

Age and Descriptive Representation in Southern Europe: The Impact of the Great Recession on National Parliaments

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Abstract

This article looks at how well different age groups are represented in the parliaments of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. We focus on three periods—before, during and after the ‘Great Recession’—assuming the economic turmoil has generated new demands channelled by new parties that have recently entered parliament or have had a surge during the crisis. Data comes from mass surveys carried out in each country and from MP biographies. The findings reveal relevant changes in Spain and Italy, with more young people in the parties that appeared or had a surge during the crisis, whereas in Greece and Portugal no relevant changes are observed.

Keywords

Political representation; crisis; elites; democratic renewal; anti-political establishment parties; Italy; Greece; Portugal; Spain

One of the most unknown features of parliaments is the extent to which they mirror the societies that elect them in terms of social diversity: that is, do parliaments reproduce the social cleavages found in their societies? This is what Hanna Pitkin (1967) termed 'descriptive representation', meaning the sociodemographic makeup of that part of the political elite that represents citizens in parliaments (MPs) and how similar it is compared to the voters that elect them. In other words, the issue at stake is whether parliaments and societies are socially close or distant. Pitkin differentiates between descriptive and 'substantive representation', which focuses on the congruence between citizens and representatives in terms of ideology and policy preferences rather than sociodemographic characteristics. However, our focus in the present article will be only on descriptive representation, and only in terms of age.

Different studies note that, while there is always a social gap between the political elite and citizens, the divide is gradually bridged over the years as political parties increasingly incorporate more social diversity in the electoral lists (Kakepaki et al 2018). This is something that can be seen in changes in the professions represented and, especially, in the parliamentary presence of women. Thus, descriptive representation is making parliaments resemble societies more, at least in those areas for which information is available.

The global economic crisis in general and the eurozone crisis in particular generated a great deal of discontent with politics and politicians. The side-effect of this discontent was the rise of new parties (or the re-emergence of older and previously irrelevant ones) that have entered institutions of representation and which have become influential in either setting the political agenda or even controlling governments. These parties usually present themselves as being 'the voice of the people' or the 'regenerators' as they establish new cleavages between establishment and anti-establishment politics or old and new politics (Morlino & Raniolo 2017). In this article our major focus will be on the parties that have had a parliamentary breakthrough or else enjoyed an electoral surge during the crisis, as compared with all the other established national parties (which we label 'national mainstream parties').

In this regard, Southern Europe is a particularly interesting object of study. This region of Europe was the most severely hit by the eurozone crisis. The economic shock spread to the political systems, leading to political instability and almost unprecedented dynamics, both at the electoral stage and during the process of government formation (Bosco & Verney 2013; Bosco & Verney 2017). In other words, Southern European countries faced an economic crisis and at the same time a political crisis (Hutter et al 2016).

In Spain, Italy and Greece, the party system was restructured during the crisis years. The main drivers of change were parties combining opposition to austerity and opposition to old politics. In contrast, Portugal deviates from this pattern since in that country, no successful new parties emerged during the crisis period (although three new micro-parties won one seat each in the post-crisis election of 2019). This counter case deserves more attention and will be used here as the negative case to test some hypotheses.

When new political actors enter parliament, they generate a turnover effect insofar as new MPs are entering representative institutions. Such occurrences open the possibility of a renewal effect, to the extent that the new representatives display on average qualitatively different

characteristics, particularly in terms of their age. Political renewal in this case is understood in terms of (partial) replacement of an older political class by a younger one. Our goal here is to test different hypotheses (which will be formally presented below) concerning an expected increase in social diversity, focused here on age groups, due to the economic crisis and the emergence/surge of new parties in Southern European legislatures. In general, we expect there to be more young people among the parliamentary groups and voters of the new political parties compared to the existing political forces.

Our decision to focus on age, rather than on other fundamental elements used for evaluating descriptive representation (like gender, education, profession, etc.) is related to the overall rationale of the present special issue. As the editors state in their introduction, the extent to which the economic crisis has constituted a major generational political event in Southern Europe, with lasting consequences for the younger cohorts of the population remains underexplored.

In addition, the rejection of established political elites and the success of new challenger or protest parties during the crisis in countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy have presumably also affected patterns of political representation and the composition of political elites, traditionally dominated by middle-aged and elderly male politicians with very specific professional backgrounds. Additionally, better descriptive representation, namely in terms of age, can also be a way to achieve better substantive representation (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999), especially in the case of uncrystallised issues such as those produced by major shocks like the Great Recession, the external interventions and the austerity policies that followed.

Moreover, young populations constitute a large part of the population in European societies (especially when including individuals in their 30s). They might share policy preferences, and thus the strong under-representation of young cohorts produces a triple negative effect. First, in descriptive representation terms, it implies that a very large part of the population is not well represented. Second, in substantive representation terms, it implies the policy preferences of these younger cohorts are not fully taken into account in parliamentary representation. Third, it fuels the vicious cycle of apathy of the young (Stockemer & Sundstrom 2018; Joshi & Och 2021).¹ By fuelling the growth of anti-political-establishment parties (APEp) (Bértoa & Rama 2020), this is an area where the economic crisis might have inadvertently contributed to positive change in terms of the quality of representation. We develop these points further below in the theoretical section.

We begin this examination by providing some contextual information about the Great Recession in Southern Europe and its effect on the different age groups. We then turn to the theory of descriptive representation and democratic renewal, as well as presenting the three hypotheses to be tested. In the third section, we present the data and methods for testing the hypotheses before providing an empirical analysis in the following two sections.

Context: The impact of the 'Great Recession' (2009-2015) on youth in Southern Europe

The international financial crisis that followed the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, caused economic growth to plummet and reminded financial institutions of the need to be more careful when assessing lending risks. In the years 2009–11, many countries were labelled high-risk investments, demands for government bonds fell and interest rates rocketed. As a result, Ireland, Greece and Portugal were obliged to request loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU). The loans were granted, but on very stringent conditions. Italy and Spain, on the other hand, were described as countries at risk of contagion, with a bank bailout imposed in Spain (2012) and reforms prescribed in the Italian case. While all four countries introduced unpopular and far-reaching austerity measures, these were particularly demanding in the countries that received bailouts (Bosco & Verney 2013; Bosco & Verney 2017, Verney & Bosco 2014; Bermeo & Bartels 2014; Zamora & Collier 2014; Freire, Andreadis & Viegas 2016; Collier & Ramírez de Luis 2019).

We expect the Great Recession to have had several effects upon young people's social integration, political participation and political choices. This is because the literature suggests crises affect their engagement in several ways. First, economic crises affect youth participation through the effects of unemployment (Kern, Marien & Hooghe 2015), given youth unemployment tends to be more sensitive to short-term economic fluctuations (Sala Lorda, Ghoshray & Ordóñez 2016; Serracant 2015). Even though the impact of the economic crisis of the previous decade on employment rates was significant across all four South European countries and across all age groups, it was the young that were disproportionately affected. For example, for the age groups facing job insertion (25-29 years), the crisis was particularly harsh in Greece and Spain where the young lost around 25 percentage points in employment rates between 2008 and 2014, followed close behind by the young in Italy and Portugal (Gutiérrez 2015, p. 85).

Second, the crisis had a disproportionate effect on the political participation of the young as a result of higher rates of emigration due to limited employment prospects when compared to older age groups (Freire & Lisi 2016). Third, unemployment and emigration, together or separately, have another impact: to push the youth to postpone their family building plans. According to the 'withdrawal hypothesis' we should expect such unemployment, emigration and postponement of life projects to have a negative effect on political participation (Brody & Sniderman 1977).² Thus, one should also expect crises to exacerbate divides in rates of political participation between younger and older citizens.

Theory and hypotheses: Descriptive representation and democratic renewal

The main research questions of the article concern the extent to which MPs are similar to the citizens who elect them and whether parliaments reflect society's social structure and cleavages, or, to put it another way, whether parliaments and societies are socially dissimilar.

Descriptive representation is important due to reasons of inclusiveness and fairness and because it is a way to achieve better substantive representation (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999). The parliamentary underrepresentation of young citizens has a triple negative implication. First, in the language of descriptive representation, the severe under-representation of the young (see IPU

2014 and Stockemer & Sundstrom 2018) implies that a very a large part of the population is excluded from representation.

Second, in terms of substantive representation, young populations might share very specific policy preferences (for example, in terms of post-materialist policy preferences), and thus the strong under-representation of young cohorts also implies that their policy preferences are not fully taken into account (Stockemer & Sundstrom 2018; Joshi & Och 2021).

Third, the severe under-representation of the young in parliament fuels the vicious cycle of apathy of the young, manifested in their declining political interest and political sophistication, plus their detachment from conventional politics, particularly voting. If younger cohorts vote increasingly less, then their policy preferences are less and less taken into account (Stockemer & Sundstrom 2018, pp.470-2). Therefore, a better parliamentary representation of the young can break the above-mentioned vicious cycle. We know that some new or previously marginal parties either had a parliamentary breakthrough or enjoyed an electoral surge during the Great Recession, and that among them are some anti-political-establishment parties and challenger parties, which typically claim to pursue the renewal of the political system. In this regard, we follow the definitions of anti-political-establishment and challenger parties proposed by Abedi (2004) and updated by Bértoa, & Rama (2020). In particular, we consider those parties *that appeared or had a surge, respectively, during the context of the Great Recession*. For the sake of simplicity, they can also be labelled new or ‘surge’ parties.

