Economic Crisis, Globalization, and Partisan Bias: Evidence from Spain

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Who do citizens blame for the recent European economic crisis? In this paper, we test theories about blame attribution with respect to the economic crisis. We argue that blame for the crisis is partially conditioned by partisan bias and framings of the crisis as being related to globalization. We test the argument with new survey data and a survey experiment from Spain. In the experiment, respondents receive different framings of the economic crisis which are endorsed by different political parties and non-partisan organizations. We obtain the following findings: (i) blame for who is responsible for the economic crisis is greatly affected by partisanship; (ii) making globalization as a cause of the crisis salient exonerates the government of blame, but only for co-partisans of the government; and (iii) citizens are willing to blame other globalization-related factors for the crisis, in particular, European governments and blame the domestic government less. The results expand our understanding of public opinion dynamics during major economic recessions and also suggest conditions under which “scapegoating” globalization can occur.

The economic crisis that has hit much of Europe between late 2007 and continues as of 2013 has raised many theoretically important and policy-relevant questions regarding the attitudes and preferences of citizens. Who do citizens blame for the crisis? Does globalization affect who is to blame for the crisis? Since the onset of the crisis, average unemployment in the eurozone area has risen to above 11% by mid-2012, while the average growth rate between 2008 and 2011 was ~0.1%. Many European countries have been hard hit by the crisis, most prominently Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, and Spain. Descriptive overviews of this “Great Recession,” which for some countries is the worst economic downturn since the early 1970s (and for some the worst crisis since the Great Depression), conclude that the growth prospects of the most crisis-affected states remain grim, that the debt crisis will likely worsen, and that further bank defaults or a more prolonged economic recession could possibly lead to the breakup of the Eurozone (Eichengreen 2009; Hugh 2010; Hope 2012). The crisis has forced governments to make difficult decisions in a number of domestic and international domains, including fiscal policy (austerity vs. expansion); support for European Union (EU)-funded bailouts; default on debts from foreign lenders; domestic banking reform; and reforms of labor market regulations.

In this paper, we address the question of who citizens blame for the crisis, and particularly how globalization shapes public opinion regarding the economic crisis. Among political elites and within the general public, disagreement exists about the root causes of the economic crisis, as well as the policies that governments should pursue in response. For example, some economists argue that adoption of the euro has significantly worsened the crisis (in particular for Spain and Ireland), while others argue, not necessarily mutually exclusively, that lax international capital regulations allowed domestic borrowers to borrow irresponsibly, fueling asset bubbles which ultimately crashed. Some analysts argue that these dynamics were worsened by liberalizing policies undertaken by conservative political parties in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Others focus on the importance of domestic wage rigidities and fiscal irresponsibility as being roadblocks to the end of the crisis. The roles of each of these causes and the appropriate policy responses remain disputed.

We design a study that leverages the complexity of the crisis and the fact that both globalization-related and domestic-oriented causes of the crisis have been invoked in the public debate. We seek to explain who or what citizens think is to blame for the economic crisis, and focus primarily on the extent to which factors linked to globalization might affect who citizens blame. The ongoing nature of the crisis and salient public debate about the appropriate government responses make survey data about attitudes regarding the crisis especially valuable.

We argue that existing theories about the impact of globalization on domestic public opinion neglect the important role of partisan bias. The ongoing crisis allows us to analyze how globalization shapes public opinion and how partisan bias and competing frames affect attitudes and blame. We theorize that partisan bias should

affect which actors citizens hold responsible for or blame for the crisis. In particular, co-partisans of the incumbent government should be more willing to blame the actors that the incumbent government blames for the economic crisis. By blaming other actors, domestic governments can avoid being electorally punished for poor economic performance. We further argue that globalization can play an important role in the politics of blame shifting. Recent literature argues that under conditions of high economic internationalization, voters punish incumbent governments less (Kayser 2007; Duch and Stevenson 2010). We argue that one important mechanism for this result is that supporters of the incumbent government are more willing to divert blame toward global factors. This intuition is also relevant to the modern economic voting literature, which assumes that voters make certain attributions of responsibility before rewarding or punishing incumbent governments.

To test these conjectures, we conducted an original survey of citizens in Spain in autumn 2010. Spain is a particularly useful test case of public attitudes regarding the crisis, because of the depth of the economic recession, and the intense public division over different causes of the crisis. The crisis in Spain began in January 2008 after a rapid fall of asset and housing prices, a crash that had been preceded by the largest period of economic growth since the democratic transition. As of 2012, Spain is among one the worst-performing European economies, with a projected growth rate of negative 1.5% for the next year and an unemployment rate of more than 22%. The causes of and the policy options to exit the crisis have been the most reported issues in the Spanish media in the last several years, as evidenced by the massive public protests in May 2011, October 2011, and September 2012. In November 2011, the government led by the left-leaning Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español [PSOE]) suffered its worst electoral defeat in history and was replaced by the right-leaning People’s Party (Partido Popular [PP]); the grim economic situation played a major role in both the public protests and the election results. Despite the policy announced by the European Central Bank (ECB) in September 2012 to purchase government debt directly, much uncertainty remains over the stability of the euro currency union as well as the long-term growth prospects of Spain.

