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# 'We are Different': do Anti-establishment Parties Promote Distinctive Elites? An Analysis of the Spanish Case

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## ABSTRACT

Since the Great Recession, new parties challenged the pre-eminence of mainstream parties in many European democracies. In this paper we wonder to what extent this challenge translates in the representative politics. This paper aims to evaluate whether a) in terms of descriptive representation, the new challenger parties renewed the composition of the Parliaments; b) new challenger parties belonging to different ideological families elect different élites. The analysis focuses on two new successful anti-establishment parties: Podemos and Ciudadanos. Podemos belongs to the radical left family while Ciudadanos is a centre-right liberal party. We have built a dataset of the representatives of these two parties and the two other mainstream parties (PP and PSOE) in the Congress (2016), in the Autonomous Communities (2015) and in the Party in Central Office. Our findings suggest that Podemos and C's élites are younger and better educated compared to mainstream parties. Yet, we found that beyond their common anti-establishment background, different core ideologies matter when it comes to other aspects of the descriptive representation: in terms of education and working background, Podemos and C's élites are more similar to their ideologically closer parties, rather than among each other, thus highlighting the irrelevance of the shared anti-establishment rhetoric.


## KEYWORDS

Political representation; new parties; elites

## 1. Introduction

Since the Great Recession, several authors have fruitfully focussed on the change in the Southern European political systems (Hutter, Kriesi, & Vidal, 2018). Both new and already existent parties – Five Star Movement in Italy, Podemos and C's in Spain, SYRIZA and To Potami in Greece, En Marche! and La France Insoumise in France – came to the front as electable challenger and anti-establishment parties: mainstream parties from both the social-democratic and conservative party families suffered tremendous setbacks. The 'cartels' (Katz & Mair, 2009) that characterised the European political system were shaken between 2008 and 2017: their withdrawal from civil society and transformation into State agents – as demonstrated by their reliance on public funding (Katz &

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Mair, 2009), the decrease of the mass membership (van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012) and reduced linkage capacity (Ignazi, 2018) – has alienated parties from the classical electorates. On the other hand, ‘challenger parties’ (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016) made an effort to reconnect with civil society and with social movements (Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013) in order to increase their legitimacy. From an electoral standpoint, this attempt was successful; however, the question so far unanswered is to what extent this challenge in the political systems has been translated in the representative politics. Once social democratic party family enters the European political systems, its élite differs from that of the established liberal and conservative families (Ruostetsaari, 2000). Does this hold true for these new challengers? The challenger party family includes those parties that ‘have not formed part of any government (...) and have sought to reshape the political landscape by putting new issues on the agenda’ (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016, p. 4). At the same time, this family is heterogeneous: not only do these challengers have different backgrounds, but their core ideologies reflect old, established ideologies. Finally, most of them are also anti-establishment parties: they resort to a ‘rhetorical appeal based on opposition to those who wield power (...)’ (Barr, 2009, p. 44) raising the cleavage between ‘ruled’ and the ‘rulers’ (Schedler, 1996, p. 294). These parties, criticising the absence of responsiveness on the part of the political class, offer as a solution the change in political personnel, often in conjunction with the promotion of citizens’ participation in the political process (Barr, 2009, p. 38). Our analysis will focus on two challenger and anti-establishment parties – Podemos and Ciudadanos (C’s) – belonging respectively to the radical left and the liberal family and both of them recently emerged in Spain, a paradigmatic case for the transformation of a well-established political system during the Great Recession. The aim is to scrutinise whether the descriptive political representation (Pitkin, 1967) of the new anti-establishment elites resembles their electorate, as well as whether the new anti-establishment parties’ elites do represent different sectors of their respective societies. To this end, we will examine the socio-demographic profile, the educational and work background of the two parties’ MPs at the national and regional levels, as well as the elected members their executive boards.

Our findings suggest that Podemos and C’s elites are younger and better educated compared to mainstream parties, the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE); however, Podemos and C’s elite’s education/work background is distinct from that of the other party as well as from its own electorate.

## 2. Parties as Agents of Representation: Theoretical Approach

Political parties are representative agents of the society in the State (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). The link between parties and their ‘core constituency’ is not automatic nor does it depend solely on the social context and its attendant internal fractures. Parties are not passive agents and often politicise new issues. Yet, according to the literature (Gay, 2002; Heath, 2015; Mansbridge, 1999), the social background of political representatives is nonetheless one of the fundamental factors in influencing the perceptions and choices of voters. Indeed, the mere presence of people of their own social group in a position of political power can make voters feel both closer to the party in question and better represented by it. Thus, the identification between represented and representatives may fruitfully be based on social characteristics rather than on shared ideology or political

proposals. In this case it is the descriptive dimension of the representation that emerges. It differs from the formal representation, understood as concession of authority from the electorate to the elected; symbolic, where the symbols have evocative power; substantial, which includes both accountability, deriving from the capacity to sanction the representatives, and responsiveness, i.e. the transformation of the citizens' preferences into policies (Pitkin, 1967). Descriptive representation is based on inclusiveness or institutional mirroring of societal interests and it implies that representatives 'stand for' others, sharing some socio-demographic characteristics. From this perspective, this type of representation does not imply the activity of representation except in the narrow sense of 'making representations', i.e. giving information about the representatives (Pitkin, 1967, p. 90). On the other hand, however, representatives with the same visible sociotropic characteristics as the body represented may have 'shared experiences' and be more able to understand and bring out the relative requests. This happens especially in the case of underrepresented groups, bearers of uncrystallised issues, i.e. issues that have not been fully and openly discussed and consequently need to be politicised to demonstrate their salience (Mansbridge, 1999). From this point of view, therefore, descriptive representation can crucially support the principles of democracy, allowing decisions that are inclusive to a wider set of popular voices. Consequently, there is a potential link between descriptive and substantive representation (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Sobolewska, McKee, & Campbell, 2018).