Considering these points, this article sets out to test three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The economic crisis has helped parliaments become more socially diverse in terms of age and hence more representative of young citizens, especially in countries in which important new political parties have entered the parliamentary arena, but also in countries where previously marginal parties have a major surge with the crisis.

Hypothesis 2: A large part of the increased social diversity and better representation of young citizens is the result of the new political actors entering parliament, namely the anti-political-establishment parties (APEp) and the challenger parties.

Hypothesis 3: In terms of age, in the wake of the economic crisis, parliaments have closed the gap between MPs and citizens, although the contribution of different parties varies significantly, with the newer parties or parties that have had a major surge during the crisis being larger contributors to this change.

Data and methods

We use mass surveys for citizens and biographical data for MPs.. More details on the mass survey data used are provided in Table 1, while the exact sources for MPs’ data can be found in Tables 2-6.³ In the next section, with the country by country analysis, we consider only the legislatures analysed before and after the crises (Tables 2-6). For each country we chose one legislature elected before the start of the crisis and the most recently elected legislature. More precisely, we

selected legislatures 2005-2009 and 2019-2023 for Portugal, 2004-2008 and 2019- for Spain, 2006-2008 and 2018- for Italy, 2004-2007 and 2019- for Greece. In the following comparative section before the conclusions, we also consider a third case - the crisis legislature - for each country (Table 6).

We should be aware that survey data generate statistical errors that can affect external validity and, consequently, comparison with MPs. For instance, the more age groups we have, the smaller is the sample size per category, which increases statistical errors. However, census data can pose more serious problems for our purpose. First, the dates of censuses (every ten years) do not match our time periods. Second, and even more important for our purposes, census data does not provide party breakdowns. Our solution is the best possible, therefore, although we must be aware of its potential shortcomings. Another point that must be underlined is the following: although we use mainly secondary data for these analyses in each and every country, the specific analyses that we perform in the present article are innovative, i.e. they were never performed before for these countries and periods of time.

In the country-by-country analyses, to investigate the presence of different age groups we divided the mass and elite populations into three age groups: 18-29, coinciding with the usual official definition of what constitutes young adults; 30-49; and 50 or more (this allows us to compare the youngest with two other broad age categories). We also compare the average age of the citizen population and the parliamentary elite. Specifically, we compare both the total mass population with that of the whole parliament and that of the relevant party groups at the electoral level (based on the party the citizen voted for in the last election) and the parliamentary level (based on the parliamentary affiliation of the MP). We are aware that although our definition of young people (below 30) is sometimes used in political representation studies, it is perhaps not the most common (see IPU 2014; Stockemer & Sundstrom 2018; Joshi & Och 2021). Thus, in the final comparative section (see Table 6), where we focus on young people only, we use two different definitions of young people (below 30 and below 40) and compare mainstream parties with anti-political-establishment parties in that respect.⁴

These procedures allow us to test our hypotheses. First, comparing a legislature before and after the crisis and paying attention to variations in average ages and proportions in age groups, we try to establish whether increased age diversity is a fact, both for the whole parliament (Hypothesis 1) and segmented by political party (Hypothesis 2). Second, we compare old and new actors in each national parliament before and after the crisis to assess the role of each type of political party in the variations observed earlier (Hypotheses 2 and 3). Third, comparing these actors means we can establish whether this kind of 'new politics' is nurtured among younger political actors more often than older actors. Fourth, comparing MPs and citizens before and after the crisis will allow us to see whether, in terms of age, the gap between parliament and society narrows or widens, and what the relative contribution is for each type of political party (new versus old) for these expected changes (Hypothesis 3). For this purpose, we calculate the Social Disproportion Index (SDI), which measures the degree of the gap between society and parliaments (or any two groups). The closest to 1 the SDI, the shorter is the distance between society and parliament in the variable analysed (in this case, age) (see Coller et al 2018 and Coller

2008 for an explanation and its use for Spain). In this case, it is computed as the average age for the whole parliament divided by the average age for the population as captured by mass surveys.

Age groups in South European legislatures before and after the Great Recession: a country-by-country analysis

Portugal: Plus ça change?

With respect to the basic indicators of the evolution of electoral behaviour, the effects of the electoral system and the format of the party system, there is nothing that allows us to say the 2011 or 2015 general elections in Portugal were extraordinary in any way: the fundamentals were all similar to those found in previous elections (Freire & Lisi 2016). Only one small new party achieved parliamentary representation (winning one seat in 2015). This was the PAN (Partido das Pessoas, Animais e Natureza – People, Animals and Nature Party), which stood on a platform that focused on environmental rights; its success was probably not related to the Great Recession or its aftermath.

One of the most persistent traits of Portuguese politics between 1975 and 2015 was the ability of the parties on the right – above all, the liberal centre-right PSD (Partido Social Democrata – Social Democratic Party) and the conservative-right CDS-PP (Partido Popular – Popular Party) – to form coalitions and produce stable executives, something the left was not able to do until late 2015. However, the harshness of austerity policies, the systematic and profound breach of several election promises by the serving government and the affronts to the country's constitution (see Freire 2016) helped overturn this situation and led the parties of the left to reach an understanding. Following the 2015 elections, a PS (Partido Socialista – Socialist Party) minority government was formed with parliamentary support from the parties to its left, the BE (Bloco de Esquerda – Left Bloc) and the CDU (Coligação Democrática Unitária – Unitary Democratic Coalition), the latter consisting of the PCP (Partido Comunista Português – Communist Party) and the PEV (Partido Ecologista 'Os Verdes' – Ecologist Party 'The Greens'). And this new pattern in coalition politics in Portugal was a major consequence of the Great Recession, after 40 years of the absence of political alliances between the centre-left PS and the radical left parties on its left. One could argue that the impact of the crisis on the Portuguese party system had more to do with changes in its *mechanics* (i.e. patterns of competition and cooperation) than its *format* (number and types of significant parties).

Precisely because of what has been said, Portugal is the control case in the set of four countries for the crisis period. While young people in Portugal were also very badly affected by the Great Recession and its aftermath, their protest was channelled mainly through traditional party routes rather than via any new political parties (Fernandes 2017). We, therefore, do not expect to see any major changes in the representation of younger Portuguese at the parliamentary level. In fact, we see that there has been no increase in age diversity at the parliamentary level since the Great Recession. Indeed, there is less – the percentage of MPs under the age of 30 fell from 7 per cent in Legislature 2005-2009 to 2.2 per cent in Legislature 2011-2015. (Even the 30-49 age group

fell from 53.5 per cent to 49.6 per cent). Meanwhile, the average age of parliamentarians increased from 46.1 to 49 (see Figure 1).

Adding the current legislature (2019-) to the analysis does not change this overall picture much (see Table 2). The parliamentary groups of BE and the CDU remain younger than those of the largest parties (PS and PSD) and the conservative CDS-PP, but they seem to be losing some ground among the youngest cohorts. Three new parties emerged - IL, Chega, and LIVRE (Free) – but are too small (one MP each) to be considered relevant for these analyses. However, both their parliamentary groups and their voters are younger than those of the other parties. Hence, the Portuguese parliament has not become more diverse in age terms and Hypothesis 1 is, therefore, clearly rejected in the case of Portugal.

The SDI reveals that with the increase in the electoral participation of 30-49-year-olds from Legislature 2005-2009 to Legislature 2011-2015, the gap between society and the political elites reduced slightly, from 0.90 to 1.06 (the latter value being closer to one). However, this is due to a decline in the average age of the voters caused by the participation of the 30-49 age group (which is now better represented), rather than because of greater representation of the youngest of the age groups. Moreover, the change is rather small. Thus, we are also inclined to reject Hypothesis 3, concerning the closing of the age gap between MPs and citizens.

Changes in terms of representation of the different age cohorts are also not relevant in respect to the major patterns found prior to the Great Recession, at either the MP or voter level (larger representation of the two younger age groups among the radical left and the conservative CDS-PP, older CDU voters and younger MPs, and older PSD and PS voters and MPs) (Freire 2001, pp. 61–6; Lisi 2011, pp. 115–6). Again, adding the current legislature (2019-) to the analysis does not have a significant impact on this overall picture. For each and every age cohort, there is no major change in the SDI or in the average age of MPs vis-à-vis citizens. Except for the much younger and the much older age cohorts, the parliament is pretty similar to society as a whole (average). And, in fact, Figure 1, that compares the overall parliament with the Portuguese adult citizenry (18 years old or more) clearly goes in the same direction, for each and every one of the three legislatures considered. Thus, the hypothesis concerning the contribution of non-mainstream parties to improved representation of the young (Hypothesis 2) is also rejected.

Spain: a case of political renewal

The Great Recession triggered changes in the Spanish political landscape whose intensity has been partly moderated over the years. New political actors emerged, challenging traditional parties. Both Cs (Ciudadanos – Citizens) and Podemos (We Can) won a significant share of seats in Congress for the first time in the 2015 election. Together they received 27 per cent of votes and 30 per cent of seats. Cs and Podemos shook up the political board. They were also successful in the 2016 national election, called after the failure to form a government. The centre-right PP (Popular Party – Partido Popular) won and formed a government (with the declining support of Cs) while the centre-left PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers’

Party) got its worst result since the establishment of democracy four decades earlier, triggering a deep crisis inside the party in Autumn 2016.