To test our hypotheses about attitudes toward the economic crisis, we implemented an experiment embedded in an Internet survey of 1,500 Spanish adult citizens, and gathered data on their attitudes regarding who is to blame for the economic crisis. We use an experimental design to evaluate whether varying the partisan endorsement and framings—affect citizen views of the European crisis. This design allows us to evaluate whether simple interventions that have been shown to affect preferences in other domains—partisan endorsement and framings—affect citizen views of the European crisis. We find evidence that the salience of globalization as a cause of the crisis can affect public opinion regarding who is to blame for the crisis and that this effect is conditioned by the partisan endorsement of the framing of the crisis. In particular, individuals who identify as being close to the incumbent left-wing government (PSOE) are more likely to blame other international actors—European governments in particular—once globalization as a cause of the crisis is made salient. We find no symmetric effects for PP (opposition) supporters. Further, we find that the results are most pronounced among citizens who identify with the PSOE, not among individuals who have left-wing ideological beliefs. Our findings demonstrate the importance of partisan bias and salience of global issues in explaining blame for the great recession, and provide one possible explanation for why economic voting appears to occur less in more globalized economies. The results also give us better substantive understanding of citizen preferences during difficult economic times.

The following section summarizes recent research on the causes of the economic crisis and presents the theoretical expectations. The next section presents the experimental design and methods of analysis. The penultimate section presents the results. We conclude in the final section.

Literature Overview and Theoretical Expectations

Globalization, Economic Crisis, and Public Opinion

Little systematic research exists regarding the impact of globalization on public opinion and partisan preferences, in contrast to the voluminous literature explaining preferences for globalization policies (such as trade, immigration, or European integration). One strand of research focuses on how globalization affects policy preferences, using traditional factor endowment or factor mobility theory. This literature tests the argument that variation in economic openness creates winners and losers and those citizens accordingly express different redistribution preferences to compensate for the impact of globalization. A representative example of this argument that uses survey data as an empirical test is a recent study that finds that among lower educated citizens in OECD states (Walter 2010), globalization increases risk perceptions and demands for income redistribution; this finding is consistent with the classic compensation hypotheses about how trade openness affects redistribution (Cameron 1978; Burgoon 2001; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Adsera and Boix 2002; Walter 2010).

An additional strand of literature complements this approach and focuses on the electoral consequences of globalization, and examines specifically how globalization might affect the accountability of governments to their citizens. According to this literature, higher levels of openness reduce the degree of economic voting in a country. That is, incumbents are electorally punished or benefited less during negative economic times in more open countries, as opposed to incumbents in more closed economies. In more closed economies, stronger evidence of economic voting exists (Hellwig 2001; Fernández-Al-
bertos 2006; Duch and Stevenson 2010). However, different causal mechanisms for this finding remain untested. One possible mechanism is that citizens believe that globalization reduces the capacity of governments to effectively pursue certain policies, and are more likely to attribute negative outcomes to fluctuations in the world economy than to national governments. Another mechanism is that citizens who support the incumbent government and believe that economic outcomes are related to globalization have more reason to exonerate the government for undesirable outcomes (Kayser 2007; Hellwig and Samuels 2007).

This literature suggests that globalization can affect political preferences, and should be particularly relevant during difficult economic times, as factors related to globalization might be blamed for outcomes. These effects should be expected to be particularly strong in a crisis context, in which the international aspects of the economic crisis (the degree of interconnectedness of national financial markets, global capital flows, and the role of private and public international actors) have been especially salient. However, few studies address the impact of globalization on citizen blame of the economic crisis. Little research explores whether factors related to globalization are in fact blamed for negative outcomes and whether incumbent governments benefit from the blame of global as opposed to domestic factors. These gaps in the international political economy literature are important because public vulnerability to biases in blame (for example, partisan bias, or “scapegoating” other actors or causes) can explain variation in subsequent support for incumbent governments, political parties, or policies related to the process of globalization in itself. These policies could include trade, immigration, and capital mobility.

Recent literature on citizen blame in other domains suggests that blame of the crisis should be affected by the salience of issues as well as partisan bias. Some studies identify the importance of partisan bias in who citizens blame for various outcomes in both economic and non-economic contexts (Arceneaux 2003; Malhotra and Kuo 2008). The standard operationalization of partisan bias is the effect of party cues or party endorsements on citizen preferences. Party cues have been found to affect a wide range of political attitudes and assessments of political candidates and policies in the US context (Layman and Carsey 2002; Cohen 2003; Achen and Bartels 2006; Ansolabehere, Hirano, Snyder, and Ueda 2006; Malhotra and Margalit 2010). But few studies assess the role of party cues and partisan bias on policy views in European states (Ray 2003; Hobolt 2007; Tilley and Hobolt 2011).

Given the complex, multicausal nature of current European economic crisis, we expect these partisan biases to play an important role in how both international and domestic factors are related to who citizens think is responsible for the crisis. The political consequences of blame during economic recessions remain overlooked in the political science literature; few studies test for the role of partisan bias and blame for the ongoing recession. Understanding public opinion dynamics in economic crises is particularly important, as attitudes formed during recessions can be persistent over lifetimes (Giuliano and Spilimbergo 2009). The crisis provides an opportunity to understand the circumstances under which globalization is likely to be “scapegoated.”

**Theoretical Expectations and Relevance of Spanish Context**

We delineate some basic expectations about the connection between globalization, partisan bias, and blame for the economic crisis. We focus on a set of factors of blame that can be classified as “domestic” causes of the crisis and those related to “globalization.” First, we hypothesize that citizens who share the partisan affiliation of the incumbent government are more likely to blame factors for the crisis that the government also blames. Given the previous discussion, we expect that citizens of the same party of the incumbent government will be more likely to blame globalization factors for the crisis when they are made salient. These hypotheses are specified more precisely after describing our estimation strategy. In the results section, we also describe and test several alternative hypotheses regarding blame of the economic crisis.

Before describing the specific research design, we briefly discuss the particular relevance of the theoretical framework to the Spanish case, one of the worst hit countries by the current economic crisis. Within Spain, there has been strong public disagreement about the cause of the crisis and what policies should be pursued. Globalization-related as well as domestic policy issues have been discussed as reasons for the crisis. Some pundits and political elites have argued that under-regulated international capital flows and integration with the European Union helped drive the housing price bubble; others have focused on the importance of imprudent government policies and restrictive domestic labor regulations in preventing Spain from recovering from the crisis (Andrés et al., 2009; De Grauw, 2012).

