The Impact of Social Movements on Political Parties

Examining whether anti-austerity social movements have had an impact on social democratic political parties in Ireland and Spain, 2011-2016

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Abstract

Research on social movements has traditionally addressed issues of movement emergence and mobilisation, paying little attention to their outcomes and consequences. Moreover, despite research on the political consequences of social movements accelerating in recent years, much has been left under researched, no more so than the impact social movements have on one of the most important actors in liberal democracies: political parties. This paper extends social movement research by examining whether social movements have an impact on political parties and under what conditions impact is more likely to take place. The empirical analysis, investigating whether anti-austerity social movements have had an impact on social democratic parties in Ireland and Spain during the years 2011 to 2016, suggests that the relationship between social movements and political parties is both under-theorised and under-researched, and mistakenly so. The paper finds that while parties are more likely to be influenced by social movements when certain conditions are present, social movements can also have unintended impacts on parties. Ultimately, this paper encourages research on political parties, and particularly research on party change, to pay greater attention to social movements and for social movement research to pay greater attention to political parties.

Key words: social movements, social democratic parties, party change, political opportunity structure, Ireland, Spain, Right2Water, Movimiento 15-M, Labour Party, PSOE, austerity
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 4
   1.1 Aim of the paper and research question ................................................................. 5
   1.2 Paper outline ........................................................................................................... 6

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework ......................................................... 7
   2.1 Key concepts ........................................................................................................... 7
   2.2 Previous research on explaining party change ......................................................... 7
   2.3 Social movement and political party interaction – why the lack of research? ........... 9
   2.4 Why should we expect social movements to impact political parties? ..................... 10
      2.4.1 The decline and vulnerability of parties ............................................................... 12
      2.4.2 Social democratic parties in crisis? .................................................................... 13
   2.5 Measuring social movement impact ......................................................................... 14
   2.6 Hypothesis ............................................................................................................. 15

3. Methodology ................................................................................................................. 17
   3.1 Cross-country comparison ....................................................................................... 17
   3.2 Operationalisation and research limitations ............................................................ 23

4. Case studies analysis .................................................................................................. 25
   4.1 Anti-austerity social movements and the European crisis ......................................... 25
   4.2 PSOE and Movimiento 15-M ................................................................................... 26
      4.2.1 Background to Movimiento 15-M ....................................................................... 26
      4.2.2 Impact on PSOE discourse ............................................................................... 29
      4.2.3 Impact on PSOE policy ..................................................................................... 33
   4.3 Right2Water and the Labour Party .......................................................................... 36
      4.3.1 Background to Right2Water ............................................................................. 36
      4.3.2 Impact on Labour Party discourse .................................................................. 39
      4.3.3 Impact on Labour Party policy ........................................................................ 44
   4.4 Analysis ................................................................................................................... 47

5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 52

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 54

Appendix A ....................................................................................................................... 67

Appendix B ....................................................................................................................... 68
Chapter 1: Introduction

The global financial crisis of 2008 and the Eurozone economic crisis that followed prompted a wave of calls for a move away from free-market and neo-liberal economics and a return to the state playing a regulating and stabilising role in macro-economic affairs. Many leading economists, such as Krugman, Stiglitz, and Posner, as well as politicians on both the centre-left and centre-right, including Obama and Sarkozy, called for states to adapt Keynesian policies and implement fiscal stimuli (Giles, Atkins and Guha, 2008). With Keynesian economic ideas enjoying such a resurgence, many predicted that European social democratic parties, traditionally pro-public spending and pro-regulation, would thrive (Collignon, 2009). However, this anticipated swing, from neo-liberalism to social democracy, never occurred.

Notwithstanding a brief period following the 2008 economic crisis when most advanced industrial democracies increased public spending, the subsequent policy consensus in Europe has been one of overwhelmingly austerity, both as a means to return to growth and to balance public finances (Farrell and Quiggin, 2012). Despite the predictions, the economic crisis did not lead to a revival for European social democratic parties; conversely it led to the birth of new leftist social movements across Europe (Ancelovici, 2015). People mobilised and groups organised under the banner of anti-austerity and after decades swaying off challenges from the right, social democratic parties faced yet another challenge, this time from the left.

The current predicament social democratic parties find themselves in is well documented: globalisation, neo-liberal hegemony, and individualisation, as well as their weakness in responding to the latest economic crisis, are all factors that have contributed to social democratic parties losing both power and support across Europe in recent decades (see, Mair, 2013; Albo, 2013; Bailey, 2009). But while much has been written about the aforementioned challenges, little has been written about the new challenges facing centre-left parties, particularly the rise of anti-austerity social movements and how social democratic parties have responded. Have social democratic parties incorporated some of the demands of anti-austerity movements into their speeches, policies, and manifestos? Have they sought to challenge the rhetoric and objectives of the movements? Or has it been the case that anti-austerity social movements have simply had no tangible impact on social democratic parties?

1 Those calling for fiscal stimuli were influenced by J.M. Keynes who in the 1930s encouraged states to implement fiscal stimulus packages and expansionary monetary policies (Reddy, 2009; Leijonhufvud, 2009)
2 Launching France’s fiscal stimulus in late 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy of the centre-right UMP party said, ‘our answer to this crisis is investment because it is the best way to support growth and save the jobs of today, and the only way to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow’ (BBC, 2008)
1.1 Aim of the paper and research question

While social movements can have far-ranging effects on politics and society, they can also have far smaller observable impacts (Gamson, 1990; Giugni, 1998). Despite the vast amount of literature on social movements, much has been left under researched, no more so than the impact movements have on one of the most important actors in liberal democracy: political parties. Although social movements see themselves as radically distinct from parties (the very reason a social movement exists more often than not is because the party system is unable to channel or deliver their demands), it is still necessary for movements to interact with parties as in order to gain access to the institutional environment, parties are the ‘first and fundamental barrier that social movements demands have to overcome’ (Piccio, 2016: 264).

The purpose of this paper at a broad, general level therefore is to investigate whether social movements impact political parties and if this is the case, to explore under which conditions impact is more likely to take place. At a more specific level, the paper will study whether anti-austerity social movements have had any impact on social democratic parties during the Eurozone crisis in the years 2011 to 2016.3 Investigating the interaction between anti-austerity social movements and social democratic parties should make for an interesting and compelling study – not least because such a study has not been carried out before.

This paper aims to answer two research questions. First, what impact, if any, have anti-austerity social movements had on social democratic political parties? Second, what specific conditions or factors lead to social movements having an impact on political parties? In order to answer these two research questions, a qualitative cross-country comparison will take place, using two European countries with large anti-austerity social movements as case studies. Both the impact (if any) Movimiento 15-M (15-M) has had on PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) in Spain and the impact (if any) the Right2Water movement has had on the Labour Party in Ireland will be investigated. By selectively focusing on two cases, this paper will explore the validity of four core conditions explaining social movement-party interactions according to previous research: (i) whether the party is in opposition; (ii) party electoral vulnerability; (iii) ideological coherence between the social movement and party; and (iv) public opinion. As the 15-M-PSOE case meets more of these four conditions than the Right2Water-Labour case, the former will be taken as the paper’s most-likely case with the latter taken as the paper’s least-likely case. The four conditions will be tested using political

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3 As this paper was completed in early 2016, practically all of the empirical study is focused on the years 2011 to 2015. However, some documents that were analysed in the study (namely the Labour Party’s 2016 election manifesto) were published in 2016, hence the time period in question ranging from 2011 to 2016.
opportunity structure theory with impact measured based on an in-depth analysis of party discourse (party speeches and statements) and party policy (policies included in their election manifestos and/or policies implemented by the party if in government) in the years preceding and following the highest peak of mobilisation of the anti-austerity social movements in the two countries.

In total, this paper aims to make three contributions to the social movement and political party research fields: encourage research on political parties, and particularly research on party change, to pay greater attention to social movements and for social movement research to pay greater attention to political parties; reveal, via an empirical investigation of two cases, whether social movements impact parties and under which conditions such impact is more likely to take place; test the practicality and efficacy of political opportunity structure theory.