Many studies have focussed on the role of descriptive representation in relation to ethnic and cultural minorities or gender equality (see for eg. Lovenduski & Norris, 2003; Mügge, van der Pas, & van de Wardt, 2019; Sobolewska et al., 2018), while this issue is less investigated with reference to the role of new anti-establishment parties emerged in various European democracies after the Great Recession. Yet, as pointed out by Serrano and Bermúdez (2018, p. 27), the social identification between representatives and representatives should be even more powerful in the case of new and anti-establishment parties, precisely because they declare themselves different with regards to recruitment and selection of their ruling classes.

At the same time, however, another factor that affects the characteristics of the representatives and the link between descriptive and substantive representation is the ideology. From the formation of liberal democracies onward, the political class of the different party families presented specific social and professional characteristics. The conservative parties used to select representatives from the 'traditional establishment': noblemen, military officers, judges. Although since the end of the twentieth century, the level of internal homogeneity of the party family has decreased, the main professional categories are still corporate management, legal professions and in some cases non-legal professions (Cromwell & Verzichelli, 2007, pp. 210–214).

Liberals MPs display a comparatively higher level of education. The legal professions and educators are overrepresented, the former on the liberal right and the latter on the liberal left (Ruostetsaari, 2007, pp. 233–241).

Historically the socio-professional background of the left parties' elites has been completely different from that of Liberal and Conservative elites. During the late 18th and early nineteenth century many socialists were 'working-class party intellectuals', i.e. party officials with low levels of formal education (Ilonszki, 2007, p. 291). This composition became less specific in the second half of the twentieth century, following improvements in social and economic conditions. Intellectuals have always been over-represented as

compared to blue collars workers. This is partly due to the idea of the party-form and its functions according to the socialist ideology: 'to make the mass party work, an educated and enlightened group was badly needed' (Ruostetsaari, 2000, p. 73)

### 3. The Party Elite(s) and the Democratic Representation

In recent decades, the disengagement between parties and citizens seems to have weakened parties in their roles as legitimate intermediary bodies between the electorate and the government (Mair, 2009). Propositions for reforming democratic institutions, opening the political system and strengthening the mechanisms of direct democracy come from all kinds of political actors (Núñez, Close, & Bedock, 2016). This is a trend favourable to 'democratic innovations', aimed at both expanding direct democracy (Smith, 2009, p. 1) and deepening 'descriptive' and 'substantial representation' (Pitkin, 1967). New parties have been the main interpreters of this renewal, canalising the protest of citizens distrusted by the representative capacities of traditional actors. These new parties share a common characteristic: they stress their distinctiveness—in terms of policy proposals, organisation or personnel—from established parties (Abedi, 2004). Particularly, their focus on the need to strengthen the representativeness of political parties favours the emphasis on descriptive representation (Lisi, 2018). However, while much has been written about the supposed ability of these new parties to innovate in terms of organisation or policy proposals, their capacity to 'reflect' the characteristics of their community is far less investigated. Precisely for this reason, and given the consensus gathered by these new forces in the various European democracies, it is important to investigate whether and how their entrance into representative institutions has changed the social and professional composition of the political class, strengthening—at least symbolically—the link with their electorate.

Podemos and C's in Spain are among the most successful cases both in electoral terms and with regards to their impact on the characteristics of the party system. Both parties, campaigned for a democratic renewal of institutions, acting as the opposition to the two existing parties, the PP and the PSOE. They politicised the people/caste 'cleavage', trying to promote at least rhetorically the inclusiveness of the candidate selections.<sup>1</sup>

Several works (Coller, Jaime-Castillo, & Mota, 2018; Cotta & Best, 2007) have shown that in European countries, the composition of representative elites has changed over time in response to social and political transformations. In the mid-nineteenth century there was a prevalence of 'symbol specialists' (e.g. university professors) and executive specialists (i.e. administrative civil servants), while the economic elites prevailed in the periods of accelerated industrialisation. With the transition to mass democracy in the twentieth century, specialists in mass mobilizations and representatives of intermediary organisations also entered the parliaments (e.g. trade unionists). Finally, in the second half of the twentieth century, the entry originated principally from the public sector (Best & Vogel, 2018, pp. 348–349).

The composition of the Spanish Parliament seems to be different from other cases because of the relative youth of Spanish democracy. López Nieto (1997) emphasizes the difference with the European context when discussing the first seven legislatures: Spanish MPs were younger and, besides those highly educated, a growing number of representatives had college degrees. Moreover, female representation had grown faster than in other European countries: although initially very low, it was approaching 30%

by the early 2000s (Christmas-Best & Kjær, 2007, p. 102). López Nieto (1997, p. 150) claims that Spanish MPs were ‘less professional but more “democratic”, i.e. more similar to the majority of citizens. However, other more recent works (Coller et al., 2018; Jerez, Linz, & Real-Dato, 2013) have shown that in the last years composition of the Spanish political class has realigned itself with other European democracies. In their study of the political class of the 2008–2011 legislature, Serrano and Bermúdez (2018, pp. 21–35) have highlighted the prevalence of male representatives of relatively advanced age, possessing university qualifications predominantly in the social sciences and humanities (teaching and law), professional careers linked to legislative work and privileged socio-economic backgrounds. The under-representation of women and of young people is common to state-wide and regionalist parties.

These characteristics persisted also in the X legislature (2011): the number of women grew, but remained always lower than that of men; the large majority of MPs had a university degree, and education (centre-left) and law-related (centre-right) professions were the most represented in the Parliament (Kakepaki, Kountouri, Verzhichelli, & Coller, 2018).