An important political feature of the economic crisis in Spain is that both of the major political parties have blamed both global (such as the actions of foreign governments, supranational institutions, and international investors) and domestic factors (such as labor market regulations) as causes of the crisis. Representatives from both parties have blamed the actions of other European governments and international capital flows for facilitating the asset bubble which was the proximate cause of the economic crash, and have blamed European governments for interfering in domestic banking affairs and for “unfair” banking stress tests, exacerbating investor concerns. Representatives and legislators from both of the main parties have also blamed international ratings agencies for unfairly downgrading Spanish debt (Mallet 2010). Similarly, both...
the PP and PSOE have pushed for labor market flexibilization as a solution to Spain’s employment woes. The salient disagreements about the causes of the crisis, and the plausibility that these different causes and policy interventions (involving globalization and domestic policy issues) can be reasonably attributed to both parties, allows us to use an experimental design that isolates each of these factors—partisan endorsement and framings of the crisis—and observe whether partisan endorsement of different causes of the crisis affects citizen blame.

Research Design and Methods

To test the above hypotheses regarding the impact of the partisan endorsement of different framings (global or domestic) of the crisis on blame, we administered an Internet survey to 1,500 respondents in October and November 2010. The survey was administered by Netquest, a Spanish survey firm. The resulting sample has similar demographic composition to large nationally representative surveys in Spain.7 Respondents were randomly assigned to a treatment group; the treatment consisted of reading a short simple statement about the causes of the economic crisis; this statement differed across treatment groups. After reading the statement, they went on to answer a question about blame for the crisis. Demographic survey data were collected at the conclusion of the survey.

Treatments

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of seven groups, one control and six treatment groups. The treatments vary along two dimensions: the endorser of the statement about the crisis and the framing of the statement about the crisis. The endorser could be from a non-partisan source, the then-incumbent ideologically left-wing PSOE political party, or the opposition ideologically right-wing PP political party. The statement about the crisis was about the role of globalization or domestic labor market regulations affecting the crisis. The treatment statement template is below, with “/” indicating different text for each treatment group.

We would like to present to you some conclusions that have been made about the current economic crisis. According to a report made by (non-partisan experts/ an institution linked to the Socialist Party (PSOE)/an institution linked to the Popular Party (PP), (a series of international factors related to globalization/regulations in the Spanish labor market) have played a major role in the development of the economic crisis that Spain is undergoing now.8

Table 1 displays the experimental design and classification of each treatment. In the control group, the respondents read no statement about the crisis and simply answered a set of questions about blame and policy questions. In Treatments 2–4, the respondents read the statement about globalization as a cause of the crisis. In Treatment 2, this statement was endorsed by non-partisan experts; in Treatment 3 by the PSOE; and in Treatment 4 by the PP. In Treatments 5–7, respondents read the statement about labor market regulations as a cause of the crisis. In Treatment 5, this statement was endorsed by non-partisan experts; in Treatment 6 by the PSOE; and in Treatment 7 by the PP. As the above discussion summarizes, each treatment is credible in the sense that political parties in Spain have been affiliated with both types of statements regarding the crisis.

We also code partisanship and demographic characteristics of the respondents; we code all characteristics as binary unless otherwise indicated. Individuals who respond as being closest to the PSOE out of a list of ten political parties in Spain are coded 1, indicating he or she is a PSOE supporter and 0 otherwise. The same procedure is used for coding PP supporters. We also code political ideology on a seven-point scale of “extreme left, left, center-left, center, center-right, right, extreme right.” We use a binary indicator for “left-wing ideology” if the respondent identifies as either “extreme left, left, center-left,” and 0 otherwise. Gender is coded on a four-point scale where 0 indicates non-completion of primary school, 1 indicates completion of primary school, 2 indicates completion of secondary school, 3 indicates completion of tertiary schooling. Income is coded by decile. Gender is coded as 1 for female. We code respondent’s “insider” labor market status as 1 if the worker has a formal labor contract and 0 otherwise.

Dependent Variable

Following the above experimental treatment, we asked respondents which factors they blame most for the crisis. All respondents had to rank three out of six factors that they blame the most for the development of the economic crisis. The question was:

Thinking about the current economic crisis, we would like to know which are, according to you, the three most important factors that have contributed to the crisis among the following six, ranking them from most important to least important: The actions of the current Spanish government; the actions of Spanish banks; the entry of Spain in the euro; the actions of European governments; the actions of international investors; the regulations in the Spanish labor market.

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7 Appendix 1 gives an overview of Netquest’s stratification and sampling strategy. Appendix 2 compares the samples on the relevant social and demographic variables and shows no statistically significant differences in the distributions of these variables between the surveys.

8 The Spanish translation of the statement is: “Ahora le queríamos presentar algunas conclusiones que se han hecho recientemente sobre la actual crisis económica en España. Según un informe de ‘una institución asociada al Partido Popular (PP)/el Partido Socialista/ un grupo de expertos independientes’, ‘una serie de factores internacionales relacionados con la globalización/ las regulaciones en el mercado de trabajo español han jugado un papel crucial en el desarrollo de la actual crisis económica que atraviesa España.’ Spanish translations of the survey questions are available upon request. Appendix 3 demonstrates the randomization process was successful.
Respondents chose three out of the six to rank with 1 being most to blame, 2 next, and 3 third most blameworthy; the rest of the response options are unranked. Three of the factors deal with non-domestic causes (the euro, foreign investors, and European governments), and three factors are explicitly about domestic actors (the incumbent government, domestic banks, and labor market regulations).