1.2 Paper outline

The following chapter, chapter 2, is the paper’s theoretical section. It provides definitions of the two key concepts of the thesis and proceeds by reviewing the three bodies of literature most relevant to this study: the party change, the social movement-political party interaction, and the party decline literatures. The chapter continues by introducing social movement impact theory and outlines the paper’s hypothesis. Chapter 3 explains how the country-comparison study will be conducted and the paper’s research limitations. Chapter 4 consists of the main analytical part of the thesis: the cross-country comparison. There will first be a brief overview of European anti-austerity social movements before moving on to providing background on the two case studies, Ireland and Spain. The impact 15-M has had on PSOE in Spain and Right2Water has had on the Labour Party in Ireland will then be investigated, followed by an analysis of the two cases. The final chapter of the thesis, chapter 5, will consist of some concluding remarks.
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Key concepts

The first issue to be addressed is perhaps the slightly monotonous but essential task of defining social movements and social democratic parties. This paper uses Tilly’s definition, namely that a social movement is an ‘actor or organisation that seeks to challenge power holders over a sustained period of time in the name of their fellow citizens by means of repeated public displays of that population’s worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment’ (Tilly, 1999: 258). Despite viewing social movements primarily as ‘challengers’, this paper will take into account all the political collective action of social movements, and therefore not only the traditional ‘extra-institutional’ actions such as protest marches, mobilisations, and civil disobedience but also lobbying, press conferences, assemblies etc. By including these more unconventional forms of social movements’ action, this paper agrees with Goldstone that that there is only a ‘fuzzy and permeable boundary between institutionalised and non-institutionalised politics’ and that social movements have become increasingly part of the ‘normalised political environment’ (2003: 2).

Social democratic parties are defined as parties that are commonly aligned to the ideas of social democracy with this paper differentiating between ‘traditional and ‘new’ forms of social democracy. Traditional social democracy is viewed as an ideological commitment to pursue a gradual reform programme which includes Keynesian demand management of a full-employment economy and the redistribution of resources towards the working-class (Bailey, 2009: 594). On the other hand, new social democracy is understood as the need for countries to achieve balanced budgets, a focus upon low inflation in macro-economic policy, a reduction in the level of dis-incentivising income transfers, and the limiting of economic intervention to the supply-side of the economy (Bailey, 2009: 594). This distinction is important as the focus of this paper is on social democratic parties in the years 2011 to 2016, a period when all European social democratic parties had long made the transition from traditional to new social democracy.

2.2 Previous research on explaining party change

As mentioned in the introductory section, the goal of this paper is to examine whether social movements impact political parties and if so, in what ways impact is manifested and under what conditions. It is therefore necessary to begin with a review of the party change literature in order to explore what causes parties to change discourse and policies in the first place.
Since Budge’s seminal study on party change in 1994, the literature has developed four key explanations on what factors impact parties: poor election results (Budge 1994; Somer-Topcu 2009); changes in economic conditions such as globalisation patterns and unemployment (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Haupt 2010); shifts in mean voters’ opinion for mainstream parties (Adams et al. 2004); and shifts in party voters’ opinion for niche, smaller parties (Schumacher, de Vries and Vis, 2013). These four dominant explanations are by no means a comprehensive list and in order to evaluate the party change literature in greater detail, Fagerholm (2015) carried out an overview of the 18 most prominent empirical studies that studied party change of the past 20 years, with the results listed in Table 1.

### Table 1: Political parties changing their policy positions – a summary of the evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Existing evidence (Minimal–Extensive)</th>
<th>Level of support (Low–High)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in party leadership</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of dominant faction</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties in government</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral performance</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties in opposition</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent, considerable, electoral loss</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-party structure</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous shifts by rival parties</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global economic change</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td>Extensive</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all factors that could potentially lead to party change, the most thoroughly examined has been the expectation that changes in public opinion cause parties to change position. Fagerholm found extensive evidence indicating that mainstream parties change their policy positions when public opinion moves away from their party’s ideology or preferred policy while smaller, activist-dominated parties tend to follow the opinion of their own supporters to a greater extent (2015: 5-6). Adams et al. label this the ‘dynamics of disadvantaged parties’ – parties respond to shifts in public opinion only in situations where opinion shifts in a direction that is clearly disadvantageous to the party, e.g. leftist parties moderating their
positions when public opinion shifts to the right (2004: 590). Perhaps surprisingly, empirical research has not been able to confirm that a change in party leadership leads to party change. Researchers in the party change literature concede that the variables included in their studies are by no means an exhaustive list. For instance, Adams et al. mention several other factors that could potentially lead to party change such as the electoral system, party system, and the role of party activists (2004: 608-609). However, what is omitted by Adams et al., and is also notably absent throughout the party change literature, is any mention of the role social movements, non-party activist groups, or mass mobilisations might play in causing parties to change position. Why is this the case? Do social movements simply have no impact on parties or is it rather that the impact movements have on parties is erroneously overlooked? This paper sets out to answer these two questions in the hope of revealing whether the omission of social movements in the party change field is justified.

2.3 Social movement and political party interaction – why the lack of research?

It is remarkable to consider that while one cannot even attempt to begin understanding the development of the dominant 20th century European socialist, liberal, and confessional parties without reference to social movements, that there has been so little research on the interaction between social movements and political parties (Piccio, 2016: 265). In recent decades, greater scholarly attention has been paid to political outcomes in the social movement field combined with a growing number of calls to theoretically and empirically connect the ‘institutional’ and ‘non-institutional’ fields of politics (McAdam et al., 2001; Goldstone 2003). Yet, both the social movement and party change literatures continue to overlook the interaction between parties and movements. The social movement field is filled with attempts to explain social movements, how they emerge, what factors are important to their development etc., but little about their impacts and even less about their interaction with parties.

One might place (some of) the blame for this lack of research on Tilly’s hugely influential polity model, which separated social movement politics (i.e. non-institutional politics) from institutionalised politics by distinguishing between movements as ‘outsiders’ seeking access to the institutionalised realm of politics and ‘polity members’ who already have such access (Tilly, 1999). This led to the interaction between parties and movements to go overlooked as scholars tended to focus on the more unconventional forms of movements’ action. Even researchers who use the political opportunity structure theory, that focuses on external factors

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4 This is despite a change in leader often being considered as a key factor that leads to party change – no more so than in the wake of Jeremy Corbyn’s election as leader of the British Labour Party in 2015 (Castle, 2015)
in the political arena where parties are located, have been more interested in observing the movements’ broader political outcomes, and have thus largely ignored the specific channels of interaction between social movements and parties (Tarrow, 1995; Kriesi et al., 1995).

A second reason explaining the lack of research on movement-party interaction is because most social movements view political parties as hierarchical organisations that are self-insulated and inattentive to social change. Movements are therefore not typically interested in influencing parties as they seek to impact society at a broader level (Piccio, 2016: 263). Social movement scholars have thus assumed that this lack of interest on the part of social movements means that movements won’t impact parties – not taking into account that movements can perhaps have indirect or unintended effects on parties.

The lack of research on social movement-party interaction is quite startling when you take into account that several studies have shown that social movements have caused major parties to shift their positions, as was the case with the women’s movement in the US in the 1960s (Cowell-Meyers, 2014: 62). Rucht remarks that seeking allies is critical for a movement’s success and that challenging an opponent while simultaneously appealing to potential allies are essential tasks for social movements (2004: 197). In other words, even if a social movement is not interested in influencing a party, whether social movements manage to have an impact on political parties and the degree to which impact takes place is crucial for the broader political goals of social movements (Piccio, 2016: 264).

What is clear from the social movement-political party interaction literature is that as social movements exist in the political arena, and seek to bring about some sort of political change, they will naturally come into contact with political parties. It’s also evident that social movements possess the potential to have some sort of impact on political parties as they will often go about challenging parties and seeking allies, two actions which can have implications for parties. However most researchers in both the party change and social movement literatures have dismissed the role social movements have on parties to such an extent that movements are routinely ignored when it comes to examining what impacts parties. The following section will outline why researchers shouldn’t disregard social movements as readily as they have.

2.4 Why should we expect social movements to impact parties?

As we have seen, the party change literature has largely ignored the role – and one could even say the existence – of social movements. The question at this stage of the paper is therefore, why should we expect social movements to have an impact on parties? Despite the
relationship between social movements and political parties remaining largely under-researched, there is reason to suggest that social movements can impact parties.