#### 4. Podemos and Ciudadanos: the Actors That Changed Everything?

Spain simultaneously represents both a paradigmatic and unique case. It is paradigmatic for the (radical) transformation of its political system, which also occurred in other Southern European countries. From 1982 until 2015 the mechanics of the Spanish party system followed a two-party logic, centred on the alternation between the PP and the PSOE. In the 2011 general elections, however despite formally resisting, bipartism was weakened. In the 2014 European elections bipartism was under threat as two new parties—Podemos and Ciudadanos—gained a consistent share of votes (Table 1) (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). However, these elections had the typical characteristics of second order elections: the turnout had been low (44%) and other already existent parties such as the radical left Izquierda Unida (IU) and the centre-right Unión Progreso y Democracia (Upyd), had considerably broadened their consensus<sup>2</sup> (Cordero & Ramón Montero, 2015). Finally, with the 2015 general elections Spain became a four-party system: Podemos and C’s benefited from the collapse of bipartyism while other nationwide parties suffered significant losses (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). The difficulties of the four most-voted parties to establish a coalition led to new elections in 2016, after less than one year. The minority government led by PP lasted only until 2018, when Podemos backed a no-confidence vote proposed by PSOE: PSOE leader, Pedro Sánchez became

**Table 1.** Elections’ Results of the four main nationwide parties

	Podemos (Unidos Podemos)	C’s	PSOE	PP
European Elections 2014	7.98% (new)	3.2% (+3.1%)	23% (–15.8%)	26.1% (–16%)
General Elections 2015	12.7% (new) 20.6%*	13.9% (did not contest)	22.0% (–6,75%)	28.7% (–15.9%)
General Elections 2016	13.4% (+0,7%) **	13% (–0.9%)	22.6% (+0.6%)	33.0% (+4.3%)
General Elections 2019	11.1% (–2.3%) **	15.9% (+2.9%)	28,7% (+6.1%)	16.7% (–16.3%)
European Elections 2019	10.05% (–7.96%***)	12.2% (+9%)	32.8% (+9.8%)	20.1% (–6%)

\* Podemos formed several alliances at the CC.AA. level with other regional parties \*\*Unidos Podemos (UP) (Podemos, IU, Equo and other minor parties). \*\*\*UP: we subtract the results of Podemos and IU in the 2014 elections from UP result in 2019.

Source: Ministry of the Interior (Spain)

PM, but he soon called for snap-elections in 2019, through which he consolidated PSOE relative majority.

Until 2017 the Spanish case was almost unique, as the country lacked radical-right parties while presenting at the same time two new successful challenger parties. Indeed, the two new parties had different core ideologies. Podemos arose as a left-leaning party, politicising the issues of anti-austerity and democratic regeneration that had already emerged in 2011 with the Indignados movement. C's was economically (neo)liberal, proposing anti-crisis solutions oriented towards favouring competition, productivity and innovation (Ciudadanos-cs.org).

In other Western countries the most electorally successful protest parties belonged to the left/right extreme poles (with the exception The River in Greece, whose relevance from 2014 onwards was nonetheless limited and more recently of the La Republique En Marche in France).

Between 2014 and 2016, both the Spanish political system and political personnel changed radically. After an unexpected success in the 2014 European elections, Podemos received 1 million 800 thousand votes at the 2015 regional elections (Table 1). In the 2015 general election, it was the third most-voted party, and the following elections it coalesced with IU and 15 territorial formations (Unidos Podemos).

C's, on the other hand, is a much older Catalan-based party, which has only recently become relevant at the national level. After entering the EP in 2014, in 2015 the party gained the third position in the municipal elections and fourth position in the regional elections. In the 2015 elections in Catalonia it became the second party, and in the 2015 and 2016 general elections it was the fourth most-voted party.

Podemos and C's electorates present substantial differences despite sharing a very critical assessment of the political situation and of the corruption in the country (Orriols & Cordero, 2016). Podemos has a more left-wing electorate (Ramiro & Gómez, 2016), while C's voters have a more centrist orientation (Rodríguez Teruel & Barrio, 2016).

Although the literature has analysed the evolution of these two parties, what has insofar been neglected is how the differences in their electorate are reflected among the parties' élites. While the parties are perceived by the electorate as left and centrist respectively, do their élites reflect these differences? Does the configuration of party elites at national and local levels help explain the difference in the core ideology of each party? On the basis of the theoretical premises presented above, we expect that:

- 1) Podemos and C's representatives have a stronger sociological link with their respective electorates compared to PP and PSOE elites.
- 2) Podemos and C's differ in terms of social and professional characteristics of their MPs. We expect to find many intellectuals in Podemos, while national and regional MPs with an economic and juridical educational and professional background should prevail in C's, in line with the traditional sectors of recruitment of the respective party families.

## 5. Analysis of the Parliamentary Class

In order to assess these hypotheses, we propose a comparison of the characteristics of the two parties' representatives in the last legislatures at the national and regional level for



which data were available at the time of writing, 2016 for Parliament and 2015 for the Autonomous Communities. Although Podemos and C's passed the representation threshold for the first time in the 2015 general elections, we decided to concentrate the analysis on the 2016–2019 legislature because of the short duration of the previous one (only 5 months). The choice to also consider the regional context is due to the federal-regional structure of the Spanish democracy, as well as to the different social and political characteristics of the various regions. We will focus on the characteristics that indicate the position of MPs in the framework of hierarchically and functionally differentiated societies: age, sex, education and profession.

Age is an important dimension of demographic representation from both the perspective of generational representation and political life cycle renewal because it deeply influences the accumulated experience and personal circumstances of MPs (Serrano & Bermúdez, 2018, p. 23). We distinguish between three cohorts for the purpose of this analysis: 18–34, the so-called generation Y (the Millennials), 35–54 (Generation X) and 55 and over (the baby-boomers and elderly people).

Similarly, gender is a basic dimension of demographic representation and is receiving growing attention, especially in the last decades, because of the under-representation of women in European democracies.

The dimensions 'education' and 'profession' are fundamental in order to observe eventual changes in comparison to other parties, both in the past and in the last legislature. Indeed 'the prevalence of university degrees among the political elite [...] is a historical constant' (Serrano & Bermúdez, 2018, p. 24). In this case we will distinguish between two categories: higher education (graduated politicians) and pre-university (politicians without university degree), as lower education's categories are not meaningful for the data we collected, being those categories residuals.