Methods

In this section, we describe the methods used for analysis. The appropriate model where the dependent variable data are ranked items is the rank-ordered logistic or “exploded logit” model (Beggs, Cardell, and Hausman 1981; Allison and Christakis 1994). This model allows us to assess which variables affect the respondents’ ranking of items relative to other items (for example, blaming the government more so than domestic banks). We then report the likelihood that the respondent ranks a particular item higher than the other items, which are set as the baseline. Allison and Christakis (1994) and Malhotra and Kuo (2008) provide a relevant application of the model; we draw on summaries of the model here and the latter’s notation (p. 125). The rank-ordered logit model is a generalization of conditional/multinomial logit models; the model relates how the characteristics of the choosers and the items affect the likelihood of the items being selected. The process of ranking is an aggregation of these individual choices. In this study, the items are the individual items linked to the crisis as listed above. Ranked data can be statistically modeled by combining a set of conditional logit models to create the rank-ordered logit model. The likelihood of the rank-ordered logit model is the product of the likelihoods of individual conditional logit models.

Consistent with previous applications of this model, we assume that the data are derived from a random utility model where \( BR_{ij} \) represents the latent blame respondent \( i \) has for item \( j \) (out of \( J \) items). We observe \( Y_{ij} \), which is the blame ranking respondent \( i \) assigns to item \( j \). Although \( BR_{ij} \) is unobserved, we assume that respondent \( i \) ranks item \( j \) more blameworthy than item \( k \) if \( BR_{ij} > BR_{ik} \). Each \( BR_{ij} \) is modeled as having a systematic component (\( \mu_{ij} \)) and a random component (\( \epsilon_{ij} \)). We estimate variations of a model that account for characteristics of the blame items as well as the partisan affiliation of the respondents. We first estimate a model where we assess whether the fact that an item is related to domestic causes of the crisis (the government, domestic banks, and labor market regulations) is more likely to be ranked higher than global/non-domestic items (the actions of other European governments; Spanish membership in the Eurozone; and foreign investors). This equation takes the form of:

\[
BR_{ij} = \beta_1 D_j + \beta_2 (D_j \times S_i) + \beta_3 (D_j \times T_2) + \beta_4 (D_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \beta_5 (D_j \times T_3) + \beta_6 (D_j \times S_i \times T_3) + \beta_7 (D_j \times T_4) + \beta_8 (D_j \times S_i \times T_4) + \beta_9 (D_j \times T_5) + \beta_{10} (D_j \times S_i \times T_5) + \beta_{11} (D_j \times T_6) + \beta_{12} (D_j \times S_i \times T_6) + \beta_{13} (D_j \times T_7) + \beta_{14} (D_j \times S_i \times T_7) + \epsilon_{ij}
\]

Equation (1) implies the likelihood, \( L_i \), of a respondent ranking item \( k \) as more blameworthy than item \( j \). Let \( \delta_{ijk} = 1 \) if \( Y_{ij} \geq Y_{ik} \) and 0 if \( Y_{ij} < Y_{ik} \). Then,

\[
L_i = \prod_{j=1}^{J} \left[ \frac{\exp(\mu_{ij})}{\sum_{k=1}^{J} \delta_{ijk} \exp(\mu_{ij})} \right].
\]
made salient, PSOE supporters should be less likely to blame domestic factors for the crisis.

We also estimate alternative specifications of the rank-ordered logit model that allow us to more directly assess which individual characteristics and treatments are more likely to make respondents blame specific items more than others. We present an example specification where we examine blame of each item relative to a baseline item of blame of European governments. This means we must estimate a model that includes all binary indicators of the other five items, interacted with partisan affiliation, relative to the baseline. The example specification takes the form:

$$BR_i = \beta_1 \text{Gov}_j + \beta_2 (\text{Gov}_j \times S_i) + \beta_3 (\text{Gov}_j \times T_2) + \beta_4 (\text{Gov}_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \beta_5 \text{Ban}_j + \beta_6 (\text{Ban}_j \times S_i) + \beta_7 (\text{Ban}_j \times T_2) + \beta_8 (\text{Ban}_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \beta_9 \text{Euro}_j + \beta_{10} (\text{Euro}_j \times S_i) + \beta_{11} (\text{Euro}_j \times T_2) + \beta_{12} (\text{Euro}_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \beta_{13} \text{For}_j + \beta_{14} (\text{For}_j \times S_i) + \beta_{15} (\text{For}_j \times T_2) + \beta_{16} (\text{For}_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \beta_{17} \text{Lab}_j + \beta_{18} (\text{Lab}_j \times S_i) + \beta_{19} (\text{Lab}_j \times T_2) + \beta_{20} (\text{Lab}_j \times S_i \times T_2) + \epsilon_i$$

(2)

where the variables Gov_j, Ban_j, Euro_j, For_j, Lab_j are binary indicator variables for the items of the domestic government actions, domestic banks, Eurozone membership, international investors, and labor market regulations, respectively. The sample for this estimation equation is respondents in the control group and those in condition of Treatment 2. The baseline is thus the binary indicator of the blame item of European government actions. The interpretation of $\beta_3$, $\beta_4$, $\beta_5$, and $\beta_6$, so on, is similar to that of equation (1); only instead of the impact of domestic vs. global issues on respondent rankings, we can evaluate whether each respondent ranks each item (domestic government actions, domestic banks, Eurozone membership, international investors, and labor market regulations) as more blameworthy relative to the item of the actions of European governments. Further, as with equation (1), we can estimate the impact of being a PP vs. PSOE supporter and the impact of Treatment 2 on the likelihood of ranking each item in equation (2) as more blameworthy than that of European governments.13 Equation (2) can also be estimated by including all treatment categories (T2 through T7), to evaluate the impact of each treatment on blame. For tractability and ease of reading purposes, we display the results from estimation of equation (2) in Table 5 where the baseline is the item of European governments, and include all treatments (T2 through T7).

