as a result of drop-outs before survey completion and missing information regarding the ideology of some respondents. People without Spanish citizenship or born abroad (n=38) are excluded from the analysis because alternative national identities can be more relevant for them than the Spanish identity. Given that participants in the survey were forced to answer to these questions, the reliability of the answers of this type of respondent could be lower.

¹¹ National pride has been also estimated using an ordered logistic regression; however, because the results do not change substantially to those obtained using OLS estimation, we report here the latter for ease of interpretation.

¹² Table A2 of the supplemental appendix reports the estimates of the main effects. Results indicate that the unconditional treatment effect is not statistically significant for any of the dependent variables. These results also run counter to the expectations of the diversionary nationalism theory.

Acknowledgements

We thank Eva Anduiza and the members of the Democracy, Elections and Citizenship Research Group for their suggestions on a previous version of this article. We are also very grateful to the reviewers, whose constructive comments greatly helped to clarify and improve the paper.

Funding

This work was supported by the LIVEWHAT project financed by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme [grant number 613237].

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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. Summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables

Variable name	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Min.	Max.	N
Identification	6.68	3.00	-0.70	0	10	635
Pride	6.10	3.44	-0.17	0	10	635
Nationalism	6.04	3.07	-0.59	0	10	635
Social Class	1.57	0.78	-0.03	0	4	635
Ideology	4.33	2.62	0.15	0	10	635
Age	40.73	12.32	0.07	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.

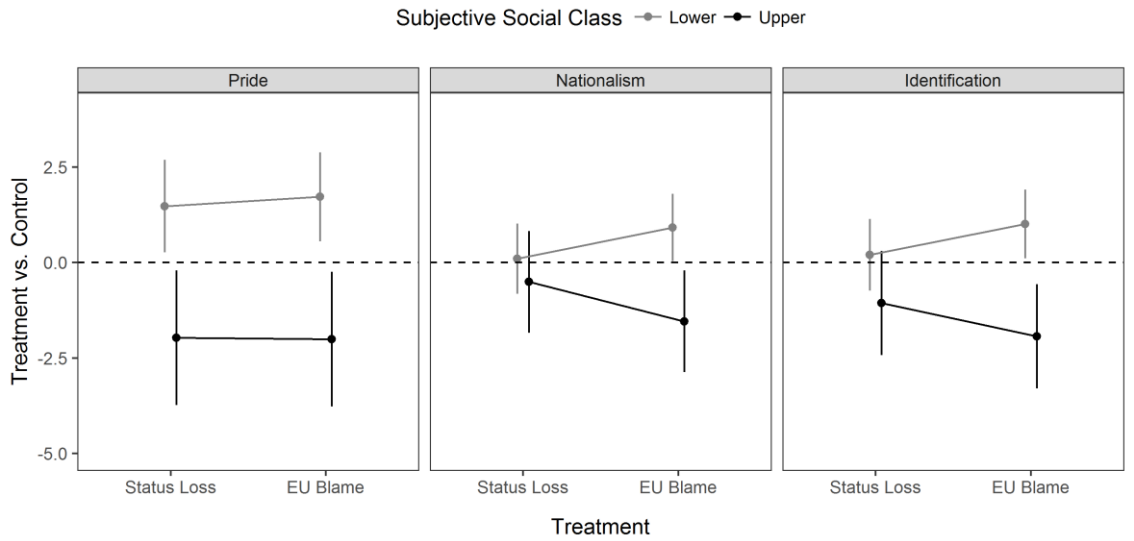
Table 3. Exposure to treatments and effects on nationalist attitudes by subjective social class

	Pride	Nationalism	Identification
<i>Treatment (ref. no treatment)</i>			
Status Loss	1.474* (0.736)	0.097 (0.556)	0.201 (0.569)
EU Blame	1.717* (0.708)	0.913+ (0.535)	1.004+ (0.547)
Social Class	0.624* (0.312)	0.244 (0.236)	0.251 (0.241)
<i>Heterogeneous effects</i>			
Status Loss * Class	-0.860* (0.422)	-0.152 (0.319)	-0.316 (0.326)
EU Blame * Class	-0.932* (0.414)	-0.614* (0.313)	-0.735* (0.320)
Ideology	0.376*** (0.051)	0.531*** (0.039)	0.452*** (0.040)
<i>Region dummies (ref. all others)</i>			
Catalonia	-0.877* (0.368)	-2.616*** (0.278)	-2.475*** (0.284)
Basque Country	-1.148+ (0.695)	-2.451*** (0.525)	-2.682*** (0.537)
Age	0.022* (0.011)	0.024** (0.008)	0.019* (0.008)
Constant	2.665*** (0.705)	2.908*** (0.533)	4.148*** (0.545)
Observations	635	635	635
R ²	0.120	0.370	0.310

Unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

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

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



Note: 90% confidence intervals. Predictions based on the estimations in Table 3.

Supplemental Appendix

Dependent Variable Wording

Pride

“To what extent do you feel proud of being Spanish?” 1 = not proud at all; 4 = very proud.

Nationalism

“The next scale measures the nationalist feeling españolismo. Where do you place yourself?” 0 = lowest españolismo; 10 = highest españolismo.

Identification

“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?” 0 = not at all; 10 = completely.

Table A1. Descriptive statistics by experimental condition

	Control	Status Loss	EU Blame
Pride	5.86 (0.24)	6.13 (0.23)	6.31 (0.24)
Nationalism	5.94 (0.21)	6.04 (0.21)	6.14 (0.21)
Identification	6.68 (0.20)	6.59 (0.21)	6.76 (0.21)
Social Class	1.53 (0.05)	1.63 (0.05)	1.53 (0.06)
Ideology	4.12 (0.18)	4.43 (0.18)	4.45 (0.18)
Age	40.23 (0.85)	40.36 (0.84)	41.63 (0.85)
Region (col. %)			
Catalonia	16.3	13.2	15.4
Basque Country	3.3	4.3	3.4
All others	80.5	82.6	81.3
Observations	215	212	208

Note: Mean values, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table A2. Main effects

	Pride	Nationalism	Identification
<i>Treatment (ref. control)</i>			
Status Loss	0,136 (0,316)	-0,121 (0,239)	-0,276 (0,244)
EU Blame	0,292 (0,318)	-0,028 (0,240)	-0,121 (0,245)
Social Class	-0,014 (0,171)	-0,037 (0,129)	-0,131 (0,132)
Ideology	0,374*** (0,051)	0,532*** (0,039)	0,452*** (0,040)
<i>Region dummies (ref. all others)</i>			
Catalonia	-0,897* (0,369)	-2,625*** (0,278)	-2,487*** (0,285)
Basque Country	-1,210+ (0,696)	-2,515*** (0,525)	-2,751*** (0,537)
Age	0,021* (0,011)	0,024** (0,008)	0,019* (0,008)
Constant	3,674*** (0,574)	3,359*** (0,433)	4,757*** (0,443)
Observations	635	635	635
R^2	0,111	0,366	0,304

Unstandardized OLS coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$