As for the working background of the party élites, our selection relies on the ILO convention called ISCO-88, which divides occupations into 9 major groups. However, the peculiar structure of the professions among elected representatives forced us to modify the categorisation in order to make it meaningful and in order to provide fruitful information about the background of the political personnel of the parties. In doing so, we provide a more balanced structure for classifying the personnel elected within the two parties.

Our first category is that of 'manager and professional élite' (see online Appendix, par. 2 for further details). The teaching, social and cultural professionals belong to a second category denominated 'intellectual workers'. We added this new category, which is not present in ISCO 88 categorisation, in order to stress the difference between professionals involved in business and for-profit related profession and those in which the for-profit model is an exception, rather than the norm (schools, culture workers etc.).

The third category is named 'technicians and autonomous workers' and it includes a) private corporate employees and b) mid-level self-employed workers and consultants.

Although ISCO-88 does not clearly identify the role of "generic civil servant," we decided to make it a fourth category derived from the literature on elites (Cotta & Best, 2007). This fourth category excludes all top-level civil servants working in local, regional or national administration.

The fifth broad category is what we call 'manual workers' (see online Appendix, par. 2 for further details).

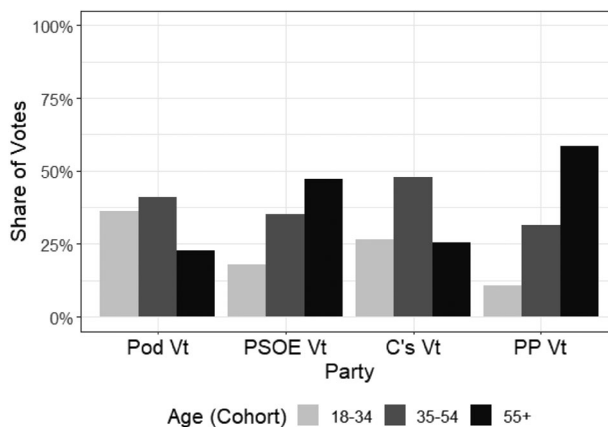


The sixth residual category is composed by ‘non-conventional workers’: this category includes those professions for which clear-cut insertion in one of the categories would have been difficult or lack meaning: we inserted students and athletes among these ‘non-conventional workers’.

Finally, the political classes of Podemos and C’s will be analysed on the basis of the role they play within the respective party organisations. As well, we will compare the socio-demographic composition of the PCO with that of the Party in Public Office (PPO). In Podemos the PCO is the Citizens’ Council, which determines the party’s political direction. It is composed of 62 members elected by the Assembly, the regional secretaries, a representative of the members abroad and four representatives of the party’s basic units (the circles). In C’s the PCO is the General Council, which acts as the decision-making body. It is made up of 125 members elected by the General Assembly, twenty members of the Executive Committee and the representatives of the Regional Committees.

We collected data from the website of the Spanish Congress for the parties’ MPs, while for regional councillors we checked CC.AA. institutional websites. For parties’ PCO we relied on political parties’ websites, when information was not available on institutional websites. Where biographical information was not available in institutional website, we checked first on Facebook and then other websites that could provide further clues about missing data. Regionally-based newspapers’ websites were particularly useful for information about some regional councillors for whom data was missing in institutional websites. When it was impossible to retrieve the information, we left the cell empty (see online Appendix, par. 3).

The two coders coded separately PCO, PPO and PPO(CCAA) for each party, with the exception of PPO(CCAA) of Podemos which was used to test inter-code reliability. As explained in the following paragraphs, sociodemographic features for which the test was conducted were education and profession. For education the Cronbach’s alpha was .93, while for profession the figure was lower (.78) but still above the conventional threshold.



**Figure 1.** Parties’ electorate according to the age cohorts. Source: CIS (2016). Legend: Pod = Podemos. PSOE = Spanish Workers’ Socialist Party. C’s = Citizens. PP = Popular Party.

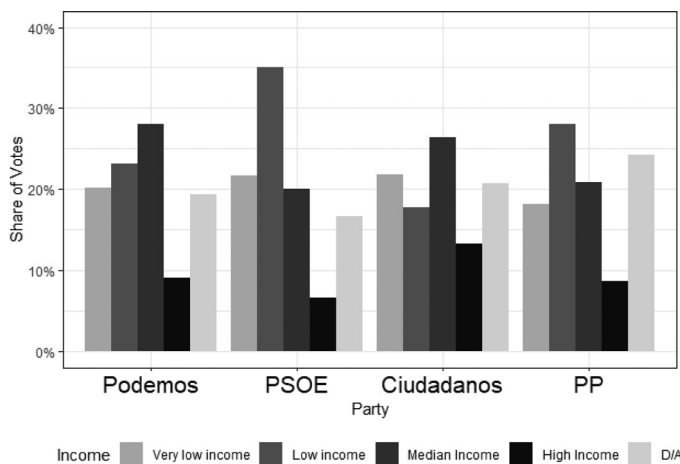
The analysis will be extended to the traditional parties — PP and PSOE — in order to highlight their differences relative to the anti-establishment parties. Finally, the analysis of the four parties' electorates will be carried out using the literature and data from the 2016 CIS barometer (CIS, 2016). The April 2016 CIS barometer is a national survey designed to retrieve vote choice in the previous election. It had a sample of 2490 interviews: the sample covers 49 provinces and 256 municipalities. It comprises 39 questions, whose results are presented in two different sections: in the first, the answers are divided according to the party that the interviewees claimed to have voted in the last election; in the second, the very same answers are divided according to their left-right placement. We used the data of the first section for our analysis.

## 6. The Electorates of Podemos and Ciudadanos in a Comparative Perspective

Podemos and C's electorates are younger and highly educated compared to other mainstream parties, the PP and the PSOE. [Figure 1](#) shows that in both cases more than 1 out of 5 voters are under 35 and, accordingly, the category +55 is the least represented. For the PSOE and PP, the situation is exactly the opposite: their core is represented by older people, while young voters constitute a minority.