### Results

We begin with discussion of the control group. We first present descriptive statistics and then examine determinants of blame within the control group. After discussion of the results for the control group, we turn to the experimental results on how a framing of the crisis based on the roles played by globalization vs. domestic factors affects citizen views of the crisis. We find evidence of partisan differences regarding blame of the crisis, and that making globalization salient helps exonerate the government for PSOE voters, and increases blame of European governments and foreign investors (with much of the blame shifting toward other European governments). We show that this result is confined mainly to PSOE supporters.

#### Evidence from the Control Group

##### Demographics of the Control Group

We briefly summarize the descriptive statistics from the control group and discuss the baseline effects and results from the control group. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of the entire sample of respondents. Consistent with results from other nationally representative samples, a slight majority of respondents identify with one of the two main political parties: 30% of the control group list themselves as closest to the Socialist Party (PSOE) and 25% of the group lists themselves as closest to the conservatives (PP).

##### Blame of the Crisis Overall

Which factors did respondents rank as most to blame for the economic crisis? Figure 1 displays the patterns of blame of the crisis for the control group and decomposed by partisan affiliation, and demonstrates the important role that partisanship plays in people’s assessment of the crisis.

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13 Equation (2) can be estimated with a different blame item as a baseline to evaluate the likelihood of blaming one item relative to another baseline item. The substantive results do not change.
Two-thirds of respondents (67%) blame the incumbent government as a top three factor explaining the crisis. Seventy-three percent of respondents blame the actions of domestic banks as a top three factor of the respondent. More than half of the respondents (56%) put the actions of foreign investors as a top three factor, whereas Spain’s adoption of the euro, the actions of other European governments, and labor regulations were less blamed (33%, 26%, and 40%, respectively). In terms of the factor that was put as the top factor contributing to the crisis, the actions of the government, domestic banks, and foreign investors were the most blamed (28%, 27%, and 27%, respectively).

Blame of the Crisis by Partisanship
As Figure 1 shows, PSOE and PP supporters differ greatly in their views on the crisis. Partisanship greatly distinguishes who respondents blame for the crisis for all factors of blame, except for the factor of Spanish membership in the Eurozone. Overall, PP supporters are more likely to blame the government and labor market regulations most, followed by domestic banks. PSOE partisans are more likely to blame domestic banks, the actions of European governments, and foreign investors. They are willing to blame the government, but far less so than PP supporters. For PSOE supporters, the most blamed combination (domestic banks, European governments, and foreign investors) does not include the government.

Specifically, about half of PSOE partisans (51%) listed the government as one of the top three factors of the crisis, whereas 93% of PP partisans listed the government as a top three factor (p < .001). Seventy-eight percent of PSOE partisans blame the banks as a top three factor, as opposed to 61% of PP partisans (p < .001). Sixty-five percent of PSOE partisans blame the actions of foreign investors as a top three factor, whereas Spain’s adoption of the euro, the actions of other European governments, and labor regulations were less blamed (33%, 26%, and 40%, respectively). In terms of the factor that was put as the top three factor explaining the crisis; we estimate separate equations where the binary party identification variable is compared to the baseline of the rest of the respondents in the control group. As Table 3 shows, partisan identity best explains which factor is blamed. The difference in views by partisanship on banks’ responsibilities is larger as well: 37% of PSOE supporters put the banks as the top three factor to blame, in contrast to only 11% of PP supporters (p < .001). Thirty-three percent of PSOE supporters blamed the actions of foreign investors most, in contrast to 12% of PP supporters (p < .001).

These partisan differences remain when controlling for the demographic variables of education, income, age, gender, and labor market status. As Table 3 shows, partisan identity best explains which factor is blamed. The table displays logistic estimations where the dependent variable is whether each blame item is ranked as a top three factor; we estimate separate equations where the binary party identification variable is compared to the baseline of the rest of the respondents in the control group. For each dependent variable, with the excep-

Note that these differences do not reveal whether respondents consistently ranked banks as more blameworthy than the government, only that more respondents placed the banks as a top three factors.
tion of the euro, the coefficients for the binary variables of PSOE and PP affiliation are statistically significant. The coefficient for PSOE supporter is positively correlated with blame of the domestic banks, foreign investors, and other European governments. PSOE individuals are less likely to blame the incumbent government and labor market regulations. PP supporters, consistent with the bivariate cross-tabulations reported above, are more likely to blame the government and labor market regulations and less likely to blame domestic banks, international investors, and European governments.

Overall, partisan affiliation matters much more than other demographic characteristics in explaining blame for the crisis. Wealthier and more educated respondents are less likely to blame the euro and more likely to blame foreign investors. In sum, from the control group, we learn that PSOE supporters blame the following factors most: banks; foreign investors; and European governments. They are much less likely to blame the government (though some PSOE supporters still do). By contrast, PP individuals are much more likely to blame the government and labor market regulations and less likely to blame the banks, international investors, and European governments. The euro is the only issue where partisan identity does not affect whether it is blamed as a top three factor.