Kriesi argues that there is a likelihood of a movement influencing a political party for both opportunistic reasons – parties and politicians seizing the opportunity created by challengers to proclaim themselves tribunes of the people – and for more substantive or ideological reasons – the cause of the social movement is similar to a party’s ideology or objective (Kriesi, forthcoming: 5). These two explanations tie in with Lisi’s assertion that political parties have acted as mobilising actors for social movements in the past in order to assist them in getting their demands across (2013: 23). Two key factors for Kriesi are whether the party is a mainstream or peripheral party and whether they are in government or opposition, commenting that there is a greater chance a movement will influence a peripheral party and/or one that is in opposition (Kriesi, forthcoming: 5-6). Kriesi et al., add that we should expect to see parties in opposition profiting from any criticism social movements direct at the government, especially as such challenges will weaken their opponents in the next elections (1995: 59). Furthermore, as opposition parties are less constrained by domestic and international factors (eg. the EU), they theoretically should have greater freedom to channel the demands of social movements in order to try and garner some of the movements’ participants support (Kriesi et al., 1995: 59; Mair, 2013).

Piccio on the other hand believes it’s inevitable that a party will come to interact with a party, and therefore have the opportunity to influence it in some shape or form, as due to parties’ centrality, they are a fundamental juncture in the chain of social movements’ political outcomes (2016: 267). For Piccio, the two main conditions that determine whether a movement will influence a party are: electoral vulnerability – parties will be open towards supporting social movements if such action will lead to an increase in electoral support, particularly if the party is electorally vulnerable; and identity coherence – the greater the overlap between the parties’ and movements’ identities, the greater the possibility that the movement will influence the party (Piccio, 2016: 267-268; Rucht, 2004).

Public opinion also appears to be a factor when it comes to determining whether a social movement will have an impact on a party. As we have already seen, the evidence in the party change literature points to public opinion as being the strongest variable when it comes to determining what causes party change for mainstream parties. Adams et al.’s ‘dynamics of disadvantaged parties’ states that parties respond to shifts in public opinion in situations where opinion shifts in a direction that is clearly disadvantageous to the party (2004: 590).
This leads us to conclude that if public opinion is behind the social movement, there is reason to believe that a party will come out and support the movement as the situation will be disadvantageous to the party if it chooses not to (as they run the risk of losing support if they don’t back, or at least engage with, the movement).

Kriesi, Kriesi et al., Rucht, and Piccio all believe it is possible for social movements to have an impact on parties due to opportunistic, ideological, and electoral reasons. They follow in the tradition of political opportunity structure scholars, focusing on external factors and the political environment, hypothesising that whether a movement will have an impact on a party depends on political factors outside of the movement’s control. Before turning our attention to the social movement impact literature, it is necessary to review the party decline literature to learn why parties are currently more susceptible to external influence than ever before.

2.4.1 The decline and vulnerability of parties today

As well as for the aforementioned factors that might lead to parties engaging with social movements, and the fact that movements and parties co-exist and act in the same political arena, there is a fourth reason, one that is closely related to electoral vulnerability, why there is a high probability that social movements will impact political parties: the current state of European parties, particularly social democratic parties.

Mair expressed strong concerns over the state of party politics, outlining the major shifts he saw taking place: both citizens and the political elite withdrawing from electoral politics. In the case of citizen withdrawal, Mair pointed to declining electoral turnout, rising voter volatility, declining party identification, and declining numbers of party members (2013: 17-42). In the case of political elite withdrawal, Mair identified two kinds of shifts: a shift in identity, relating to the reduction in ideological polarisation of party systems, and a locational shift, where parties have moved from being defined primarily as social actors to state actors (Mair, 2013: 75-99). Together, these two shifts have led to a scenario where ‘party-voter distances have been stretched, while party-party differences have lessened’ with citizens becoming disconnected from parties (Mair, 2006: 45). These developments have ultimately led to: (i) partisan realignment occurring where there has been a durable shift in the political system’s configuration of voters’ partisan identifications and parties’ vote shares; (ii) the development of a ‘democracy without choices’ in which citizens can change governments far more easily than they can change policies (Krastev, 2002: 51); and (iii) where parties have lost their traditional role of intermediation and the capacity to mobilise citizens through party ideological platforms (Lisi, 2013: 22).
These are all significant developments when studying the interaction between political parties and social movements. As parties have become increasingly removed from citizens, it is plausible to suggest that due to opportunistic and electoral reasons, parties might decide to support or attach themselves to a social movement (and thus interact and become influenced by it) in order to be seen as relevant again to the public. This might be particularly true for social democratic parties, once described as ‘more movement than party’ and who are still considered reformist (Kriesi et al., 1995). On the other hand, perhaps it is too late for movement-party cooperation with parties too far on the path to becoming fully fledged state actors with little interest in engaging with social movements.

2.4.2 Social democratic parties in crisis?

If political parties are in decline, then social democratic parties are in crisis. In the late 1990s, new social democracy appeared to be in the ascendancy with centre-left parties governing in one-party governments or coalitions in 12 of the then 15 EU member states. By 2006, a couple of years prior to the economic crisis, social democracy was already experiencing a decline in popularity with Sweden’s once powerful Social Democratic Party losing power for only the third time since 1932. This defeat was a sign of things to come with the past 10 years proving even less fruitful for social democracy in Europe. Even in the face of the financial system’s breakdown – amid a weakened regulatory system under the stewardship of centre-right governments and calls for a return to Keynesian traditional social democratic economic policies – centre-left parties have been unable for the most part to take advantage of the right’s difficulties (Karreth, Polk and Allen, 2012).

The situation becomes even more striking when one looks at it from a long-term perspective (see Appendix A). In 12 out of 17 EU member states, there has been a fall in the vote share for social democratic parties since the end of the Second World War. Few parties of the centre-left now register more than 30% in elections, a stat inconceivable only a few decades ago. A clear long-term pattern emerges, and while it might not be the most drastic of trends

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5 There have been many occasions where parties have come out in support of social movements and/or mass mobilisations. To give just a few recent European examples: the Left Bloc party in Portugal supporting the Que se lixe a troika anti-austerity social movement from 2012 (Distrito Porto BE, 2013); the HDZ party in Croatia supporting the ‘In the Name of the Family’ civic movement in 2013 (U ime obitelji, 2013); and the National Liberal Party in Romania supporting the demonstrations against the Roșia Montană mining project in 2013 and 2014 (Dąborowski, 2013)

6 Political commentators certainly believe social democracy is in crisis. To take one example, since December 2014, the left-of-centre British political magazine the New Statesman has carried five feature length articles on the ‘irrelevance’, ‘retreat’, and impending ‘death’ of social democracy with headlines such as ‘Social democrats face irrelevance at best, extinction at worse’ (Lawson, 2014). The New Statesman is not alone, a quick Google search with the words ‘social democracy crisis’ brought up 18,300,000 results in December 2015 (and 2,100 results if one searches “social democracy crisis” using quotation marks)
(Mair calls such trends a ‘trickle rather than a flood’), it is still clear what direction it is going: social democratic parties are losing support across Europe (Mair, 2013: 43). Due to their current weak state, one might therefore assume that social democratic parties will want to gain some much needed electoral support by allying themselves with left-leaning social movements in an attempt to reassert themselves as the alternative, reforming option. Whether this is the case will be investigated in the main body of the paper.

2.5 Measuring social movement impact

This paper has so far touched upon the party change, the social movement-political party interaction, and the party decline literatures. What has become apparent is that while the potential impact social movements may have on parties has been under researched, it does appear possible for movements to have some sort of impact on parties, particularly due to their current weak state. One final question remains however: how to identify and measure such social movement impact?

While there may be longstanding theoretical disagreement within the social movement field, there is one thing that all social movement scholars agree on: the study of the impacts and consequences of social movements has largely been neglected. Such neglect is all the more puzzling considering the overarching aim of social movements is to bring about change. However, while social movement researchers agree that the impacts of movements have been neglected, they disagree about how to conceptualise and explain social movement impact. Central to this has been the debate between resource mobilisation and political opportunity structure scholars.