In subsequent regional elections, Podemos and Cs ended up providing the parliamentary support for regional governments led by traditional parties (e.g. in Valencia, Extremadura or Castile-León). In Catalonia, Cs won the 2017 election in terms of votes and seats but was unable to form a government. Corruption scandals associated with the PP in the national government led to a non-confidence vote in Congress (May 2018) in which several parliamentary groups supported the PSOE leader, Pedro Sánchez, to form a government. Sánchez called new elections in 2019 after Congress rejected his budget. The April 2019 elections had to be repeated in November since the PSOE did not reach any agreement with other parties to support the future government.

Meanwhile a new scenario was emerging. To the right of the PP, Vox, a new far-right party, entered the regional parliament in Andalusia (2018), leading to the PP and Cs forming the new regional administration after 30 years of socialist regional governments.⁵ This paved the way for a relative success of Vox in the regional elections of May 2019 and, especially, in the national elections of November 2019, when it became the fourth parliamentary group with 50 seats. Subsequent regional elections (2021) in Galicia and the Basque Country were a huge failure for Vox while elections in Catalonia, in February 2021, showed a success for this party (fourth parliamentary group in terms of size) and a failure for Cs and Podemos. The decline of these two former challenger parties contrasts recently with the rise of the new challenger on the far right.

Spain has been closing the gap between citizens and MPs in terms of five comparable factors: gender, place of birth, studies, profession and age (Coller et al. 2018). Podemos and Cs introduced more social diversity in parliaments (less so in the case of Cs, as shown by Kakepaki et al. 2018, pp. 195–6) largely due to more decentralised and inclusive methods of selecting politicians (Jaime-Castillo, Coller & Cordero 2018). However, while the old challengers contributed to reducing the already diminishing gap between MPs and citizens, it seems that the new challenger Vox shows a higher level of disproportion vis-à-vis the Spanish population, i.e. its demographics are dissimilar to the overall Spanish population (Portillo-Pérez and Domínguez 2020).

In terms of age, in Spain MPs traditionally mirror the average age of the electors (Coller et al. 2018). This was the case before the Great Recession and continues to be so. The average age of MPs in Legislatures 2004-2008 and 2019- is around 48, while it was also 48 among electors (+18 years old) according to census data (www.ine.es). Small differences appear in the SDI in Table 3 and Figure 2 because we use mass surveys rather than census data to have comparable data by party and age group. Historically, age is the variable that helps parliaments to better mirror societies (Coller et al 2018). However, the youth of the challenger parties' MPs and the aging process of the Spanish society brought Portillo-Pérez and Domínguez (2020, p.112) to find a growing gap in recent years. Although we have to proceed very cautiously, the SDI found in 2019 is 0.93, close to 1, but a bit far from 1.02 obtained in 2016 for Congress (Coller et al. 2018, p.3380).

In terms of average age, before the crisis, younger MPs tended to be associated with parties of the left, while in the post-crisis legislature elected in 2019, the youngest MPs belong to UPs (Unidas Podemos – United We Can, a leftist coalition including Podemos), Ciudadanos and Vox. It

seems, therefore, that ‘new politics’ also means young MPs, which confirms Hypothesis 2. Analysis of electors shows that while before the crisis the average left-wing party voters were younger, after the crisis, those who vote for ‘new politics’ parties tend to be younger (especially Vox electors), while those who vote for the traditional parties (PSOE and PP) tend to be older on average.

Age diversity is shown in Table 3. The conclusion is that, in comparative terms, Spain’s Congress has become a little more age diverse, but without any dramatic changes (adjusting thus to Hypothesis 1). Younger cohorts have similar weight in both legislatures, but mid-age group politicians have increased a bit while there is a reduced presence of the oldest age cohort. The reverse seems to have occurred among electors, thus not confirming Hypothesis 3. Younger generations (below 30) more often vote for parties in the post-crisis elections than they did before the crisis; at the same time, the proportion of voters in the 30-49 age range fell by over 10 percentage points while the share of older voters remains almost unchanged after the crisis. It should be borne in mind that surveys report the vote for a party as declared by the interviewee – 74 per cent (out of 4,118 respondents) in 2004 and 70 per cent (out of 4,804) in 2019 indicated the party they voted for in post-electoral surveys.

Parties exhibit different behaviour, confirming only partially Hypothesis 2. Before the crisis, the youngest MPs belonged proportionally more to parties on the left, such as PSOE and ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya – Republican Left of Catalonia), while after the crisis that same cohort is better distributed among parties with no clear ideological cleavage. Politicians from the middle-age cohort tended to dominate in all parties apart from the regional party CiU (Convergència i Unió – Convergence and Union), which has traditionally had the oldest MPs (Coller et al. 2008).⁶ However, after the crisis, this cohort is more often found in UPs and Ciudadanos (and the regional party JxC), with the new actors incorporating younger people into their electoral lists. Conversely, while the oldest group of MPs was proportionally dominant only in CiU and ‘other’ parties in Legislature 2004-2008, after the crises this generation has been the dominant group within some traditional parties with no clear ideological cleavage.

However, statistical analysis for the 2019 survey shows that there is an association between age cohorts and party voted that is not by chance – chi square and related association measures fall in the significance below 0.002. Residual analysis indicates that the difference between expected and observed values is higher in leftist UPs and the far right Vox (more young and less old voters), and PP and PSOE (more old voters and less mid-age and young voters).

Italy: party system change injects youth to aging parliament

In 2013, Italy experienced an electoral earthquake that, for reasons related at least in part to the economic crisis, restructured the political landscape that had been established in the 1990s in the wake of another earthquake – the collapse of the so-called First Republic (Chiaromonte & De Sio 2014; Di Virgilio & Segatti 2016). The disintegration of the post-war party system during the early 1990s had brought about a major change in the composition of the Italian parliament, as some of the, then new, key political forces – such as FI (Forza Italia – Forward Italy) and LN (Lega Nord –

Northern League) – introduced a partially new political class into parliament. However, the Italian legislative elites very quickly reacquired their traditional profile.⁷

New parties then entered the Italian parliament after the 2013 general elections. The most important was M5S (Movimento 5 stelle – Five Star Movement), whose members were recruited using candidate selection methods and political socialisation channels that differed from those used by existing parties. The M5S is the only Italian party that can be fully considered as anti-political establishment. A further ‘earthquake’ took place in the 2018 general elections, when M5S won one-third of the votes, becoming the largest party in the Italian parliament and Lega (whose label no longer refers to Northern Italy to mark the party’s transformation into a nationalist and radical right force) obtained more than 17 per cent of the votes, for the first time overtaking FI in terms of votes (Schadee, Segatti & Vezzoni 2019). These two political forces, often described as populist, coalesced to form a government that lasted until the summer of 2019 (Conti, Pedrazzani & Russo 2020).

Have these ‘earthquakes’ observed after the start of the Great Recession produced discontinuity in the composition of the parliamentary class and in the degree of descriptive representation in Italy?⁸ Table 4 shows the age composition of the Italian parliamentary class and electorate in 2006 and 2018. The first message of the table is that the overall reconfiguration of the party system which occurred in 2013-2018 helped the Italian parliament become more socially diverse in terms of age, thus supporting Hypothesis 1.

Before the crisis, the distribution of Italian MPs was skewed in terms of age, with more than 60 per cent being at least 50 years old and almost 40 per cent belonging to the 30-49 cohort. Just four MPs (i.e. less than 1 per cent) were younger than 30. Such a distribution was quite at odds with the age composition of Italian voters, 18 per cent of whom were aged 18-29 in 2006. Roughly speaking, the internal composition of the different parties mirrored that of the entire parliament, with an even larger share of MPs aged 50 years or older in cases such as the centre-left L’Ulivo (The Olive Tree) and the anti-corruption party IDV (Italia dei Valori – Italy of Values).⁹ The LN was rather exceptional in this respect, as it had more MPs from the middle-age cohort than it did from the older cohort. If we turn to party electorates, we see that in 2006 the IDV stood out with a very low proportion of supporters in the 18-29 age range, while the PRC (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista – Communist Refoundation Party) received a larger share of young voters than the overall average.

Things changed considerably twelve years later, with the composition of the Italian parliament becoming more age diverse. Following the 2018 elections, the number of young MPs reached 3.5 per cent, and while this was still very far from the proportion of the electorate under the age of 30, this figure was higher than had been the case previously.¹⁰ At that same time, those in the 30-49 age range formed the largest age group of MPs, while most voters were in the 50 and over age group. This can be seen from Figure 3.

In 2018, the election of a larger proportion of younger legislators was due mainly to the M5S. The same had happened in 2013 (data not shown), when the M5S entered parliament for the first time, winning more than 100 seats to become the second-largest party group. In 2018, 7.5 per cent of M5S MPs were under the age of 30, and only 12.8 were over the age of 50.¹¹ The age

profile of the M5S parliamentary group was, consequently, different from the more established parties, lending support to the expectation that, in the elections following the crisis, a large proportion of the increased age diversity of MPs was the result of new political actors entering parliaments.¹² In this regard, we must also note that one of the existing parties – the Lega – increased its share of younger MPs. In particular, those under the age of 30 were 2.4 per cent of the Lega’s MPs in 2018, while they were absent in 2006. The increase was rather small, however, and indicated a partial renewal of the Lega’s political base following the marginalisation of its founder and historic leader, Umberto Bossi, which had started in 2013. The Italian data, therefore, seem to support Hypothesis 2.