### Experimental Results

We now turn to the results of the estimations of equations (1) and (2), examining whether partisan identification affects the blame of some causes of the crisis over others and whether the experimental treatments affected blame. Table 4 (equation 1) and Table 5 (equation 2) show the results of this analysis. Model 1 in Table 4 presents a baseline result to illustrate the importance of partisan bias. If we consider the sample of respondents who support either the PSOE or PP within the control group, across both groups of respondents, domestic issues relative to globalization-related issues are 1.9 times more likely to be ranked higher (b1 = 64, p < .001). But supporters of the PSOE and PP individuals blame the domestic and global issues differently. PSOE respondents are 1.3 times as likely to rank domestic issues as more blameworthy than global issues (b1 + b2 = 0.25, p < .005), whereas PP respondents are 3.3 times as likely to rank domestic issues as more blameworthy (b1 = 1.19, p < .001). This partisan gap is unsurprising, given the discussion of Figure 1 and the higher blame that PP respondents assign to the role of the government and labor market regulations.

Model 2 of Table 4 presents the results from estimating equation (1). We examine whether there is partisan bias in blaming domestic vs. global factors and whether the treatments affect such blame. We present results for just PSOE or PP supporters. The most substantively important result is the impact of Treatment 3 on blame rankings. Treatment 3 (the PSOE endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis) has a statistically significant and substantively large impact on PSOE respondents’ likelihood of ranking domestic issues as more blameworthy than global issues, relative to the control group. As discussed above, within the control group, PP partisans blame domestic issues more so than global issues...
issues, relative to PSOE partisans. But once respondents receive a PSOE endorsement as globalization as the cause of the crisis, PSOE respondents are more likely to rank domestic issues as less blameworthy than global issues, relative to the control group. In fact, they are roughly 1.6 times less likely to blame domestic issues ($\beta_5 + \beta_6 = -0.47$, $p < .02$). Consistent with our theoretical expectation, there is no symmetric effect for PP partisans regarding the impact of Treatment 4 on PP supporters; $\beta_7 = 0.11$, $p < .48$) (Treatment 4 is the PP endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis). The endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis by the PSOE helps exonerate domestic factors for the crisis, but only for those who share the party label of the government. However, citizens who affiliate with the opposition party are not affected by this particular endorsement. Model 2 also shows that PP supporters tend to blame domestic factors more when labor market regulations are made salient by the PSOE (Treatment 6) ($\beta_{11} = 0.51$, $p < .05$). This effect does not exist for PSOE supporters ($\beta_{11} + \beta_{12} = 0.11$, $p < .59$). This evidence indicates that when presented with intra-party endorsement of alternative explanations for the crisis, PSOE supporters are willing to shift blame to global actors, and blame domestic factors less. But to what specifically do these respondents shift their blame?

### Blame of Specific Items

We now turn to estimations that allow us to assess which individual characteristics and treatments are more likely to make respondents blame specific items higher than others. Figure 2 displays a key experimental result, comparing the raw percentages of PSOE and PP respondents who include the government among the top three blame factors in the control group, vs. those percentages under the globalization treatment conditions. PSOE supporters are far more likely than PP supporters to respond to the globalization treatment: among the former, blame of the government is the top three falls from 31% in the control group to 32% in the treatment group.

To analyze this result more systematically, we examine blame of each factor relative to a baseline of blame of European governments, equation (2). Table 5 presents the results. For PSOE respondents, exposure to Treatment 3—PSOE endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis—reduces their blame of the domestic government relative to European governments. PSOE respondents are more likely to blame the actions of European governments when receiving the statement endorsed by the PSOE that globalization factors are responsible for the economic crisis. $\beta_1$ is positive (2.95, $p < .001$), indicating PP respondents are 19 times more likely to blame the government more so than European governments. PSOE supporters are far less likely to blame the government relative to European governments (1.5 times as likely ($\beta_1 + \beta_2 = 0.38$, $p < .02$). Treatment 3—exposure to PSOE endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis—further reduces blame of the PSOE-led government relative to European governments, among PSOE supporting respondents. PSOE respondents in this treatment...
condition are 1.6 times less likely than in the control group of blaming the government over European governments (\(b_0 + b_6 = -0.47, p < .03\)). We do not find substantive effects of the treatment on changing the blame of the other items relative to European governments.

We now examine whether the effects of the treatment are driven by political ideology, as opposed to party affiliation. Some literature suggests that more left-wing ideological citizens are more skeptical of globalization; this could be because of the belief that globalization harms workers or that it constrains left-wing governments’ policy agendas (Kayser 2004; Fernández-Albertos 2006). We test this account by estimating equations (1) and (2) and interacting the treatments with left-wing ideology of the respondent (as opposed to party affiliation). The results are displayed in the third column of Tables 4 and 6. In both models, the results demonstrate that the PSOE endorsement of framings of the crisis has a greater impact on blame for PSOE respondents than for just ideologically left-wing respondents. Left-wing respondents are less likely to blame domestic issues when exposed to Treatment 3, but the effect is much smaller than for PSOE respondents. This indicates that the impact of the treatment more likely operates through partisan affiliation and less through ideological beliefs about the role of globalization.\(^\text{17}\)

### Conclusions

Who do citizens blame for the recent European economic crisis? What impact does globalization have on citizen views of the economic crisis? This paper addresses these questions and provides evidence on how globalization can be politically used to shift blame during harsh economic times. The recent substantial economic hardships already suffered in many European economies have their roots in domestic as well as global factors, and there remains much debate about the causes as well as the best policy responses. Understanding variation in blame for the crisis is an important foundational task for explaining cross-national variation in responses to the crisis.

In this paper, we test theories about the impact of globalization on blame for the economic crisis, with evidence from the important case of Spain. We argue that blame for the crisis is partially conditioned by partisan bias and framings of the crisis as being related to globalization, and we find that different framings about causes of the crisis, endorsed by different political parties, do affect who people blame for the crisis. Consistent with recent literature that documents the impact of partisan bias on policy preferences, we show that partisan attachments help explain people’s views about the economic crisis. More interestingly, these attachments matter more if globalization-related explanations of the crisis are made salient. Our findings contribute to the literature on the political consequences of globalization by showing how the salience of the issue can affect views of economic crises, and how partisan bias might condition the use of globalization as a blame-shifting device.