The resource mobilisation approach hypothesises that strongly organised and united social movements are in a better position to generate political impact compared to loosely organised movements. This theory stresses the importance of internal variables such as the amount of resources and the organisational infrastructure of movements. Research by Gamson (1990) and Lohmann (1993) has found that successful social movements tend to be more centralised, bureaucratised, and un-factionalised and that the number of protesters in a movement is closely associated with the strength of the signal that is sent to politicians who seek to make decisions that are advantageous for a majority of the population. Put simply, the greater the resources, bureaucratisation, professionalisation, centralisation, and participants, the greater the collective power and the higher the probability of the movement having an impact and achieving its goals (Jenkins, 1983).
It wasn’t long before the resource mobilisation approach came in for criticism with Eisinger, as well as others such as Goldstone and Kitschelt, arguing that it neglected the political context of social movements (Eisinger, 1973). Their critique developed into what became known as the political opportunity structure approach that focuses less on internal factors, such as bureaucratisation and organisation, and more on external factors such as the country’s political environment, party system, and degree of political openness (Goldstone 1980; Kitschelt, 1986). Its central point is that the structural political setting of a given country decisively influences the possibility for social movements to have influential impacts, particularly for ‘instrumental movements’ which are almost exclusively politically oriented, such as the ecology, solidarity, and peace movements (Kriesi et al., 1995: 236). These are movements that act instrumentally to the pursuit of goals in the environment and hence, their outcomes depend very much on the political opportunity structure (Kriesi et al., 1995: 236).

As anti-austerity social movements are instrumental movements, as they pursue goals in the political environment and are politically oriented, we expect external political factors to play a decisive role in determining their success and the probability that will have an impact on social democratic parties. Therefore, the political opportunity structure is relevant to the research questions of this paper, especially considering that political allies (i.e. parties) are said to form a principal component of the political opportunity structure (Rucht, 2004; Piccio, 2016). Kreisi et al. write that both ‘instrumental and subcultural movements are likely to enjoy the support of established allies’ with established political parties unwilling to support more radical movements as such support might cost them electorally (1995: 91-92). While Suh adds that history has demonstrated that social movements’ independent capacity to effect macro social transformation is often lacking or limited and therefore requires strategic alliance with reformist political forces (2006: 182). Following the theory of the political opportunity structure approach, we expect to find that external political factors, whether that be public opinion, party vulnerability or the party system, will determine whether anti-austerity movements will impact social democratic parties.

2.6 Hypothesis

This paper aims to shed light on social movement-political party interaction and empirically test the claims made by political opportunity structure theorists. After reviewing the relevant literature, four core conditions explaining social movement-party interactions come to the fore (all of which have been outlined in section 2.4): (i) whether the party is in opposition; (ii)
party electoral vulnerability; (iii) ideological coherence between the social movement and party; and (iv) public opinion.

It appears that the greater the number of these conditions present, the more likely a social movement will come to have an impact on a political party. For instance, if a party that is in opposition and electorally vulnerable, shares ideological traits with a social movement that has the public’s backing, there is a strong chance that that party will engage with the movement, thus increasing the likelihood of the social movement coming to have some sort of impact on the party.

The paper’s hypothesis is therefore as follows:

*Social movements will be more likely to have an impact on a political party if the following four conditions are present: the party is in opposition, the party is electorally vulnerable, the party shares ideological traits with the movement, and public opinion shifts in a direction towards supporting the general aims of the social movement*
Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodologically, the main challenges when measuring social movement impact are defining impact, assessing causality and reaching generalisable conclusions. As previously mentioned, the consequences of social movements is an under-researched field. Another reason for the lack of research is the number of methodological difficulties researchers encounter when trying to identify movement consequences, namely the problem of how to measure social movement outcomes and the problem of causality. First, as far as impact is concerned, ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ aspects raise the problem of how to assess outcomes while outcomes can be an intended as well as an unintended consequence of a movement’s action (Kriesi et al., 1995). Second, there exists the issue of causality and reaching generalisable conclusions, i.e. the difficulty of assessing the extent to which the movement has contributed to producing a certain effect. If a social democratic party does in fact change stance and take an anti-austerity position, can this solely be attributed to an anti-austerity social movement? Of course not, the movement’s action might not be the only explanatory factor. These methodological issues of measuring impact and identifying causality are problematic and while it is important to be aware of them, it doesn’t prohibit an investigation into the effects social movements have on political parties.

3.1 Cross-country comparison

To empirically test the hypothesis, this paper will carry out a qualitative cross-country comparison of two social democratic parties and their interaction with anti-austerity social movements in Europe during the years 2011 to 2016. Two of the hardest hit countries by the Eurozone crisis, Spain and Ireland, will be used as case studies. Both the Spanish and Irish governments implemented austerity measures which led to two diverse anti-austerity social movements emerging and a rise in anti-establishment sentiment.\(^7\) The Spanish social democratic party and social movement studied will be PSOE and 15-M while the Irish social democratic party and social movement studied will be the Labour Party and Right2Water.

Rather than carrying out an extensive study on one case, which have been accused of being one dimensional and for overstating the power of one or more explanatory factors that may have only been relevant to that case, a comparative study allows for greater exploration of the various factors that might determine social movements to impact parties. By studying two

\(^7\) Such sentiment was expressed with voters turning away from mainstream, ‘establishment’ parties. In the 2008 Spanish general election, the two dominant parties since the death of Franco, PSOE and the PP, won 84% of the vote. In the 2015 election, this figure had dropped to 51%. While in the 2007 Irish general election, the three dominant parties in Ireland since independence in 1922, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour, won 79% of the vote. In the February 2016 election, this figure is projected to drop to 55%. 
cases, it is possible to observe what factors have the greatest impact, while also allowing us to make generalisations. Political opportunity structure will be used as not only does this approach take into account external factors, which have been found to have a greater effect when measuring social movement outcomes than internal factors, but the two cases in question both have similar internal factors – both 15-M and Right2Water were large in size but suffered from various internal disputes – and thus studying these factors would not reveal anything new or pertinent.

The dependent variable is the impact the social movements have on social democratic parties. Impact is measured by examining party discourse (speeches and statements) and party policy (policies implemented by the party if in government and policies included in their election manifests) in the years preceding and following the highest peak of mobilisation of the anti-austerity movements. It will be investigated whether party discourse and policy alters in any way due to the emergence of an anti-austerity social movement. The time period in question for the study is 2011-2016 so it will be examined whether either PSOE or the Labour Party changed position in any way due to the rise of 15-M and Right2Water in those years. The independent variables are as follows:

- X1: party is in opposition;
- X2: party is electorally vulnerable;
- X3: party shares ideological traits with the movement;
- X4: public opinion shifts in a direction towards supporting the general aims of the social movement.

As the Spanish case fulfils more of the criteria for suggesting that social movements will have an impact on social democratic parties than the Irish case, the former will be taken as the most-likely case, predicting that 15-M will have an impact on PSOE, and the latter will be taken as the least-likely case, predicting that Right2Water will have little impact on the Labour Party. Why the 15-M-PSOE case meets more of the criteria than the Right2Water-Labour case is briefly explained below.

**X1: Party is in opposition**

Unlike in Ireland where the Labour Party was in government during the time period in question, PSOE was in opposition from 2011 until the elections of December 2015.\(^8\)

\[^8\] Although PSOE was in government when 15-M first appeared on the scene in May 2011, the party became the main opposition party in November 2011 and were thus in government for seven months (May-November 2011) and in opposition for four years (2012-2015) when 15-M were active.
**X2: Whether the party is electorally vulnerable**

PSOE was much more electorally vulnerable than Labour during the years in question. The party’s vote share fell below 30% for the first time ever in a general election in 2011 while the party’s average vote share in the last two general elections is 12.6 percentage points lower than the party’s average vote share in all general elections since 1975 (see Appendix A). With PSOE’s support only going in one direction, as shown in *figure 1*, it’s clear that the party was electorally vulnerable, and the rise of a new party to its left, Podemos, only increased its vulnerability in the last two years.