Turning now to the average age of Italian voters and MPs, it must be stressed that the gap between citizens and politicians has not shrunk after the start of the crisis. In 2006, the average age of Italian MPs was over 52, six years older than the average age of the electorate. The same difference was observed in 2018, but in this case the voters were on average six years older than MPs. Consistently, the SDI was as close to 1 in 2018 (0.87) as it was in 2006 (1.12). Here we also note that the mean age of voters in 2006 was similar across party electorates, while after the crisis party electorates were much more differentiated in terms of age: voters were, on average, much younger for M5S than for most other parties (see also Pedrazzani and Pinto 2015). On the whole, it can be argued that after the start of the crisis, the Italian Chamber has not closed the age gap between MPs and voters (Hypothesis 3).

Greece: new(er) but not necessarily younger political actors

Table 5 presents a comparison of a pre-crisis legislature in Greece with the legislature formed following the fifth parliamentary election after the onset of the economic crisis. The pre-crisis legislature was formed following the return of the conservative ND (Νέα Δημοκρατία – New Democracy) to power after eleven years of rule by PASOK (Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα – Panhellenic Socialist Movement). The most recent legislature was formed after the victory of ND (Νέα Δημοκρατία-New Democracy) over SYRIZA (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς – Coalition of the Radical Left) in 2019. Between 2015 and 2019, SYRIZA - which prior to the crisis was a minor left party struggling in every election to pass the minimum threshold for entry into parliament - had led two coalition governments with the populist right-wing ANEL (Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες – Independent Greeks) as its junior partner.

The political earthquakes of May and June 2012 led to the collapse of previously dominant PASOK and ND and the emergence of many new or previously marginal parties, such as SYRIZA, ANEL, the neo-Nazi GD (Χρυσή Αυγή – Golden Dawn), the pro-European and liberal Potami (Το Ποτάμι), the EK (Ενωση Κεντρώων – Union of Centrists) and, later, the right-wing populist EL (Ελληνική Λύση – Greek Solution) and the leftist anti-austerity MERA25 (Μέτωπο Ευρωπαϊκής Ρεαλιστικής Ανυπακοής – European Realistic Disobedience Front). One would reasonably expect the increased turnover of parliamentarians and entry of challenger APE parties would lower the average age of MPs and make parliament more representative of the Greek population. However, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, at 52.2 the average age of MPs elected to parliament in 2004 was slightly lower than the 53.4 average age of those elected in 2019 (see also Figure 4).

In 2015, the Greek parliament became even less age diverse than it had been prior to the crisis. The proportion of parliamentarians over the age of 50 increased from three-fifths in 2004 to two-thirds in 2019. The partial SDI for age is 1.09 in Legislature 2004-2007 and 1.10 in Legislature 2019-. Ironically, the party that has contributed most to this development is SYRIZA, which ran an electoral campaign pitting the 'new' against the 'old'. New political parties which emerged during the crisis years, however, such as MERA25, contributed to age diversification as they elected some of the youngest MPs in 2019, similar to what Potami, EK and GD did in 2015. However, the number of seats won by these parties in both of the last legislatures were not nearly enough to lower the average age of parliament. Hypothesis 2, therefore, is only partially confirmed in terms of the ways electorally successful non-mainstream parties have affected the age composition of parliament.

Citizens under the age of 30 are practically unrepresented in every parliament, at least in descriptive terms. In 2004 and 2019, one and two MPs respectively below the age of 30 at the time of the vote were elected to parliament. One of the trends in Greek electoral behaviour has been the lower participation rates among younger generations. The low descriptive representation of the young in the Greek parliament appears to be a constant, and it is not clear if it is causally linked to the lower electoral participation of young Greeks in all types of elections and, if so, in what direction the causality works. However, the data show that representation of the young has not improved since the crisis, despite the success of some of new or previously marginal parties, of all ideologies, which tend to send younger representatives to parliament. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3, therefore, have to be rejected in the case of Greece. Hypothesis 2 is only partially confirmed: confirmed for some new smaller parties (MERA25, EK, Potami and Golden Dawn); not confirmed for SYRIZA, which although not exactly new, was by far the most successful non-mainstream actor during the crisis.

A general overview

Summing up, the country data show mixed findings regarding the three hypotheses we put forward. The first hypothesis, concerning the better overall representation of younger citizens, is supported in the cases of Spain and Italy. Following the economic crisis, the parliaments of these countries have become more socially diverse in terms of age, and this is often related to the entrance of new political parties in the parliamentary arena that tend to be challenger or anti-political-establishment parties like the M5S in Italy. This mostly confirming our second hypothesis (that challenger parties have driven better representation of young citizens) in the case of Spain and Italy. Neither the first nor the second hypotheses, however, are confirmed in the case of Portugal, which is the control case in the set of countries we consider, or in the case of Greece.

Finally, evidence is even more mixed regarding our third hypothesis, namely that in the wake of the crisis parliaments have closed the gap between MPs and citizens. In Spain and Italy, the age gap between MPs and citizens has not been reduced in the wake of the economic crisis. This is because the aging process of the society has counterbalanced the increase in the number of young MPs. Hypothesis 3 is not confirmed in Greece, where an age gap between MPs and citizens persists or in Portugal, where a slight reduction in age gap is not attributable to a greater representation of the youngest age groups.

Age groups in South European parliaments before and after the Great Recession: a comparative analysis

In the present section, we perform a more comparative analysis of the four countries of Southern Europe under consideration (see Table 6). First, we introduce an additional legislature for each country, the crisis legislature (i.e., Legislature 2011-2015, for Portugal and Spain, 2012-2015, for Greece, and 2013-2018, for Italy). Second, we compare age representation in mainstream parties (i.e., in national established parties that have had either government presence or influence, over the years) with parties that either appeared for the first time or had a surge in support during the period of the Great Recession, which are in some cases anti-political-establishment or challenger parties (see which parties belong to which categories, for each country, in the notes below Table 6). Third, for each country and legislature we consider four elements (for each group of parties): voters or MPs below 30 and 40 years old; voters' or MPs' average and median age. The period under consideration encompasses a legislature before the crisis (2005-2009 in Portugal, 2004-2008 in Spain, 2006-2008 in Italy, and 2004-2007 in Greece), the crisis legislatures mentioned earlier and a post-crisis legislature in each country (the legislature elected in 2019 in Portugal, Spain and Greece, and the legislature elected in 2018 in Italy).

In the case of Portugal, before the Great Recession, we consider that only the BE and the CDU (PCP-PEV) were anti-establishment or challenger parties because they never entered the governmental sphere before 2015, and they have had a small surge after or during the Great Recession. However, after 2015 BE and CDU in a governmental alliance with the socialists), and CDU continued to support the socialist budget for 2020 and 2021, although not for 2022, and the BE supported it only for 2020, and thus these two parties lost the status of anti-establishment or challenger parties since 2015 until now, and entered the group of "mainstream parties" according to our definition (i.e., national established parties that have had either government presence or influence, over the years). In the current legislature we consider only IL and Chega to be anti-establishment or challenger parties, because the third new entrant to parliament, LIVRE, is willing and has been in cooperation ad-hoc with the socialists (it even entered in several formal pre-electoral coalitions with the PS in the late 2021 local elections, namely in the capital, Lisbon). We can see that the under-representation of young voters is more evident when we consider the category below 30 years old, but also in terms of average and median age. The pattern is similar before and after the Great Recession but was somehow reversed during the crisis legislature, very likely due to lower turnout of the young people. Moreover, even when we include the more recent legislature in the analysis (2019-), as happened in the previous one (2015-2019), we see that the differences between the mainstream and the new and / or surge parties (which were also anti-establishment/challenger parties before 2015) almost vanished when we consider people with age below 30 years old. The differences only remain for people below 40 years old.

In the case of Spain, we do have anti-political-establishment parties that appeared during the context of the Great Recession (UP and Cs). They entered the political scene during the crisis legislature (2011-2015) and first gained national parliamentary representation in 2015. Therefore, it is only in the post-crisis legislature (2019-) that we clearly see that Podemos and Cs (and also Vox) have younger voters and MPs than the mainstream parties. However, by entering the

government in coalition with PSOE, we can also consider that UP in 2019 entered our category of mainstream parties according to our above-mentioned definition. A similar pattern was found in Italy. Here we consider as anti-political-establishment or challenger parties only M5S, and we can see that M5S has much younger voters and MPs than the Italian mainstream parties (on all the indicators). With the formation of a coalition government between M5S and Lega after the 2018 elections (i.e. outside the window of observation of this article), we can also consider that M5S might have become a mainstream party.

Greece is an in-between case, but perhaps much closer to the Portuguese example in terms of age representation. The political parties that appeared or experienced a surge in support in the context of the Great Recession are SYRIZA, GD, Potami, ANEL, EK and, in 2019, EL and MERA25. However, as we saw in the previous section, changes in age representation can only be seen for some of the smaller new parties, not SYRIZA, the most successful non-mainstream party of the crisis period. Thus, a stronger parliamentary presence of young people for non-mainstream parties can only be witnessed in one indicator (below 40 years old) in both the crisis and the post crisis legislature.

Conclusions

Our major focus in this research was to examine the extent to which the crisis, i.e. the Great Recession and its aftermath, has generated a renewal of the political landscape associated with the growing presence of younger people in the 'new politics'. To investigate this, we compared one pre-crisis legislature with the most recent post-crisis legislature in each of the four Southern European countries studied. Using mass surveys and the biographies of MPs in each country and in each period, we focused on the (mass level) presence and (elite level) representation of age cohorts, with a particular emphasis on the younger cohorts (aged 18-29). We expected to discover more age diversity in parliaments after the Great Recession (Hypothesis 1), particularly because of the appearance of new parties (or the post-crisis surge of former minor parties) (Hypothesis 2). We also expected that after the crisis, the average age of parliamentarians would move closer to that of the society they represent (especially the younger age group) (Hypothesis 3). These predictions were expected to hold true for those countries where there were new parties (or post-crisis surge parties) – Spain, Italy, and Greece.