Furthermore, 25,9% of Podemos voters and 35,6% of C's voters have the highest levels of education among those investigated by the CIS<sup>3</sup>; for the PSOE (15,7%) and PP (18,4%), these numbers are almost halved. Though the percentage of non-respondents is significant, the [Figure 2](#) representing income levels shows that a significant portion of C's' electorate is high income (13,3%) (see online Appendix, par. 4) while its proportion of low-income voters (17,7%) is lower compared to the other three parties. Podemos voters are predominantly in the median income category, while its share of low-income voters (23,2%) is lower than that of the PSOE (35,0%) and PP (28%).

Finally, in relation to the work background (see online Appendix, par. 5) Podemos and C's voters are predominantly in the 'Technicians and autonomous workers' category



**Figure 2.** Level of Income in the Spanish parties' electorate. Source (CIS, 2016).

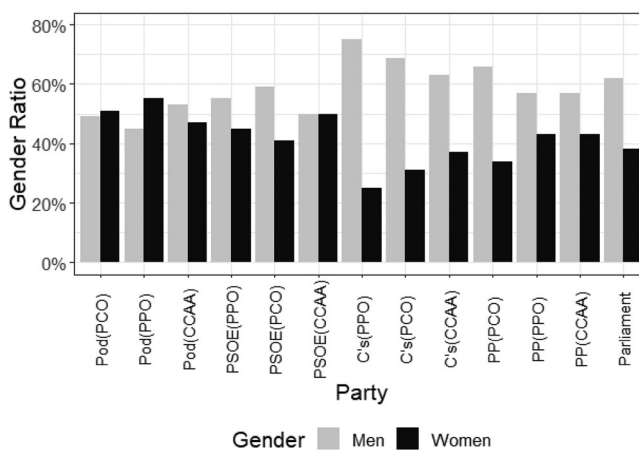
(23,7% and 22,4% respectively) while in the PSOE and PP the three categories – ‘Managers and professional elite’, ‘Technicians and autonomous workers’ and ‘Manual workers’ – are more balanced (6,4%, 12,3% and 15% in the case of PSOE and 11%, 10,5% and 10,6% in the case of PP). It is not surprisingly that, compared to the other three, Podemos (20,7%) has the highest share of their votes coming from manual workers.

## 7. The Elite of Podemos and Ciudadanos in a Comparative Perspective

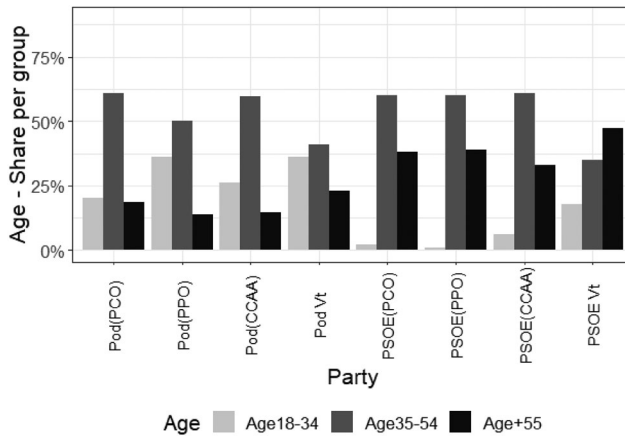
Nine parties entered Congress in 2016, 8 less than legislature XI (started with the 2015 elections). In comparison to the past, the main differences are social rather than political: the percentage of woman (39%) is one of the highest registered, the average age is similar to that of citizens of voting age, and the range of MP’s professions is larger than in the past (Coller, 2016). These changes are due in part to the presence of Podemos and (to a lesser extent) C’s members. Both the new parties held online primaries prior to the 2015 elections and re-elected almost all of the previous legislature’s candidates again in 2016. The PP and the PSOE re-elected almost all their 2015 candidates as well. Both parties have had a significant turnover rate (39% and 50% respectively) in the previous elections (2015). However, compared to 2011, the socio-demographic composition of their political class was almost unchanged (Kakepaki et al., 2018).

### 7.1. Gender

In Podemos’ case, gender equality is a *fait accompli* both in the PCO and the PPO. Women outnumber men in the PCO (51%/49%) and in the Congress (55%/45%), while men are the majority in the Autonomous Communities (53%/47%). Podemos’ female representation in the Congress is 15 points higher than the overall mean (40%). In contrast, men hold a clear-cut majority of in all sectors of C’s, with a particularly high 75/25



**Figure 3.** Gender Ratio in Podemos and C’s elites and among its electorate. Legend: Pod = Podemos. PSOE = Spanish Workers’ Socialist Party. C’s = Citizens. PP = Popular Party. PCO = ‘Party in Central Office’. PPO = ‘Party in Public Office’ (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level. Parliament = Distribution in the Parliament.

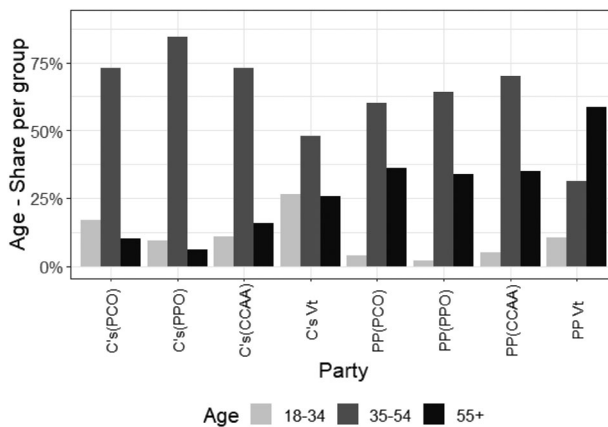


**Figure 4.** Podemos and PSOE: voters and elite, according to the age. Legend: Pod = Podemos. PSOE = Spanish Workers' Socialist Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level. Vt = Voters.

ratio in the PPO. Compared to the other parties, Podemos' gender ratio is similar to that of the PSOE MPs, while C's is closer to the PP in that respect (see [Figure 3](#)).