*Figure 1: Vote Share of PSOE in Spanish elections 1975-2015*

![Vote Share of PSOE in Spanish elections 1975-2015](image)

This vulnerability is in contrast to the Labour Party who were only somewhat electorally vulnerable during the years 2014-2016. At first glance, this assessment appears incorrect as from a high of 19% in the spring of 2011, Labour’s support dropped by at least 10 percentage points to around 8% in opinion polls by early 2016. However, from a longer-term perspective, the party is one of only five European social democratic parties whose average vote share in the last two general elections is higher than their mean vote share in all general elections since the end of the Second World War (see Appendix A). Furthermore as can be seen in *figure 2*, a clear pattern is observable, after a Labour electoral success, it tends to suffer in the following election with its vote share returning to its core support base of around 10%, a base it has managed to retain during its latest tenure in government. In saying that, Labour has become increasingly electorally vulnerable from 2011 onwards, particularly from
leftist parties who from mid-2011, began to frame themselves as the ‘real left’ and the ‘true alternative’ and are therefore somewhat vulnerable.

**Figure 2: Vote share of the Labour Party in elections, 1945-2015**

![Vote share of the Labour Party in elections, 1945-2015](chart-image)

**X3: Whether the party shares ideological traits with the movement**

15-M shared more ideological traits with PSOE than Right2Water did with Labour. Surveys found that most 15-M participants classified themselves as left to the centre on the political spectrum and considered the movement reformist (Likki 2012; Calvo, 2013). For example, as figure 3 shows, just under 40% of those that took party in 15-M in the city of Salamanca placed themselves on number 3 on a left-right scale while the most popular position for PSOE voters was number 4 on the same scale. With PSOE still regarding themselves as both a centre-left and reforming party, there didn’t appear to a substantial difference between where the supporters of PSOE and 15-M see themselves ideologically.

This was in contrast to the Irish case where there was little ideological coherence between Labour and Right2Water. Unlike other European social democratic parties, Labour has always been quite moderate in both its policies and discourse (Puirséil, 2012; O’Malley, 2015). With Right2Water and its supporters espousing very left-wing sentiments, the movement was at odds with Labour ideologically as despite over half of the movement’s participants voting Labour in the 2011 election, by 2014 Labour had become increasingly centrist after entering government in March 2011 (Hearne, 2015b).
Figure 3: Left-right self-placement among PSOE supporters and 15-M participants*

![Graph showing self-placement among PSOE supporters and 15-M participants.](image)

* Data from Calvo (2013) and CIS (2015)

X4: Whether public opinion shifts in a direction towards supporting the general aims of the social movement

As we shall see in the following section, Spanish public opinion was broadly supportive of 15-M with the movement having a major effect on Spain’s two party system with support for both PSOE and the PP (People’s Party) decreasing immediately after the emergence of 15-M. Combined support for the two parties dropped from 83% in April 2011, a month before 15-M held their first mobilisations, to 50% within four years (see Appendix B). The fact that Spain’s two largest parties, who were the target of much of 15-M’s anger, suffered such a drop in support immediately after the emergence of 15-M shows that the ideas put forward by 15-M clearly resonated with the public. However, while 15-M appeared to have a detrimental impact for the two main parties, it had less of an impact on ideology. As figure 4 reveals, there was a small move to the far-left among the public between 2008 and 2012 (2.6% to 9.4%) but also a move away from the centre-left (31.6% placed themselves on 3 and 4 on the scale in 2008, compared to 18.9% in 2012). With evidence, outlined in section 2.2, indicating that parties respond to shifts in public opinion in situations where opinion shifts in a direction that is clearly disadvantageous to the party, this situation appears to be problematic for PSOE as public opinion moves away from the centre-left to both the centre and the far-left. Nevertheless, public opinion still got behind 15-M’s general objectives.
Unlike in Spain, there was no major change in support for parties in Ireland after the emergence of Right2Water. And while a majority of the public supported the movement’s stance on water charges (by the end of the summer 2015, more than half of the public had still failed to pay their first and second water bills), public opinion failed to get behind the movement’s broader anti-austerity objectives. Leftist parties that supported the movement saw no increase in support while ideology also failed to shift leftwards (O’Malley, 2015). As can be seen in figure 5, if anything, public opinion moved slightly to the centre-right.

* Data from the European Social Survey 2006-2014 (ESS, Rounds 3, 5, and 7)
It is clear that the conditions for 15-M to have an impact on PSOE are more favourable than for Right2Water to impact Labour, as is summarised in table 2. Whether these conditions are as significant as the literature makes them out to be will be explored in the following section.

**Table 2: Independent variables and the two case studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X1: Party is in opposition</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2: Party is electorally vulnerable</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X3: Party shares ideological traits with the movement</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X4: Public opinion shifts in a direction towards supporting the general aims of the social movement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Operationalisation and research limitations

Impact is operationalised as the effect that social movements have on two key dimensions of political parties: political discourse and policy. Impact on political discourse is observed as parties taking on board social movements’ themes of mobilisation in their speeches, statements, and documents. The dominant objectives and themes of the anti-austerity movements were identified with all references made to such objectives and themes searched in PSOE’s and Labour’s discourse in the years 2011-2016. For the Spanish case, 15-M’s main objectives and themes related to the following issues: austerity, corruption, reform of the political system, transparency, democratisation, alternative economics, and the youth. While for the Irish case, Right2Water’s main objectives and themes related to: austerity, water charges, debt justice, democratisation, housing, transparency, and reform of the political system. All references made to these issues by PSOE and Labour were noted and analysed, both before and after the emergence of 15-M and Right2Water, in order to discover whether any changes in party discourse occurs.

Impact on party policy is observed as parties incorporating some of the movements’ ideas and demands into their election manifestos and/or government policy. All policy references to the same issues mentioned above (austerity, corruption, reform etc.) were noted and analysed in order to find out whether PSOE or Labour incorporated policies related to the issues the two social movements campaigned on. Party documents, statements, speeches, policy positions, and manifestos were sourced primarily from the websites of the two parties, from the websites of the two national parliaments, and indirectly through media coverage.
It is important to mention once again that social movements cannot be considered as the only and primary drive of changes taking place within parties, as parties themselves exist in, and are influenced by, the social environment (Amenta et al., 2010: 301). In order to make causal connection robust and avoid ‘pseudo-outcomes’ (political outcomes related to the political goals of the social movement but that are not caused by the movement), this paper will only take into account changes that occur after the movements’ first emergence and when they relate directly to the goals and ends of the movements.
Chapter 4: Case studies analysis

4.1 Anti-austerity social movements and the European crisis

Whereas the Eurozone crisis, also referred to as the European debt crisis, erupted in 2009, protests in European countries only really emerged after the new politics of austerity began to take shape in 2010 and 2011. In Greece, strikes and mass demonstrations, which often led to violent confrontations with the police, swept the country in May 2010 and early 2011 with large-scale demonstrations and strikes spreading to other European countries by the summer of 2011. While the two social movements to be studied in this paper possess unique characteristics, similarities exist across the various anti-austerity social movements that developed across Europe, most notably in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

First, all of the anti-austerity movements can be considered instrumental social movements as they were primarily, but not solely, concerned with economic austerity policies. Secondly, the anti-austerity movements were predominantly left-wing in nature. Despite numerous assertions that the movements’ participants were neither left nor right, surveys have found that the vast majority of participants were very much left-leaning.9 Thirdly, the movements differed from their alter-globalisation, left-wing predecessors as all demanded social justice from their national governments, rather than targeting international organisations or financial institutions, with the movements acting within a national context with limited European-wide coordination (Pianta and Gerbaudo, 2015). Fourthly, while austerity was the main issue that led to the formation of the social movements, it wasn’t the standalone concern of the movements’ activists (Ancelovici, 2015). Rather than calling for maintaining representative democracy, protestors proposed and practiced different visions of democracy and central to their demands was a new version of democracy, ultimately one that was more direct, participatory, and horizontal (Della Porta, 2012). Fifthly, the internet played a hugely important organising role for all European anti-austerity social movements. One of the main reasons the movements became as large as they did was because of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and micro-blogging sites (Kaldor et al., 2012).