In Portugal, where no such new parties emerged, all three hypotheses were rejected. The crisis did not produce major changes in electoral behaviour or the party system format. The major changes that did take place concerned coalition politics (with the parties of the left willing to govern together after 40 years of rejecting such alliances). Thus, while the young were also badly affected by the crisis in Portugal, their protest and criticism was mainly voiced through traditional party channels and there have been no major changes in age representation.

In Spain, there has been more age diversity in the national parliament since the crisis, due in large part to the emergence of new political actors like Podemos and Ciudadanos (and later Vox), consolidating the trend in Spanish politics of having parliaments that reflect the age structure of electors. Moreover, while Hypothesis 1 (in brief: *the economic crisis has helped parliaments become more socially diverse in terms of age and hence more representative of young citizens, especially in countries in which important new political parties or old parties with a significant*

change) was supported, Hypothesis 2 (in brief again: *A large part of the increased social diversity and better representation of young citizens is the result of the new political actors entering parliament, but also old parties that have had a major surge during the crisis*) was confirmed only partially, and Hypothesis 3 (in a snapshot: *In terms of age, in the wake of the economic crisis, parliaments have closed the gap between MPs and citizens*) was rejected. In particular, the age gap between voters and elected representatives has not been closed. This might seem paradoxical but, as we explained in the section of the paper exclusively dedicated to Spain, this is due the ageing of the Spanish population that contrasts with the age renovation of (with more young MPs) of the Spanish Parliament.

In Italy, the restructuring of the party system in 2013-2018 made the parliament more age-diverse than it had previously been (confirming Hypothesis 1). This change was due mainly to the electoral success of M5S, a new party in the 2013–2018 legislature and one that lowered the average age of Italian MPs and increased the number of parliamentarians under the age of 30 (supporting Hypothesis 2). However, we should note that, as in Spain, the age gap between citizens and their elected representatives has not been reduced (leading to a rejection of Hypothesis 3). The reason for this apparently paradoxical result is similar to the one just furnished for the Spanish case.

In Greece, the electoral earthquakes of 2012 that led to the collapse of the old party system and ultimately, four years later, to the rise to power of two challenger parties (one previously marginal, the other new, with the first one becoming after 2015 a mainstream, established national party according to our definition, due to the control of government 2015-2019) did not actually translate into a more diverse or representative parliament, at least not in terms of age (thus not confirming Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3). While some of the new political parties that entered parliament after the outbreak of the crisis had parliamentary groups that were significantly younger than those of the more established parties, this was not true for all challenger parties (and indeed not for SYRIZA, the most successful). In any event, their small size was not sufficient to change the overall composition of parliament (only partial confirmation of Hypothesis 2). Young people continue to be significantly under-represented. The paradox is that the parliamentary groups of the parties of the left – SYRIZA and KKE (Communist Party of Greece – Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδας) continue to have some of the highest age averages in parliament, despite support for these parties coming disproportionately from younger people. This is perhaps due to the fact that among left-wing Greek parliamentarians there are a lot of veteran politicians espousing political change and renewal in ideological terms, but not necessarily in terms of personnel.

In the comparative section of the article, we introduced a new category for young people (below 40) and compared the parties that appeared for the first time with the crisis and/or that have had a surge with the Great Recession, many of them anti-political-establishment (APE) or challenger parties, vis-à-vis the established national parties that have alternated in government (as leading parties or as support parties) over the years, and that we defined as ‘mainstream parties’, in terms of age representation. The results reinforced the previous country-by-country analysis, i.e. only in Spain (UP and Cs and later Vox) and Italy (M5S) did the new or ‘surge’ parties bring more representation of young people in parliament after the Great Recession, when compared with the mainstream parties. Thus, only in these two cases is there clear evidence to confirm H1 and H2.

As we showed in the contextual section of the article, the youth populations in each of the four countries were among those segments of the population that were most severely harmed by the politics of austerity. They were also among the section of the population that voiced more severe criticism of the crisis of political representation that had, allegedly, been made worse as a consequence of the Great Recession and the austerity policies that followed (see for example Della Porta et al 2017). It is therefore important to see whether these age groups are better represented at the parliamentary level now and by which political parties. We found this was indeed the case in Spain, Italy and to a limited extent in Greece but not in Portugal. This can be said to be a sign of a democratic renewal and of the capacity of the political systems in Southern Europe to accommodate the tensions and integrate the criticisms within the system (Fossum 2019). Finally, our findings are important because this type of analysis has not been carried out so far. What remains to be seen through future research is, first, whether there have also been increases in the diversity of other sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, education and profession, and second, if the patterns of substantive representation changed further after the crisis.

In a new book about ‘unpopular democracies’ and ‘populist waves’, Yves Mény (2020) states that one of the likely positive contributions of populist parties is the renewal of the political class. Although we are talking here about new political parties that appeared with the crisis (some are populist, others are anti-establishment or simply challenger parties), or old minor parties that had a surge with the Great Recession, our data also confirms the contribution of these changes in the European political party systems to the renewal of the political class. These changes are positive because more young people is now present in some European national parties and that contribute to both a better representation of its specific policy preferences (if any), and thus to the quality of representation and to reverse the cycle of apathy among the young cohorts. However, in terms of descriptive representation the results were a bit deceiving: although there are more young cohorts in some European domestic parliaments, that did not reduce the gap between the age profile of MPs and citizens, overall, because European are getting older and older. What remains to be seen is if this added representation of the young in some parliaments is here to stay or if the new (or surge) parties will became more similar to old established parties as time goes by.

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FIGURES

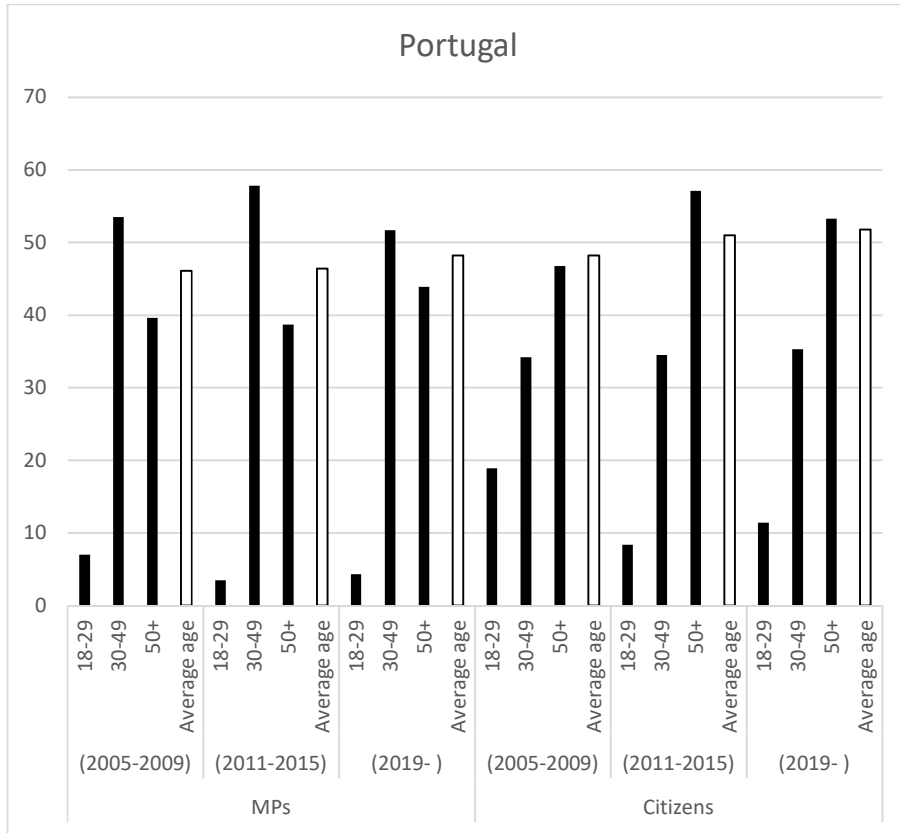


Figure 1 .Age distribution of MPs in Portugal compared to voters before, during and after the crisis.

Sources: see Table 1 for citizens; see Table 2 for MPs.