Specifically, we find that partisan attachments explain a great deal of who people think is responsible for the crisis: While supporters of the conservative party in the opposition tend to blame the government, those who identify with the incumbent party tend to blame foreign investors and domestic banks instead. The incumbent party endorsement of globalization as a cause of the crisis affects the party’s supporters’ views of the crisis: They help exonerate the government, and blame other European governments more. This suggests that it is not difficult, given the large magnitude of the effects and the minimal nature of the treatment, to

\(^{16}\) Across the entire sample, 49% of ideologically left-wing respondents identify with the PSOE. The results do not substantively change if we consider alternate codings of partisan identification; nor do they changed based on ideology if we use alternative binary classifications of “left-wing” to include the “center” category.

\(^{17}\) Additional suggestive evidence of the relative importance of partisanship over ideology comes from the analysis of the treatment effects for non-PSOE left-wing partisans, that is, respondents whose closest party is a small left-wing party such as United Left, or ERC, BNG or Nafarroa Bai (results available upon request). The estimated effect of the treatment for such respondents is similarly signed to that of PSOE identifiers, but the standard errors are much larger (this could be due to smaller numbers of such respondents). The “exonerating” effect that the PSOE-endorsed globalization treatment has for PSOE partisans is not statistically significant for non-PSOE left-party supporters.

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**Table 6. Effect of Treatments on Blame of Individual Items by Political Ideology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (baseline category: European governments)</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Banks</th>
<th>Euro</th>
<th>Foreign investors</th>
<th>Labor market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>2.33 (0.17)**</td>
<td>1.61 (0.17)**</td>
<td>0.78 (0.18)**</td>
<td>1.12 (0.17)**</td>
<td>1.02 (0.17)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 2</td>
<td>-1.85 (0.21)**</td>
<td>-0.20 (0.21)</td>
<td>-0.80 (0.23)**</td>
<td>-0.097 (0.21)</td>
<td>-0.97 (0.22)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 6</td>
<td>0.046 (0.37)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.37)</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.40)</td>
<td>-0.17 (0.38)</td>
<td>0.27 (0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 7</td>
<td>0.34 (0.48)</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.57 (0.52)</td>
<td>0.078 (0.49)</td>
<td>-0.019 (0.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 8</td>
<td>-0.26 (0.36)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.35)</td>
<td>-0.54 (0.40)</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.37)</td>
<td>0.0036 (0.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 9</td>
<td>-0.16 (0.45)</td>
<td>-0.44 (0.43)</td>
<td>0.22 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.35 (0.45)</td>
<td>-0.26 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 10</td>
<td>-0.17 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.21 (0.34)</td>
<td>-0.23 (0.37)</td>
<td>-0.24 (0.36)</td>
<td>-0.079 (0.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 11</td>
<td>-0.22 (0.44)</td>
<td>-0.38 (0.43)</td>
<td>-0.29 (0.49)</td>
<td>-0.063 (0.45)</td>
<td>-0.31 (0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 12</td>
<td>0.085 (0.40)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.40)</td>
<td>0.040 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.092 (0.41)</td>
<td>-0.18 (0.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 13</td>
<td>0.14 (0.49)</td>
<td>-0.21 (0.48)</td>
<td>-0.31 (0.54)</td>
<td>-0.089 (0.50)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 14</td>
<td>0.60 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.70 (0.42)**</td>
<td>-0.0012 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.50 (0.43)</td>
<td>-1.08 (0.50)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 15</td>
<td>-0.56 (0.50)</td>
<td>-1.08 (0.49)**</td>
<td>-0.31 (0.55)</td>
<td>-1.08 (0.50)**</td>
<td>0.73 (0.42)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 16</td>
<td>0.58 (0.43)</td>
<td>0.63 (0.42)</td>
<td>0.047 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.15 (0.44)</td>
<td>0.60 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item × Treatment 17</td>
<td>-0.61 (0.52)</td>
<td>-0.73 (0.51)</td>
<td>-0.15 (0.57)</td>
<td>-0.51 (0.53)</td>
<td>-0.56 (0.53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.

* \( p < .10 \), ** \( p < .05 \).
induce a specific subset of citizens to “scapegoat” globalization in difficult economic times. These results are driven more by partisan affiliation of citizens than ideological views.

Additionally, these findings have implications for understanding the burgeoning literature on how globalization attenuates the economic vote. This study suggests one plausible mechanism for this finding: Partisan bias leads voters to blame globalization-related factors more for economic crises than the actions of incumbent governments. We find this effect mainly for co-partisans of the incumbent government. Our findings suggest that for some citizens, inciting protectionist views may not be difficult and that such views can help reduce the culpability of the government.

The theory, design, and results raise additional questions for further research. Extrapolation of the results beyond Spain is necessarily speculative, but the blame of globalization effect found in this study should exist in other countries and may persist as the crisis worsens. One of the scope conditions could be absolute exposure of a state to globalization. In smaller and more open economies, the potential for blaming globalization (and subsequent electoral support for the incumbent government) could be expected to be even higher than in a relatively larger economy such as Spain.