Apart from these five similarities, there were of course many differences between the anti-austerity social movements. Some movements, such as those in Portugal, struggled to remain united with the country having three different anti-austerity social movements during the

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9 A survey on participants of anti-austerity mobilisations in Belgium, Spain, Italy, and the UK, found that only 5% of the activists did not identify with any particular position on a left–right scale, and for those who did, the average position was 2.2 on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates the most leftist position (Peterson, 2015). While separate surveys in Ireland and Spain, found that the movements’ participants were overwhelmingly left-wing (Calvo, 2013; Hearne, 2015b)
crisis, while the demonstrations of other movements often descended into violence, as happened in Greece. Some movements, such as Spain’s 15-M, grabbed the world’s attention with images of the country’s occupied city squares going viral in the summer of 2011, while others, such as Right2Water in Ireland, made few international headlines. This paper will focus on the movements in both Spain and Ireland, studying their impact, if any, on PSOE and the Labour Party respectively.

4.2 PSOE and Movimiento 15-M

4.2.1 Background to Movimiento 15-M

Spain didn’t have to wait long for an anti-austerity movement to emerge in the country as within a year of the ruling PSOE implementing austerity policies, the Movimiento 15-M had developed, with its participants quickly becoming known as los indignados (the outraged). Spain was adversely affected by the global financial crisis of 2007-08 with it ultimately leading to the collapse of the country’s huge property bubble and a sharp rise in the number of unemployed. From 8% unemployment between 2006 and 2007, unemployment stood at 22% at the outbreak of the anti-austerity demonstrations in mid-2011, nearly twice the Eurozone average at that time (Kennedy, 2011).

After initially attempting to implement a ‘social democratic response’ to the crisis, the ruling PSOE eventually took the decision to implement spending cuts in 2010. This rather abrupt swing to austerity led to outrage among many and in early 2011, six months into PSOE’s austerity programme, Spain’s dense network of alternative and radical groups began communicating and interacting more frequently with each other on social networking sites. It was from this that Democracia Real Ya (DRY) developed and within three months, DRY had grown into a protest platform with over 200 organisations affiliated to it (Hughes, 2011). DRY called for demonstrations to take place in cities across Spain a week before the country’s regional and municipal elections of May 2011, demanding radical changes in Spanish politics and an end to austerity policies. More than 70 Spanish cities responded to the call with mass demonstrations held across the country on 15th May 2011. The largest of these protests was held in Madrid where demonstrators chanted ‘we’re not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers’, and ‘the guilty ones should pay for the crisis’ (Hughes, 2011: 408).

10 Approximately two million jobs were lost in the three-year period up to 2010, over 60% of which were either directly or indirectly linked to the construction sector (Kennedy, 2011: 12)
What started out in Madrid as a demonstration quickly turned into an occupation when around 250 protestors decided to remain in Puerta del Sol, a square in the city centre, until after the elections had taken place on 22nd May. After attempts by the police to remove the protestors, thousands of supporters descended on squares across Spain to express support for the activists in Madrid. From these solidarity camps, 15-M was born. Deliberative consensus-based assemblies took place daily in the camps with participants debating a wide array of issues ranging from corruption and social injustice to austerity and capitalism (Calvo, 2013: 236). The activists demanded solutions to the economic crisis, zero tolerance to corruption, and a broad reform of the political system with surveys finding that the ‘fight against corruption’ and the ‘need to regulate financial markets’ were the two most important goals pursued by participants (Likki, 2012: 8). The movement defined itself as a grassroots, non-party, and non-violent citizens’ movement and adopted a decentralised structure with all banners and flags from political parties, trade unions and organisations banned. Such a ban made the movement apartidista – with it refusing to align itself to any party or allow parties to act in a representative capacity at their events (Fominaya, 2014). Moreover, there was no one well-defined opponent, with the DRY manifesto stating that ‘whole political establishment was to blame’ for the economic crisis (Calvo, 2013: 240). Notably, a survey carried out in Salamanca found that 62% of respondents viewed the movement as reformist, rather than anti-systemic, an important distinction considering this paper’s focus on social democratic parties, still thought to be reformist in nature (Calvo, 2013: 251).

15-M’s actions in the summer of 2011 were supported by a majority of the population with a poll published in the newspaper El País in June 2011 finding that 64% backed the movement and 74% considered it a ‘peaceful movement aimed at revitalising democracy’ (Kaldor et al., 2012: 6) with another poll, published by Metroscopia, finding that 80% viewed 15-M as pursuing ‘just and legitimate causes’ (Calvo, 2013: 237). Furthermore, 81% of PSOE voters supported the movement (CIS, 2011). While many political commenters and researchers had previously commented on Spain’s alleged political indifference and lack of protest culture since the end of the Franco regime, with remarks such as, ‘Spanish political culture is defined by significant apathy and lack of involvement in anything political, including social movements’ (Morales and Geurts 2007), table 3 shows that over the years, many Spaniards have taken part in demonstrations with this number increasing after the emergence of 15-M.

11 Previous Spanish social movements were often integrated, co-opted, or claimed by institutional left parties such as PSOE and IU (United Left) and by banning all party banners, symbols and flags, 15-M attempted to assert their autonomy from the outset (Fominaya, 2015)
Table 3: Percent of Spanish population that take part in lawful public demonstrations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Taken part in a lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from European Social Surveys, 2004-2012 (ESS, Rounds 2 to 6)

This first, and most vibrant, wave of mobilisation, ‘stage one of 15-M’, continued until July 2011. After July, 15-M entered ‘stage two’, by moving away from occupations, camps, and mass protests to creating new support networks and linking in with pre-existing social movements and civic associations (Levi, 2015; Calvo, 2013). These networks, like the assemblies of 2011, steered clear of traditional politics, taking a grassroots approach to activism by co-ordinating campaigns on specific issues, such as banking, evictions, health, basic income, and electoral reform (Levi, 2015). However, internal disputers were rife in stage two with disagreements over the movement’s structure and future (Elola, 2012). While many were against the idea of institutionalising the movement and setting up a political party, an anti-austerity party, by the name of Podemos, did eventually emerge indirectly out of 15-M (Fominaya, 2014). Podemos was founded in March 2014 with it being generally viewed as the political embodiment of 15-M (Kennedy, 2014). After receiving 8% of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections, it went on to receive 21% of the vote in the 2015 general election, in doing so becoming the third largest party in parliament and effectively ending the two-party Spanish system.12

The question therefore is how did PSOE respond to 15-M? In the past in Spain, a large portion of social movements ended up being absorbed by the PSOE (particularly in the 1980s), which had the effect of demobilising and ‘taming’ leftist social movements (Rendueles and Sola, 2015). But with 15-M’s apartidista nature, absorbing the movement was never a possibility for PSOE this time round. That is not to say 15-M couldn’t have an impact on PSOE, and whether it did or not will be investigated in the following section.

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12 It must be noted that despite the many connections between 15-M and Podemos (many Podemos leaders and supporters were active in 15-M), some 15-M activists have expressed concerns about the relationship between Podemos and 15-M and what they see as Podemos ‘claiming the legacy of 15-M’ and ‘weakening the grassroots movement’ (Levi, 2015; Sved, 2015)
4.2.2 Impact on PSOE discourse

PSOE discourse, in government 2008-2011

The initial PSOE response to the economic crisis of 2007-08 was to reassure the public that Spain would be left relatively unscathed by any global economic downturn (Kennedy, 2011). Just as concern was beginning to mount over the sustainability of Spain’s housing boom, PSOE were re-elected in March 2008 with 43% of the vote. Much of PSOE’s discourse in the election campaign centred on economic growth, social rights, education, health, jobs, and the notion of stability with little reference to the impending economic crisis (PSOE, 2008). When the issue of spending cuts was brought up, which the PP insisted were necessary, Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero affirmed PSOE’s stance by remarking that spending cuts ‘always hit the weak’ hardest (Díez, 2008). There was widespread belief in PSOE that Spain would weather the economic storm with Zapatero preferring to characterise the situation as an ‘economic slowdown’ and a PSOE minister maintaining that an economic recovery will occur in the ‘second half’ of 2009 and that ‘the Spanish economy is the strongest in Europe’ (El País, 2008). Moreover, in April 2009, Zapatero went as far as to claim that ‘Spain was already over the worst’ of the crisis (Kennedy, 2011: 10). However, the severity of the economic crisis finally dawned on Zapatero a few months later, with PSOE deciding to change discourse and adopt what Zapatero termed a ‘social democratic approach to the crisis’, contending that the situation required ‘state intervention in the economy through public investment and policies against unemployment’ (PSOE, 2009). PSOE maintained this counter-cyclical position throughout 2009 with government speeches and statements reiterating the primacy of the need to stimulate the economy in order to protect employment and ensure welfare beneficiaries are maintained with Zapatero asking the public to display ‘solidarity’ in order to ‘meet the demands of the most needy’ (Dellepiane and Hardiman, 2012: 19).