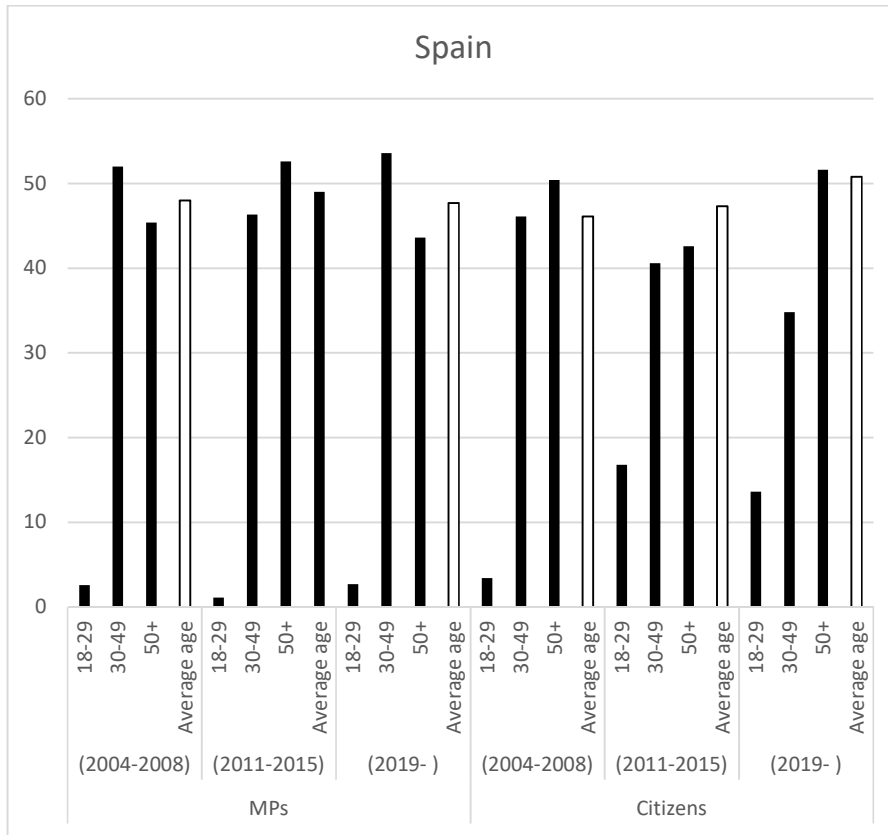


Figure 2. Distribution of citizens and MPs in Spain, in terms of age, before, during and after the crisis.

Sources: see Table 1 for citizens; see Table 3 for MPs.

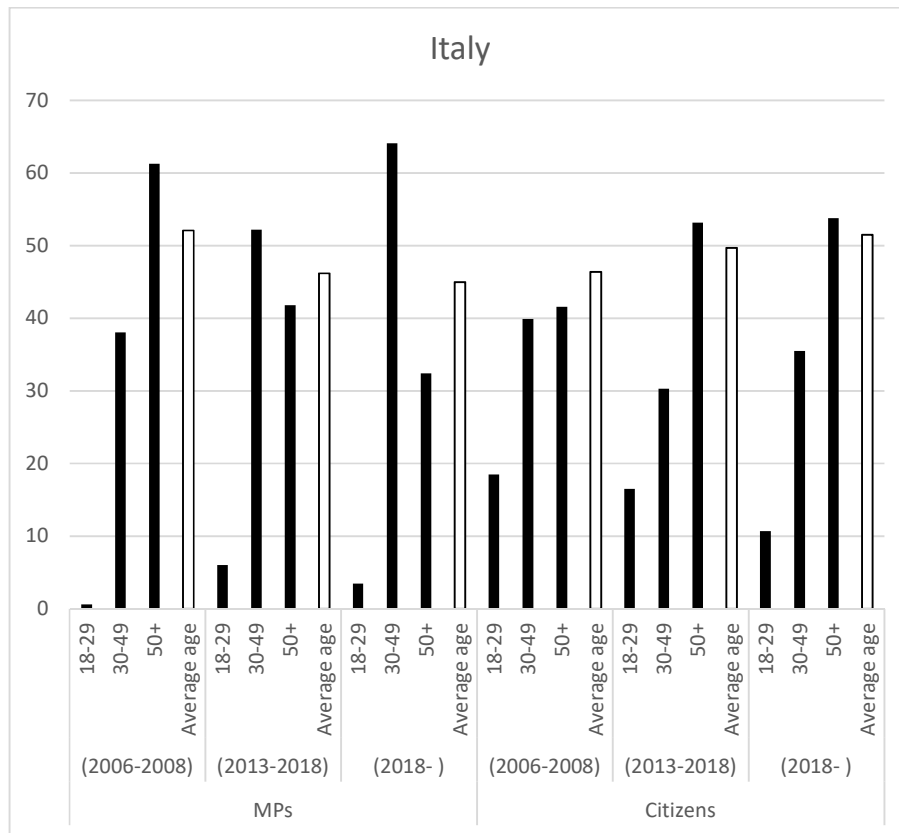


Figure 3 . Distribution of citizens and MPs in Italy, in terms of age, before, during and after the crisis.

Sources: see Table 1 for citizens; see Table 4 for MPs.

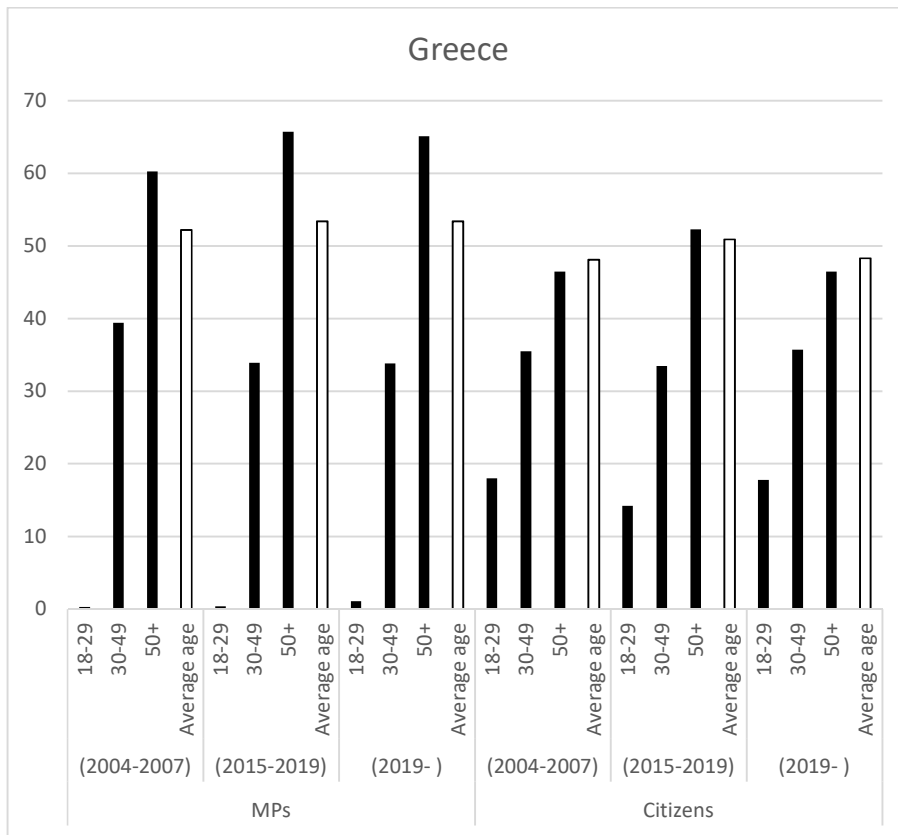


Figure 4. Distribution of citizens and MPs in Greece, in terms of age, before, during and after the crisis.

Sources: see Table 1 for citizens; see Table 5 for MPs.

TABLES

Table 1. Summary of public opinion surveys used.

PORTUGAL			
Project name	Portuguese citizens survey 2008	Portuguese citizens survey 2012	Portuguese Election Study, 2019
Legislature	2005-2009	2011-2015	2019-2022
Fieldwork	2008, post-electoral	2012, post-electoral	2019, post-electoral
N	699	562	634
SPAIN			
Project name	CIS (estudio 2559)	CIS (estudio 2920)	CIS (estudio 3269)
Legislature	2004-2008	2011-2015	2019-
Fieldwork	2004, post-electoral	2011, post-electoral	2019, post-electoral
N	5337	6082	4804
ITALY			
Project name	ITANES	ITANES	ITANES
Legislature	2006-2008	2013-2018	2018-
Fieldwork	2006, post-electoral	2013, post-electoral	2018, post-electoral
N	2560	910	1948
GREECE			
Project name	CNEP	ELNES	Prorata, S.A.
Legislature	2004-2007	2015-2019	2019-
Fieldwork	2004, post-electoral	2015, post-electoral	2019, post-electoral
N	1296	946	1005

Notes:

1st) In the case of Spain, the surveys were not the outcome of a research project but were administered by CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas);

2rd) ITANES: Italian National Election Study;

3rd) CNEP: Comparative National Election Project;

4th) ELNES: Greek National Election Study;

5th) Prorata, S.A.: Polling and political research firm in Greece

Table 2. Age distribution of parliamentarians and voters in Portugal pre- and post-crisis (%)

LEGISLATURE 2005-09 – PRE-CRISIS											
MPs by political parties											
	PS	PSD	CDU	CDS-PP	BE	Others	Total				
18-29 age group	7.4	2.7	28.6	0.0	12.5	0.0	7.0				
30-49 age group	43.0	68.0	28.6	100	50.0	0.0	53.5				
50+ age group	49.6	29.3	42.9	0.0	37.5	0.0	39.6				
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0				
Average age	47.2	46.4	42.2	37.7	44.8	0.0	46.1				
Seats	121	75	14	12	8	0	230				
Seats (%)	52.6	32.6	6.1	5.2	3.5	0.0	100				
Citizens by party vote											
	PS	PSD	CDU	CDS-PP	BE	Others	Total				
18-29 age group	18.8	19.1	10.8	17.4	31.9	48.4	18.9				
30-49 age group	32.5	32.2	39.4	58.7	56.1	16.1	34.2				
50+ age group	48.7	48.7	49.8	24.0	12.1	35.5	46.8				
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0				
Average age	48.8	49.6	49.7	39.5	35.5	40.0	48.2				
N	326	255	70	13	24	10	699				
2019- – POST-CRISIS											
MPs by political parties											
	PS	PSD	BE	CDU	CDS-PP	PAN	CH	IL	L	Others	Total
18-29 age group	2.8	3.8	10.5	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3
30-49 age group	50.9	43.0	68.4	58.3	80.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	51.7
50+ age group	46.3	53.2	21.1	25.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	43.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	49.3	49.6	42.4	43.7	46.4	37.5	36.0	58.0	37.0	0.0	48.2
Seats	108	79	19	12	5	4	1	1	1	0	230
Seats (%)	47.0	34.3	8.3	5.2	2.2	1.7	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.0	100
Citizens by party vote											
	PS	PSD	BE	CDU	CDS-PP	PAN	CH	IL	L	Others	Total
18-29 age group	12.1	7.3	22.4	5.0	4.0	37.3	0.0	0.0	15.9	0.0	11.4
30-49 age group	31.3	45.0	38.7	34.8	7.0	17.5	52.6	26.2	43.0	46.7	35.3
50+ age group	56.6	47.8	38.9	60.2	89.0	45.2	47.4	73.8	41.1	53.3	53.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	52.8	51.1	45.7	55.6	64.0	46.2	45.0	53.6	42.4	49.9	51.8
N	251	192	66	44	29	23	9	9	8	5	634

Sources: Authors' elaboration from the following: For MPs 2005-2009: Freire (2009) and for MPs, 2019- : Freire & Queiroga (2021). For citizens, 2005-2009: Freire & Viegas (2008); for citizens, 2019- : Lobo et al (2020).