## 7.2. Age

Our results confirm that 35–54 years old tend to be over-represented (Coller et al., 2018); in the PCO, PPO and PPO(CCAA), i.e. elected members at the CC.AA. level, this age group is dominant in both Podemos and C's. Accordingly, in the Podemos PCO the mean age (reference year 2017) is 44 (median 39, sd 12 years), while in the PPO the

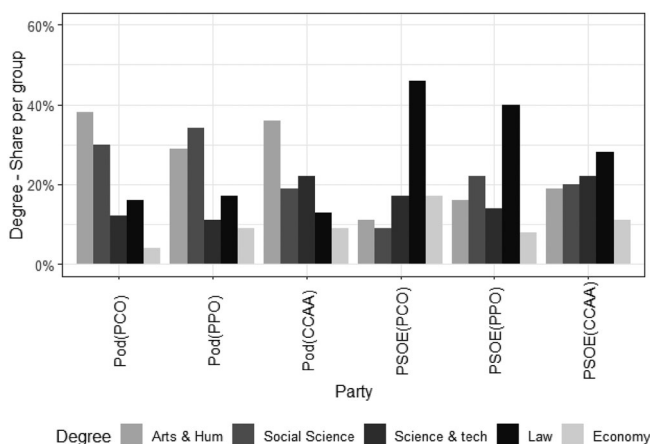


**Figure 5.** Ciudadanos and PP: voters and elite, according to the age. Legend: C's = Citizens. PP = Popular Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level. Vt = Voters.

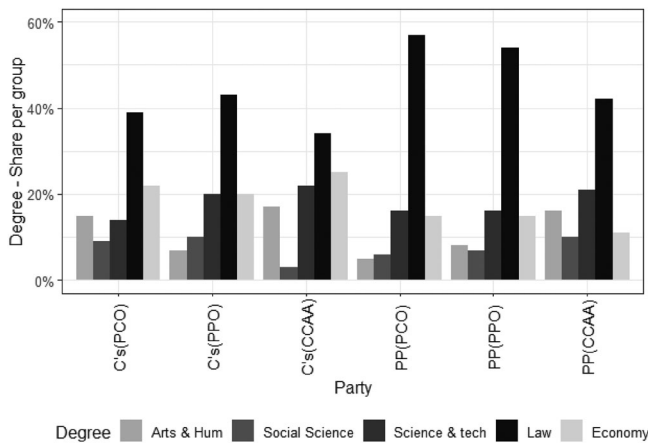
mean is 41 (38,5 median, sd 10) and it is 42 (41 median, sd 10) in the PPO(CCAA). The mean age is slightly higher for C's: 46 in the PCO, PPO and PPO(CCAA). In line with the overall composition of the electorate and with our expectations, Podemos and C's have younger PPO groups compared to the PSOE (50,5) and PP (53,3). As shown in the [Figures 4 and 5](#), PSOE and PP representatives in the 18–35 category are residuals, while their core is in the 35–54 category. Yet, PSOE and PP members (PPO, PCO and PPO(CCAA)) in the +55 category are more than double compared to both Podemos and C's in each part. This is also reflected in the electorate, at least for Podemos: 36,2% of Podemos voters are under 35, while 36,3% of the PPO members and 26% of the PPO(CCAA) members are under 35. In the case of C's, the situation is more unbalanced; the 35–54 category is over-represented in all three parts under analysis, while its electorate presents a good share of both young (26,5%) and older (25,6%) people ([Figure 5](#)).

### 7.3. Education

Firstly, the four education categories created during the first operationalisation of the data (Primary degree, Secondary degree, University Degree, Higher Degree) were consolidated into binary categories: pre-university, comprising the first two, and higher education, comprising the remaining two. MPs with either a Primary or a Secondary degree are residual. In both cases, the PPO and PCO are comprised of highly educated members; only in the Podemos PPO and in the C's PPO(CCAA) do we find a proportion of low degree members greater than 10% (16 and 11 percent respectively). These findings are, again, in line with our expectations: Podemos is sometimes called 'the party of professors', for the presence of University professors among its founding members. Similarly, C's, known as the 'Podemos of the Right,' has enrolled highly educated people among its élite. At first glance, this should imply that the working background of their members is similar. As we shall see in the next section, this is not the case. These findings are



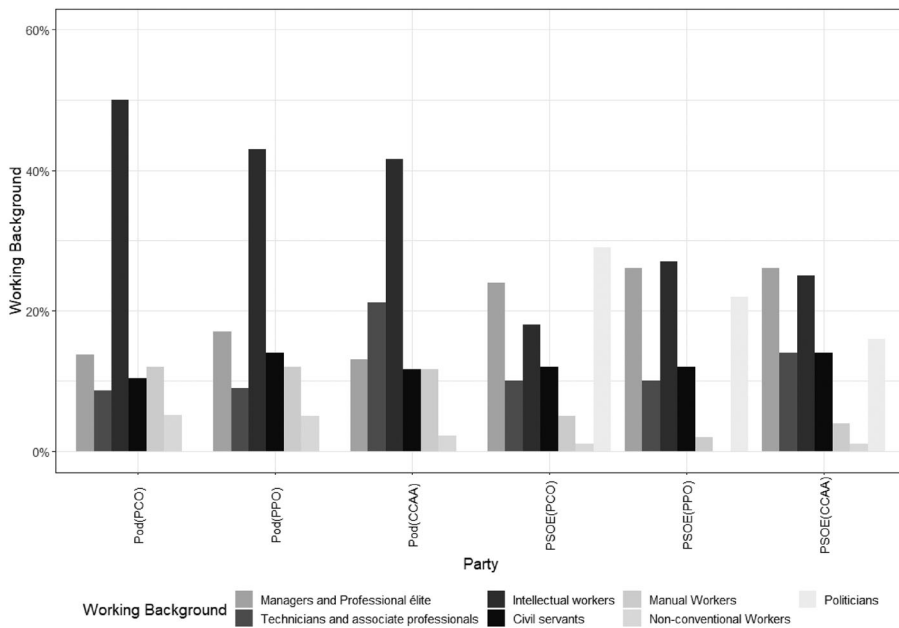
**Figure 6.** Podemos and PSOE: university background. Legend: Pod = Podemos. PSOE = Spanish Workers' Socialist Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level.