POSE upheld this social democratic stance in its discourse until early 2010 when the government began to come under severe market pressure to modify its position and implement austerity with Zapatero later remarking that ‘the markets were capable of putting our future solvency at risk’ (Moreno, 2010). In May 2010, PSOE finally gave in and implemented spending cuts which Zapatero defended by maintaining in the Congress of Deputies that it was still a ‘social response’ to the crisis, and that the cuts would be negligible compared to the ‘50% increase in social spending’ that took place from 2004 to 2010 (PSOE, 2010). Despite PSOE going on the defensive, the party’s position on austerity from May 2010
majorly contradicted with its initial Keynesian stance, and it wasn’t long before 15-M emerged. Did this new social movement cause PSOE to revert back to its social democratic position? Did it lead to the party adopting a more radical discourse? Or did its discourse stay the same, on the defensive?

**PSOE discourse after the emergence of Movimiento 15-M, 2011-2016**

PSOE had barley time to respond to the rise of 15-M before the regional and municipal elections of May 2011. In the elections, PSOE suffered its worst ever regional and municipal results with the party’s vote share decreasing by 7.2 percentage points. With PSOE loosing support, and with one eye on the general elections later on in that year, the party was lenient with the 15-M solidarity camps set up in May and June of 2011 and attempted to electorally channel some of 15-M’s demands (Mendoza, 2012). In June 2011, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, who was poised to take over leadership of PSOE after the general election of November 2011, promised 15-M activists a ‘channel of participation’ (Mendoza, 2011a) while Prime Minister Zapatero praised ‘the importance and depth’ of some of the movement’s proposals (Libertad Digital, 2011). Marcelino Iglesias, secretary of the party, went even further, remarking after a meeting of the party’s Executive Committee in June 2011 that they hear ‘the indignant with great interest’, ‘notes’ their complaints, and shares ‘some of their concerns’, all of which ‘should improve the functioning of political parties and [the] representational system’ (El País, 2011). However, Iglesias also stressed that there is no alternative to the democratic system which includes ‘political parties and democratic institutions’ (El País, 2011).

In the lead up to the November election, the party attempted to appeal to those involved in 15-M by stressing that PSOE was vastly different to the PP, using the slogan ‘we are not the same’ and claiming the PP have taken ‘advantage of the crisis’ (Mendoza, 2011b). Here, it was clear PSOE was trying to divert 15-M’s anger away from PSOE and towards the PP. This tactic was used along with PSOE emphasising its social democratic credentials, with much of its discourse dominated by talk of the welfare state (Valera Ordaz and López García, 2014: 56-57). In an effort to downplay its role in the economic crisis, PSOE attempted to avoid confronting the material dimensions of the crisis in its discourse and instead focused on social dimensions, such as health, education, and social rights. Despite attempting to appeal to supporters of 15-M, the movements’ most pressing concerns weren’t addressed as Valera Ordaz and López García found that PSOE ‘bypassed any empirical consideration on how
things are and limited itself to normative considerations’, despite 15-M’s concerns being very real, empirical issues (2014: 60).

PSOE’s social strategy ultimately failed as the party suffered a resounding defeat in the 2011 election.13 Throughout the following two years, PSOE distanced themselves from 15-M as the party, now with Rubalcaba in charge, went into a period of reflection (de Paz Nieves, 2013). The party’s focus switched to the governing PP with its discourse dominated by speeches opposing the PP’s spending cuts, neoliberal policies, and labour reforms. This was to change at the party’s conference in 2013 where discussion reverted back to issues highlighted by 15-M with debates held on topics ranging from wage caps for executives to whether PSOE should campaign for a Spanish republic (Cué, 2013). Many of the more radical proposals were voted down by the party hierarchy but such was the talk of reform that some in the media spoke of PSOE’s ‘left turn’ (Eurointelligence, 2013). In Rubalcaba’s keynote speech, he reiterated that PSOE ‘are not the same’ as the PP, adding that his party will ‘base its regeneration on presenting an alternative to Spain’s insensitive government’ and ‘rebuild everything that the right is destroying’ (Gutiérrez Calvo, 2013). However, while PSOE stated during the conference that it was ‘open to social movements’ (El Boletín.com, 2013), 15-M activists maintained their opposition to PSOE during the years 2012 and 2013, not buying into Rubalcaba’s claim that all parties are different.14

PSOE’s reforming talk continued in 2014 in the lead up to its Extraordinary Congress, due to take place in July of that year, where a new party leader was to be elected after PSOE’s poor election results in May 2014’s European Parliament elections. One PSOE MP vying to become leader, Perez Tapias, commented that PSOE needed to ‘shake off decades of neoliberal pollution’, and called for ‘fair taxation, a strong welfare state and a reformed constitution’ (Crónica de Aragon, 2014). However, Tapias failed in his bid to become leader with Pedro Sánchez elected instead.15 Within a month of Sánchez’s election, Sánchez criticised the ‘conservative politicians who run Europe’, who believe in applying ‘recipes that do not get us out of the crisis and that perpetuate suffering’ (Libre Mercado, 2014). It should also be noted that throughout 2014, PSOE was opposed to the country’s Citizens’ Security

13 Subsequent research has found that PSOE didn’t gain electorally from the 15-M in any way as the more sympathetic a voter was towards 15-M, the more likely they voted for the leftist Izquierda Unida or a smaller party rather than PSOE, while the less sympathetic a voter was towards 15-M, the more likely they would vote for the PP (Dosek, 2013)

14 For instance, in November 2013 Rubalcaba was due to make a speech at the University of Granada but the event had to be suspended after 70 15-M activists entered the auditorium and began shouting and displaying banners against the PSOE (Miguel Muñoz, 2013)

15 A month prior to his election, Sánchez remarked that he ‘he preferred the first moments of 15-M’ when it demanded a ‘democratic political regeneration’ but that he disagreed with the movement tarnishing politicians as ‘all the same’ (Val, 2014)
Law, often referred to as the ‘gag law’, which sought to restrict protest demonstrations with PSOE stating that it ‘cannot stand idle’ when such laws are passed (PSOE, 2014).

PSOE began 2015 with leader Sánchez stressing that the party ‘has always been a party of government and change’ and summarised PSOE’s plans in three main points: the need to create ‘decent work’, the fight against inequality, and concern for the ‘dismantling of the welfare state’ (La Verdad, 2015). In another speech, he demanded ‘an end’ to the Troika (the European Commission, ECB, and the IMF) and added that PSOE has ‘spent years demanding an end to austerity’ (PSOE, 2015a). Despite Sánchez’s reformist talk, PSOE suffered badly in the regional and municipal elections of May 2015. Two new political forces, Podemos and Ciudadanos (a liberal, centre-right party), won 20% of the vote and both proved decisive in forming regional governments in many of Spain’s autonomous communities.16 A few weeks after the disappointing election results, Sánchez met with the leader of the Portuguese socialists with the two leaders agreeing on a document titled, ‘A new impetus for convergence in Portugal and Spain’ which called for immediate ‘progressive reforms in the Euro area’ in order to ‘move away from the austerity policy as the only way’ (Pereira, 2015).