Notes:

- (1) N refers to the effective number of cases for which information on the variable "age" is complete.
- (2) Party acronyms of the parties explicitly mentioned in the Table (but sometimes not referred to in the text):
CH (*Chega* – Enough, radical or extreme right), IL (*Iniciativa Liberal* – Liberal Initiative), L (*Livre* – Free).
- (3) Party Acronyms for the "Others" category:

The “others” category for Legislature 2005-2009 includes PCTP/MRTP (*Partido Comunista dos Trabalhadores Portugueses/Movimento Revolucionário do Proletariado* – Communist Party of Portuguese Worker/Revolutionary Movement of the Proletariat), PND (*Partido da Nova Democracia* – Party of New Democracy) P.H. (*Partido Humanista- Humanist Party*), PNR (*Partido Nacional Revolucionário* – Revolutionary National Party), POUS (*Partido Operário de Unidade Socialista* – Workers Party for Socialist Unity), PDA (*Partido Democrático do Atlântico* – Atlantic Democratic Party). The “others” category for the Legislature 2019-2022 includes also *Aliança* (Alliance).

Table 3. Age distribution of parliamentarians and voters in Spain pre- and post-crisis (%)

LEGISLATURE 2004-08 – PRE-CRISIS										
MPs by Political parties										
Age groups:	PSOE	PP	CIU	ERC	PNV	IU	Others	TOT		
18-29	4.3	0.7	0	12.5	0	0	0	2.6		
30-49	50	53.7	40	62.5	57.1	80	44.4	52		
50+	45.7	45.6	60	25	42.9	20	56.6	45.4		
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
Average age	47.0	49.0	48.0	41.0	49.0	42.0	53.0	48.0		
Seats	164	147	10	8	7	5	9	350		
Seats (%)	47	42	3	2	2	1	3	100		
Citizens by party vote										
Age groups:	PSOE	PP	CIU	ERC	PNV	IU	Others	TOT		
18-29	4.6	2.2	0.0	3.3	0.0	3.9	3.8	3.4		
30-49	48.8	38.1	34.3	63.3	45.1	72.7	51.9	46.1		
50+	46.7	59.7	65.7	33.4	54.9	23.4	44.2	50.4		
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
Average age	44.9	50.3	54.1	36.9	52.8	34.5	39.9	46.1		
N	1601	1062	99	60	51	154	52	3079		
LEGISLATURE 2019- – POST-CRISIS										
MPs by Political parties										
Age groups:	PSOE	PP	VOX	UPs	ERC	Cs	JxC	PNV	Others	TOT
18-29	3.3	3.4	2	2.9	7.7	0	0	0	0	2.7
30-49	57.5	48.9	49	65.7	46.2	80	62.5	16.7	46.2	53.6
50+	39.2	47.7	49	31.1	46.2	20	37.5	83.3	53,8	43.6
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	47.4	48.6	49	43.7	45.5	44.4	45.5	55	49.8	47.7
Seats	120	89	52	35	13	10	8	6	26	350
Seats (%)	34	25	15	10	4	3	2	2	7	100
Citizens by party vote										
Age groups:	PSOE	PP	VOX	UPs	ERC	Cs	JxC	PNV	Others	TOT
18-29	9.4	8.4	22	21.5	15.3	17	7.8	0	16.7	13.1
30-49	28.1	26.9	41.9	45.4	40.9	47.7	25.0	26.3	48.7	35.2
50+	62.5	64.7	36.1	33.1	43.8	35.3	67.2	73.7	34.7	51.7
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	54.6	56.6	43.9	43.0	48.3	44.3	58.3	60.5	44.7	50.9
N	1089	1196	34.1	936	137	518	64	57	150	3373

Sources:

Data for MPs: © Bapolcon. Data for citizens: CIS post-electoral studies (www.cis.es) carried out in 2004 (ES2559, March) and 2019 (ES3269, December).; 3)

Notes:

- 1) N refers to the effective number of cases for which information on the variable “age” is complete;
- 2) Party acronyms of the parties explicitly mentioned in the Table (but sometimes not referred to in the text)

PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español- Spanish Socialist Workers Party), PP (Partido Popular-Popular Party), IU (Izquierda Unidad, United Left), CiU (Convergència i Unió-Convergence and Union), ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya-Republican Left of Catalonia), PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco-Basque Nationalist Party), Vox (Vox), UP (Unidas Podemos-United We Can), Cs (Ciudadanos-Citizens), JxC (Junts per Catalunya-United for Catalonia).

- 3) Party Acronyms for the “Others” category:

For Legislature 2004-2008 includes CC (Coalición Canaria-Canary Coalition), BNG (Bloque Nacionalista Galego-Galician Nationalist Bloc), CHA (Chunta Aragonesista-Aragones Union), EA (Eusko Alkartasuna-Basque Solidarity), UPN (Unión del Pueblo Navarro-Navarrese People’s Union) and GBai (Geroa Bai-Yes to

the Future). The “Others” category for Legislature 2019- includes Compromís (Commitment), CUP (Candidatura Unitària Popular- Popular Unity Candidacy), BNG, UPN, Bildu (Gather), CC, FA (Foro Asturias- Asturias Forum) +País (Más País-More Country), PRC (Partido Regionalista de Cantabria-Regionalist Party of Cantabria), TE (Teruel Existe-Teruel Exists) and NC (Nueva Canaria—New Canaries).

Table 4. Age distribution of parliamentarians and voters in Italy pre- and post-crisis (%)

LEGISLATURE 2006-08 – PRE-CRISIS									
MPs by Political parties									
Age groups:	ULIVO	FI	AN	PRC	UDC	LN	IDV	Others	TOT
18-29	0.5	0.0	2.8	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6
30-49	33.5	37.3	43.1	46.3	30.8	79.2	25.0	37.8	38.1
50+	66.1	62.7	54.2	53.7	66.7	20.8	75.0	62.2	61.3
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	52.8	53.1	51.5	49.6	53.0	41.7	57.3	52.0	52.1
Seats	218	134	72	41	39	24	20	82	630
Seats (%)	34.6	21.3	11.4	6.5	6.2	3.8	3.2	13.0	100
Citizens by party vote									
Age groups:	ULIVO	FI	AN	PRC	UDC	LN	IDV	Others	TOT
18-29	17.0	16.8	22.1	25.9	14.6	16.3	11.8	21.4	18.5
30-49	38.8	35.8	48.3	40.5	40.5	43.0	47.1	39.7	39.9
50+	44.2	47.4	29.7	33.6	44.9	40.7	41.2	38.8	41.6
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	47.3	47.9	43.5	43.5	47.9	45.8	48.0	44.6	46.4
N	979	542	317	220	158	86	34	224	2560
LEGISLATURE 2018- – POST-CRISIS									
MPs by Political parties									
Age groups:	M5S	LEGA	PD	FI	FDI	LEU	Others	TOT	
18-29	7.5	2.4	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	
30-49	79.7	72.0	49.1	39.4	62.5	64.3	50.0	64.1	
50+	12.8	25.6	50.9	58.7	37.5	35.7	50.0	32.4	
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Average age	39.0	44.0	49.9	51.5	48.2	48.8	53.3	45.0	
Seats	227	125	112	104	32	14	16	630	
Seats (%)	36.0	19.8	17.8	16.5	5.1	2.2	2.6	100	
Citizens by party vote									
Age groups:	M5S	LEGA	PD	FI	FDI	LEU	Others	TOT	
18-29	12.1	10.8	9.1	2.7	8.2	13.4	16.7	10.7	
30-49	42.9	36.9	27.1	28.1	37.7	30.6	34.9	35.5	
50+	45.0	52.3	63.8	69.2	54.1	56.0	48.4	53.8	
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Average age	48.5	50.2	55.5	58.0	52.2	50.9	49.1	51.5	
N	678	306	450	146	85	157	126	1948	

Sources:

CIRCAP database for MPs elected in 2006. Data retrieved from <https://www.circap.org/political-elites.html>. Italian Candidate Survey (Pedrazzani, Segatti & Pinto 2018) for MPs elected in 2018. Itanes (2006; 2018) for citizens.