The experimental results could also depend on the ideological orientation or partisan affiliation of the incumbent government. More moderate or right-leaning governments could plausibly benefit from shifting blame to globalization-related factors and shifting blame away from incumbent government action (at least among non-partisan citizens). The specific aspects of globalization to blame might differ depending on the ideological orientation of the political party. More Euroskeptic parties may blame specific European countries (such as Germany) or European institutions (such as the ECB); other parties might blame international financial actors, capital flows, or immigration. Our conjecture is further supported by the fact that in Europe, since the onset of the recession, many right-wing parties and governments have attempted to shift blame for the crisis toward other actors, very much as the PSOE government did in Spain. The crisis has been the most important cause of government turnover in Europe (either by elections or by the collapse of parliamentary support). In Great Britain in 2010 and Portugal in 2011, previously moderate to left-wing governments were replaced, while in Ireland the long-ruling centrist Fianna Fail party suffered its worst electoral defeat. In Greece, the New Democracy party won the elections in June 2012, replacing a previous coalition government that was formed because of turmoil related to austerity demands; the left-wing incumbent party PASOK suffered its worst defeat in these elections. In Italy, the long-serving Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was ousted after failure to resolve the sovereign debt crisis. In each of these cases, incumbent political parties—even those considered more right-wing—partially blamed global actors for the dire economic consequences.18 As the economic crisis continues and further unpopular austerity measures in countries are debated, blame of global forces could increase. Recent empirical analysis of elections in the crisis (through mid-2011) indicates that incumbent governments were electorally punished for lower economic outcomes, regardless of government ideology or which party was in control (Bartels 2011). This evidence suggests that as the European economic crisis deepens, we may observe both left-wing and right-wing parties seeking to shift blame to factors related to globalization (such as European governments, international investors, or the Eurozone generally) to avoid electoral punishment for the crisis. Our findings support the contention that globalization may be a convenient target for such governments.

Our results also indicate that replicating the experimental design in other countries with incumbent governments of other ideologies would be a useful extension. Another set of studies should examine why some global actors are targeted for blame and not others (such as European governments as opposed to foreign investors), and whether more specific framings of the crisis affect blame. Regardless of the ultimate outcome of the European crisis, the blame of globalization (fairly or unfairly), as well as the consequences of such blame and backlash, will become more important questions for scholars of international political economy.

Acknowledgments

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References


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Appendix 1: Netquest Survey Protocol

The Netquest survey uses opt-in panels, based on existing databases of nationally representative samples of residents of Spain. The panel is constrained to individuals at least 18 years of age. The sample is stratified with representative quotas of the Spanish population by geographical area (seven geographical areas), age group, and gender. Netquest compensates economically all participants with vouchers that can be used later to purchase goods at Netquest’s online store. Full documentation on sample compilation is available upon request.
Appendix 2: Comparison of Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Netquest survey</th>
<th>National representative survey</th>
<th>Survey*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household monthly income in euros</td>
<td>901–1,400 20.8</td>
<td>901–1,400 26.5</td>
<td>European Social Survey, 4th Wave, April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,401–1,900 17.3</td>
<td>1,401–1,900 26.5</td>
<td>1,901–2,700 15.6</td>
<td>CIS 2553. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,901–2,700 27.6</td>
<td>1,901–2,700 15.6</td>
<td>&gt;2,700 25.6</td>
<td>CIS 2553. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2,700 25.6</td>
<td>&gt;2,700 11.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Women: 51.0</td>
<td>Women: 51.0</td>
<td>CIS 2853. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18–24: 13.7</td>
<td>18–24: 9.2</td>
<td>CIS 2853. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote recall</td>
<td>PSOE 38.8</td>
<td>PSOE 38.2</td>
<td>CIS 2853. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PP 26.5</td>
<td>PP 26.4</td>
<td>CIS 2853. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology (1–10)</td>
<td>4.6 (SD: 2.1)</td>
<td>4.8 (SD: 1.9)</td>
<td>CIS 2853. November 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote intention</td>
<td>PSOE 19.8</td>
<td>PSOE 18.7</td>
<td>CIS 2847. October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PP 24.8</td>
<td>PP 24.8</td>
<td>CIS 2847. October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest party</td>
<td>PSOE 26.3</td>
<td>PSOE 28.8</td>
<td>CIS 2847. October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PP 22.9</td>
<td>PP 24.6</td>
<td>CIS 2847. October 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. *The closest survey available was the November 2010 Barometer (CIS 2853). However, this survey did not include questions on vote intention and party closeness, so for these questions we use the next closest survey, CIS 2847, conducted in October 2010.

Appendix 3: Randomization Check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment 2</th>
<th>Treatment 3</th>
<th>Treatment 4</th>
<th>Treatment 5</th>
<th>Treatment 6</th>
<th>Treatment 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−0.016 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.16 (0.18)</td>
<td>−0.27 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.16 (0.19)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>−0.020 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.042 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.039 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.037 (0.033)</td>
<td>−0.054 (0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−0.099 (0.17)</td>
<td>−0.16 (0.17)</td>
<td>−0.23 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.23 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.0067 (0.0067)</td>
<td>0.016 (0.0064)</td>
<td>* 0.0029 (0.0064)</td>
<td>−0.011 (0.0071)</td>
<td>−0.0029 (0.0065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSOE partisan</td>
<td>0.20 (0.21)</td>
<td>−0.21 (0.21)</td>
<td>−0.064 (0.21)</td>
<td>0.017 (0.21)</td>
<td>−0.080 (0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP partisan</td>
<td>0.40 (0.26)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.26)</td>
<td>−0.21 (0.25)</td>
<td>−0.21 (0.28)</td>
<td>−0.29 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology (L-R)</td>
<td>0.0019 (0.052)</td>
<td>−0.088 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.088 (0.050)</td>
<td>0.0057 (0.054)</td>
<td>0.081 (0.049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−1.92 (0.38) **</td>
<td>−2.50 (0.38) **</td>
<td>−2.63 (0.39) **</td>
<td>−2.29 (0.40) **</td>
<td>−2.17 (0.37) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo-$R^2$</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Estimations are logistic regressions predicting respondent placement in each of the seven experimental groups. Standard errors in parentheses. *p < .05, **p < .01.