**Figure 7.** C's and PP: university background. Legend: C's = Citizens. PP = Popular Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level.

also in line with a 2008 study carried out by CIS and analyzed by Coller et al. (2018): 88% of MPs and Senators and 85% of elected members in the CCAA have either a University or a Postgraduate degree. In the case of the PP and PSOE, 90% and 82% respectively have at least a University degree: overall, the four main parties show a high level of education.

Despite being in line with the mainstream parties, Podemos and C's, differ in one important aspect: the type of degrees held by elites. We divided educational background into five main categories: a) arts and humanities, b) social sciences, c) science-related and technical degrees, d) economics and e) law. We decided to distinguish economics from other social sciences because of its potential importance in providing 'competent' experts to political parties. We also decided to maintain a separation between law and other subjects due to its over-representation in other European parliaments (Cotta & Best, 2007). The overall results indicate a clear-cut difference between Podemos and C's (Figures 6 and 7). The predominant educational background within the Podemos PCO and PPO(CCAA) is Arts and Humanities, while a Social Sciences background is prevalent in the PPO. Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences together account for 68% of the educational backgrounds in the PCO, 63% in the PPO and 55% in PPO(CCAA). Economics and law degrees account for only 18% (PCO), 26% (PPO) and 22% (PPO(CCAA)) of the total degrees. When looking at C's, the picture is reversed. Economics and law degrees are predominant in all three components: 61% in the PCO, 61% in the PPO and 63% in the PPO(CCAA). This composition is more similar to the one of PP and PSOE, in which economic and law degrees are predominant. Although it was not possible to consistently deepen the analysis in order to investigate the branches studied by party elites within those very broad disciplines, the findings highlight two key aspects. On the one hand, each party elite shares a homogenous university background. On the other hand, the respective backgrounds present a sharp contrast: C's' elite – along with mainstream party elites' – has a predominantly market and judicial-oriented background characterised by economics and law degrees; Podemos' elite, on the contrary, has a less market-oriented background, representing thus a breakthrough novelty in the Spanish panorama.



**Figure 8.** Podemos and PSOE: working background. Legend: Pod = Podemos. PSOE = Spanish Workers' Socialist Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level.

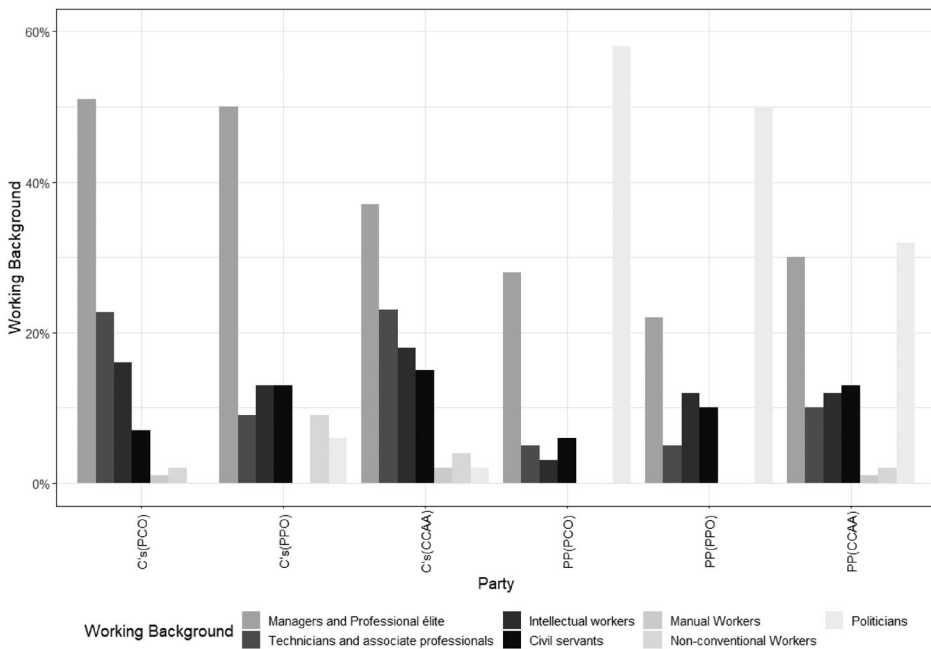
#### 7.4. Working Background

The difference in university backgrounds is also reflected in the working experience of the party élites. As Podemos and C's are genuinely new parties, it came as no surprise that there are very few members of the political 'class' in the PCO and PPOs of the parties. C's has more 'professional politicians,' i.e. those who built their careers in the PP, centrist parties and the PSOE, as compared to Podemos. Seen in the context of the operationalisation presented in the previous paragraph, [Figure 8](#) shows a contrasting trend in Podemos, which relies more on what we have called intellectual workers. Technicians and autonomous workers are the second most important category in the Podemos PPO(CCAA), while the other categories (with the exception of non-conventional workers) are almost equally distributed in the PPO and the PCO.

The C's élite falls predominantly within the category 'managers and professional élite'; however, technicians and autonomous workers are fairly represented in all three sub-groups. As in the case of Podemos, non-conventional workers are under-represented, while civil servants and intellectual workers represent between 10% and 20% of the C's élite. Compared to Podemos, manual workers are largely under-represented in C's ([Figures 8 and 9](#)).

These findings confirm that C's is mainly composed of highly-skilled workers with a top-tier professional background. While this does not mean that intellectual workers are less skilled than managers and professional élites, it does imply that C's elite reflects a more market-oriented approach.





**Figure 9.** C's and PP: working background. Legend: C's = Citizens. PP = Popular Party. PCO = 'Party in Central Office'. PPO = 'Party in Public Office' (at the national level). CCAA = Party in Public Office at the regional level.