Notes:

1)

N refers to the effective number of cases for which information on the variable “age” is complete;

2)

The “others” category for Legislature 2006-2008 includes PDCI (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani – Party of the Italian Communists), DC-PS (Democrazia Cristiana-Partito Socialista – Christian Democracy – Socialist Party), RNP (Rosa nel Pugno – Rose in the Fist), UDEUR (Unione Democratici per l’Europa – Union of Democrats for Europe), Verdi (Greens) and linguistic minorities. The “others” category for Legislature 2018- includes +Europa (More Europe), Civica Popolare Lorenzin, Noi con l’Italia-UDC (Us with Italy-Centrist Union), MAIE (Movimento Associativo Italiani all’Estero – Associative Movement Italians Abroad) and linguistic minorities. Party acronyms: PRC (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista – Communist Refoundation Party), ULIVO (L’Ulivo – The Olive Tree), IDV (Italia dei valori – Italy of Values), FI (Forza Italia – Forward Italy), UDC (Unione di Centro – Centrist Union), AN (Alleanza Nazionale – National Alliance), LN (Lega Nord – Northern League), LEU (Liberi e Uguali – Free and Equal), PD (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party), M5S (Movimento 5 Stelle – Five Star Movement), LEGA (Lega – League), FDI (Fratelli d’Italia – Brothers of Italy).

Table 5. Age distribution of parliamentarians and voters in Greece pre- and post-crisis (%)

LEGISLATURE 2004-07 – PRE-CRISIS								
MPs by Political parties								
Age groups:	PASOK	ND	KKE	SYRIZA	Others	TOT		
18-29	0.00	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3		
30-49	41.3	41.1	15.4	0.0	0.0	39.4		
50+	58.7	58.2	84.6	100	0.0	60.3		
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
Average age	51.8	51.9	58.3	58.8	0.0	52.2		
Seats	117	165	12	6	0	300		
Seats (%)	39.0	55.0	4.0	2.0	0.0	100		
Citizens by party vote								
Age groups:	PASOK	ND	KKE	SYRIZA	Others	TOT		
18-29	17.3	17.8	22.6	9.5	26.4	18.0		
30-49	34.7	32.8	38.7	59.5	49.1	35.5		
50+	48.0	49.4	37.7	31.0	24.5	46.5		
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
Average age	48.8	48.7	44.3	45.2	41.5	48.1		
N	447	581	64	42	54	1273		
LEGISLATURE 2019- – POST-CRISIS								
MPs by Political parties								
Age groups:	ND	SYRIZA	KINAL	KKE	EL	MERA25	Others	TOT
18-29	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.2	0.0	1.1
30-49	36.4	35.0	26.3	23.0	12.5	33.3	0.0	33.8
50+	62.7	65.0	73.7	77.0	87.5	44.5	0.0	65.1
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	52.3	55.0	55.4	56.8	58.3	45.2	0.0	53.4
Seats	158	86	22	15	10	9	0	300
Seats (%)	52.7	28.7	7.3	5.0	3.3	3.0	0.0	100
Citizens by party vote								
Age groups:	ND	SYRIZA	KINAL	KKE	EL	MERA25	Others	TOT
18-29	10.2	14.8	7.5	23.1	17.6	29.0	13.3	17.8
30-49	38.5	40.5	37.5	69.2	47.1	51.6	50.0	35.7
50+	51.3	44.7	55.0	7.7	35.3	19.4	36.7	46.5
Tot.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average age	50.4	47.2	52.5	36.7	42.2	36.8	46.3	48.3
N	315	261	63	40	25	38	69	1005

Sources:

Socioscope database for MP data for both legislatures. Citizen data for Legislature XI taken from CNEP 2004 post-electoral survey and for Legislature XVIII from Prorata 2019 post-electoral survey (Kolokythas, Seriatios & Tsatsanis 2020).

Note:

1)

N refers to the effective number of cases for which information on the variable “age” is complete;

2)

The “others” category for Legislature 2004-2007 includes DIKKI (Δημοκρατικό Κοινωνικό Κίνημα- Democratic Social Movement) and LAOS (Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός-Orthodox Popular Rally). The “others” category for Legislature 2019- includes GD (Χρυσή Αυγή-Golden Dawn), EK (Ένωση Κεντρώων- Union of Centrists), PE (Πλεύση Ελευθερίας-Course of Freedom), DX (Δημιουργία Ξανά-Recreate Greece), ANTARSYA (Αντικαπιταλιστική Αριστερή Συνεργασία για την Ανατροπή- Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left), EPAM (Ενιαίο Παλλαϊκό Μέτωπο-United Popular Front), LAE (Λαϊκή Ενότητα-Popular Unity).

Table 6. Young parliamentarians (i.e., below 30 and below 40 years old) in Southern Europe before, during and after the crisis, among parties that either had a parliamentary breakthrough or else enjoyed an electoral surge during the crisis (New or Surge Parties)

	Age < 30	Age < 40	Avg. age	Med. Age	Age < 30	Age < 40	Avg. age	Med. age	Age < 30	Age < 40	Avg. age	Med. age
Portugal	Legislature, 2005-2009 (pre-crisis)				Legislature, 2011-2015 (crisis)				Legislature, 2019- (post-crisis)			
Established /older parties	7%	21%	46	47	3%	26%	46	46	4%	21%	48	48
New or Surge Parties	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	Legislature, 2004-2008 (pre-crisis)				Legislature, 2011-2015 (crisis)				Legislature, 2019- (post-crisis)			
Established /older parties	3%	18%	47	48	1%	18%	49	50	3%	17%	48	49
New or Surge Parties	-	-	-	-	0%	0%	49	47	2%	28%	47	47
Italy	Legislature, 2006-2008 (pre- crisis)				Legislature, 2013-2018 (crisis)				Legislature, 2018- (post-crisis)			
Established /older parties	1%	10%	52	52	3%	21%	49	50	1%	20%	48	48
New or Surge Parties	-	-	-	-	22%	93%	34	34	7%	67%	39	37
Greece	Legislature, 2004-2007 (pre-crisis)				Legislature, 2012-2015 (crisis)				Legislature, 2019- (post-crisis)			
Established /older parties	0%	0%	63	63	0%	6%	54	55	0%	11%	54	54
New or Surge Parties	-	-	-	-	0%	14%	55	56	11%	22%	51	55

Sources: see Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Notes: For every legislature of each country, cells indicate the % of MPs below 30 years old, the % of MPs below 40 years old, the average age and the median age.

Portugal: Established national parties with cabinet presence or influence, over the years: BE, CDU, CH (2019-), IL (2019-), PAN (2019-), L (2019-), CDS-PP, PS and PSD. New or Surge Parties: none were considered, as the only two new parties in parliament, CH and IL, were micro parties, with one MP each (along with L, which existed since 2014), which makes them statistically irrelevant.

Spain: Established national Parties with cabinet presence or influence, over the years: PSOE, PP, IU, ERC, PNV-EA, PDCAT (CiU), CC. Other regional parties without consistent representation have been also considered established parties according to our definition (BNG, Cha, NaBai, FAC, Compromís, GBai, Bildu). New or Surge Parties: UP, Cs. For the 2011 election UPyD has been considered a new challenger party. The author responsible for the case of Spain thanks Pablo Domínguez Benavente for his help on preparing data for this table.

Italy: Established national parties with cabinet presence or influence: PRC, ULIVO, IDV, FI, UDC, AN, LN, SEL, PD, SC, FDI, PDL, LEU. New or Surge Parties: M5S.

Greece: Established/older parties: KKE, PASOK/DISY*, ND, Syriza (2004-2007, 2019-). New or Surge Parties: SYRIZA (2012-2015), GD, ANEL, DIMAR, EL, MERA25.

¹ A number of recent studies focus on gaps in parliamentary representation regarding age (and gender), paying primary attention to the impact of electoral systems and quota regulations. See for example Joshi (2015), Stockemer and Sundström (2020), and Belschner (2021).

² However, empirical studies have shown that the effect of unemployment on turnout can also have a mobilising effect, which counteracts the withdrawal effect (Burden & Wichowsky 2014).

³ As for Spain and Italy, for simplicity we use only data on members of the lower chamber and do not consider senators.

⁴ The age of MPs refers to the MPs originally elected at the time of the elections.

⁵ For the rise of Vox see Rama et al. (2021). For Podemos see Urquizu (2016) and Cordero & Christmann (2018).

⁶ CiU was a Catalan nationalist coalition of parties that disappeared after some corruption scandals disappeared. Former members and leaders then created the pro-Catalan independence PDeCAT (Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català – Catalan European Democratic Party), which turned later into JxC (Junts Per Catalunya – Together for Catalonia).

⁷ A full-time occupation in parties and trade unions or a professional career as a lawyer, journalist, teacher or doctor represent a typical background for Italian legislators (Verzichelli 2010).

⁸ The exceptional instability of the Italian political system has to be considered when comparing the sociodemographic profile of Italian voters and MPs before and after the Great Recession.

⁹ L'Ulivo was the name given to a succession of centre-left political and electoral alliances between 1995 and 2007. L'Ulivo can be considered as the forerunner of the present-day PD (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party).

¹⁰ A perfect correspondence in terms of age between voters and MPs would be impossible to achieve in any case, as candidates for the Italian Chamber are required to be at least 25 years old.

¹¹ In 2013, no MP from the M5S was over the age of 40, because the M5S party rules for primary elections only allowed people over the age of 40 to run for Senate.

¹² Let us add that M5S' parliamentary candidates were probably recruited outside the 'pool' from which Italian mainstream parties usually select their candidates.