## 8. Conclusion

The entry of these two new parties into existing institutions has induced some significant (but certainly not revolutionary) changes in the socio-demographic composition of the Spanish representatives. Neither Podemos nor C's have made space for members of the less privileged social classes, those who work manual jobs or those lacking higher education. Therefore, the parties always represent a social or cultural elite. The first hypothesis is only partially confirmed: there are clear differences in terms of both age and professionalisation of the political class, but there is no real contrast with the traditional elite. The emphasis placed by the two parties on their greater capacity for representation is only partially reflected in the composition of their elites. The similarities between the latter and their electorates can be found in some dimensions (especially in Podemos), but not in all (see below). Therefore, it is not possible to identify a marked difference with the descriptive representation capacity of mainstream parties.

As for the gender composition, Podemos' elite is predominantly female. However, men comprise about 60% of Podemos' electorate, while they are less than 50% of the PCO and PPO. C's electorate is mainly composed of males; this composition is reflected in all three faces under analysis, (PCO, PPO and PPO(CCAA)) and is particularly notable in the male-dominated PPO. In terms of age cohorts, Podemos' elites represent the overall composition of its electorate fairly well, while C's elites overrepresent middle-aged people in all three faces under analysis. Not surprisingly, PSOE and PP voters are older than C's and Podemos': with respect to their electorate +55 category is under-represented in PSOE and PP's PCO and PPOs; yet, within PSOE and PP,

PCO and PPOs +55 elected members are more than double compared to Podemos and C's. In a nutshell, newer parties have attracted younger politicians (and voters) compared to PSOE and PP. However, the main differences between Podemos and C's electorates emerge when looking at two crucial characteristics of the descriptive representation, i.e. the university degrees and professional background. While in both cases (Podemos and C's) highly educated people are overrepresented in the élites, compared to their voters professional backgrounds differ substantially in the case of C's, and less significantly for Podemos. In this respect, C's can be seen as the party of the social elite. Unsurprisingly, in this regard C's elected members' working background is more similar to the ideologically closest party, PP, rather than its anti-establishment counterpart (Podemos). In Podemos, the professional and managerial classes are also much more relevant in the elite than in the electorate. However, this discrepancy is not as marked as in C's. Not surprisingly, the party of the professors tends to under-represent technicians in its elites. In the same way as C's, Podemos elites resemble more PSOE's than the C's elite, even though this similarity is not as pronounced as in the case of C's and PP.

Only Podemos has allowed for a substantial gender rebalancing. This is not surprising given the greater sensitivity of the new radical left to the themes of new politics (Kitschelt, 1988). Furthermore, while both parties have a highly educated political class, each pulls from completely divergent educational and professional contexts. The C's' representatives come from the economic and legal spheres and pursue liberal and market-oriented professions: lawyers and entrepreneurs are predominant. Again, if we exclude their younger age, the representatives of C's appear very similar to those of the PP, whose working background is also predominantly law-related (31%) (Coller, 2016). More generally, they are also similar to those of the other conservative and right liberal parties.

On the contrary, Podemos' representatives come from a social sciences or humanities background and work in intellectual professions, linked to the educational or cultural sectors. This finding is in line with other left-wing Spanish parties: there are many teachers in the ranks of the PSOE and ERC (respectively 28% and 33%) (Coller, 2016). From this point of view, Podemos' parliamentary class resembles that of both the socialist and the communist party families. Compared to the communists, it differs in the absence of MPs with lower levels of education.

These results confirm our second hypothesis, highlighting how the selection of their respective representatives is influenced more by the parties' divergent ideological orientation than by the anti-establishment approach they hold in common. This indicates that the analysis of innovation capabilities of new anti-establishment parties has to take into account the left-right cleavage and not just the division between 'new challengers' and 'old mainstream parties'. Indeed, among Podemos and C's there exist relevant differences.

Yet, both parties posed a substantial challenge to the mainstream parties, especially those ideologically closer, i.e. PSOE in the case of Podemos and PP in the case of C's. More broadly, the new four party system is expected to influence not only the post-election coalitions, but mostly the way mainstream party recruit their elite. They can decide to challenge the new competitors by opening up their recruitment process, thus potentially alienating part of their core electorates or they can opt for specialising in the descriptive representation of their core sector. Either way, we expect that mainstream parties will adapt in the near future to the challenges posed by Podemos and C's. Along the same

line, we expect the two challenger parties to adopt the very same tactic, i.e. highlighting a distinct profile of their elite to distinguish even more clearly among themselves or challenging their ideologically closer mainstream partner in order to be more attractive for a broader electorate. Beyond future predictions, Spain represents a unique laboratory to analyse the strategies pursued by challenger parties and the differences between the mainstream counterparts.

Further research is nonetheless needed to explore other characteristics of new Spanish anti-establishment elites: a) their representativeness with reference to under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities but also the LGBT community that is one of the fundamental actors in the social movement panorama in Spain and whose rights both challenger parties tried to represent (albeit in different ways); b) their background as compared to their relative electorates. An in-depth study of the ideational backgrounds of the elected representatives may help solve this puzzle.

## Notes

1. The opposition between the “people” and the “elite” is a central element of populism, as a wide literature has demonstrated (see Zulianello, 2020). In this regard, however, Barr (2009, p. 31) underlined that “such rhetoric is but one aspect of the populist phenomenon”. While Podemos has often been defined as a left-populist party, in this article, we use the definition of anti-establishment party, as we focus only on this dimension of populism.
2. After the European elections, vote intention polls for the general elections indicated a substantial increase in consensus for Podemos. However, given the nature of the European elections, observers were divided among those who saw Podemos as a ‘souffle destined to deflate’ or, conversely, as a ‘tsunami’ destined to completely change the Spanish political scenario (Torreblanca, 2015, 10).
3. CIS refers to “high” education (called *superiores*), thus it is not possible to evaluate how many voters have a university degree or higher levels of educations (masters, PhD).

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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