The regional and municipal results of May set the tone for the 2015 general election, due to take place in December, as it was clear that left-leaning voters who had voted PSOE in the past had turned to Podemos (Kennedy, 2014). PSOE’s discourse therefore focused on trying to create an ideological coherent position that would attract leftist leaning voters without abandoning their centrist supporters with Sánchez remarking that neither break nor reform is required, but rather a mixture of both concepts, ‘a sort of radical reform’ (Díez and Manetto, 2015). The party embraced the slogan ‘change with stability’ with Sánchez remarking that they have ‘always been’ and will continue to be ‘the left that attracts the centre’ while simultaneously highlighting the party’s desire and ability to bring about reform promising that they would bring about the ‘change that has said no to the ideological policies of the PP’ (Díez and Ayuso, 2015; PSOE, 2015a). PSOE’s attempts of promising both stability and change didn’t convince voters, as despite the unpopularity of the PP government, PSOE wasn’t able to garner any new support and in fact lost support for the third general election in a row, obtaining just 22% of the vote.17

16 PSOE collaborated with Podemos on several city councils with the mayors (all of whom were backed by Podemos) of the cities Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, A Coruña, and Cádiz elected thanks to votes from the PSOE. In August 2015, PSOE again collaborated with Podemos, supporting a motion to place a plaque in Puerta del Sol, Madrid to remember 15-M’s fist mobilisations of May 2011 (Bécares and Sánchez, 2015)
17 Despite the poor results, PSOE entered talks with Podemos on forming what Sánchez termed a ‘progressive government’, but as of February 2016, it remains to be seen whether a PSOE-Podemos deal will be reached.
PSOE’s attention to issues raised by 15-M increased over time, particularly after the party entered opposition. While PSOE promised to listen to 15-M in the summer of 2011, and to electorally channel some of their demands, it wasn’t until the party conference of 2013 that the party started to incorporate 15-M’s ideas and proposals into its discourse. As was mentioned in the previous section, solutions to the economic crisis, zero tolerance to corruption, and a broad reform of the political system were the most important goals pursued by 15-M participants and we can see that these three issues came to feature heavily in PSOE speeches and statements and also in their election manifestos, as revealed in table 4.

Table 4: 15-M issues in PSOE election manifestos, 2008-2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References to…</th>
<th>2008**</th>
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<th>2015**</th>
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</thead>
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<td>5</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>Democratisation</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The youth</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social democracy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A score is assigned for each reference to any of the issues found in the manifestos
** No. of pages in 2008 manifesto = 317; no. of pages in 2011 manifesto = 149; no. of pages in 2015 manifesto = 388.

4.2.3 Impact on PSOE policy PSOE policy in government, 2008-2011

PSOE economic policy in the years preceding the economic crisis had broadly been in line with that pursued by the PP government of 1996-2004. With Spanish economic growth outpacing the EU average from the mid-1990s, there appeared to be little reason for PSOE to reject the PP’s model that was largely based on the construction sector (Kennedy, 2011: 11). However, after initially underestimating the severity of the economic crisis, PSOE adopted a classical Keynesian policy response to the crash of 2008. The government implemented an early fiscal stimulus package which totalled €42 billion for the two years 2008 and 2009 (equivalent to 4% of Spain’s GDP), mostly in the form of tax cuts and extra welfare entitlements, as a counter-measure to what was depicted as a temporary weakening in domestic demand (Kennedy, 2011: 12). When the seriousness of the crisis eventually dawned
on PSOE, the government attempted to phase out the extraordinary stimulus that had been in effect during 2009, not by cutting spending, but through a revenue-based consolidation strategy in the 2010 budget (Dellepiane and Hardiman, 2012). The objective was to protect core social spending and to shield welfare beneficiaries from the effects of the downturn. However, in May 2010, the Spanish government, under pressure from the European Commission and the financial markets (who were threatening to lower its credit rating), announced two rounds of austerity measures aimed at slashing Spain’s deficit to 6% of GDP by the end of 2011, a cut of more than €50 billion over two years: the Plan de Acción Inmediata 2010 and the Plan de Austeridad 2011-2013 (Fishman, 2012). Together, these aimed to accelerate the speed with which the deficit would be reduced, by introducing spending cuts of 0.5% of GDP, cuts to civil service and politicians’, changes to pension entitlements, elimination of grants to infants, elimination of dependency benefits, a freeze on public sector recruitment, and cuts to the public capital programme (Kennedy, 2011).

In less than two years, PSOE had gone from implementing a Keynesian-like policy to adopting austerity, a policy shift that represented a radical break from the government’s prior fiscal stance. This shift was a very difficult moment for the ‘social Zapatero’ who had consistently insisted upon the primacy of social democratic priorities over market pressures (Dellepiane and Hardiman, 2012: 19). However, the 2011 budget was even harsher with austerity measures entailing a drastic cut in public investment in infrastructure, which was reduced by 30%, as well as a reduction in public sector personnel. Despite these austerity measures, PSOE attempted to tailor the package of austerity measures in a manner that was intended to protect its core electoral constituency, by protecting welfare and maintaining social spending (Dellepiane and Hardiman, 2012: 20). While ‘orthodox’ in its fiscal consolidation objectives and its embrace of spending cuts, it still relied on revenue increases for about 60% of its adjustment effort. Did the emergence of 15-M in the summer of 2011 lead to a re-think of PSOE’s policy direction?

**PSOE policy after the emergence of Movimiento 15-M, 2011-2016**

As already noted, PSOE policy focused more on social issues than economic issues during the 2011 general election campaign. The party’s manifesto stressed the importance of the welfare state and claimed that PSOE was the only party that would protect health, education, and unemployment rights. Like the party’s discourse at this time, PSOE attempted to play down their economic policy U-turn and avoided discussing economic policy as much as possible (Valera Ordaz and López García, 2014). Its policy for the 2011 general election
didn’t incorporate, or even engage with, any of 15-M’s most pressing policy demands, such as re-assessing the capitalist model or taking action on the growing levels of debt.

After PSOE’s defeat in the 2011 election, it took until 2013 before any new coherent party policy proposal was put forward. Like many European social democratic parties, PSOE struggled to form a clear economic policy away from austerity, particularly after implementing austerity measures itself. However, as it was now in opposition, PSOE found itself in a position to think of alternative policies, with it being less constrained and under less pressure from the EU and the financial markets. In 2013, the party announced new policy proposals with the party pledging to repeal the labour reform act enacted by the PP government a year previously, ensure the unemployed and pensioners don’t pay income tax, raise the tax-exempt threshold for workers, implement welfare reforms, increase the lowest pensions, guarantee access to public health care, and increase the funding of public education (Eurointelligence, 2013). There was however, a notable absence of any references to the Eurozone crisis or the role of the EU in policy-making.

After Sánchez was elected party leader in 2014, PSOE policy continued on the path of reform. One policy idea that became particularly popular in the summer of 2014 was that of a basic income which was popularised and put on the agenda by 15-M a year previously through a campaign they led (El Boletín.com, 2013). PSOE eventually called for a ‘Vital Minimum Income’ which, while falling short of a complete universal income, was later included in their 2015 manifesto (Díez, 2015; PSOE, 2015b). In August 2014, PSOE published ‘Plan E’, a plan for the Euro and for European countries with over 15% unemployment. In the document, PSOE called for greater involvement from the ECB, advocating that they should purchase public and private debt and aim for a higher inflation target for the Eurozone in order to facilitate the growth of consumption (Libre Mercado, 2014). Launching the document, Sánchez advocated for the creation of a ‘genuine European labour market’, for more funds to be spent on tackling youth unemployment, for Europe to re-industrialise, for a European banking union, for medium-term tax European financial transactions, and for the EU to combat tax havens (Libre Mercado, 2014).

In advance of the 2015 general elections, PSOE policy centred around what the party termed a ‘reformed version of social democracy’ (PSOE, 2015b). The party’s manifesto called for a ‘departure away from austerity’ with Sánchez labelling their policy plans as a ‘classical social democratic project, adapted to the 21st century’ (Díez and Sérvulo González, 2015). Key economic reforms included plans to ‘socially balance’ the tax system in order to ensure the
tax burden does not fall as heavily on labour as it has done in the past, increase taxes on large companies and ensure every company pays a minimum rate of 15% tax, raise wealth and inheritance tax, offer incentives to companies to undertake more research and innovation, and depreciate the Euro in order to make it more competitive (Díez and Sérulo González, 2015; Díez and Ayuso, 2015). PSOE also planned to implement social reforms, particularly in the area of corruption where the party promised to prohibit the appointment and force the resignation of officials, councillors and MPs who are under trial for a crime against the public administration, prohibit gifts for political leaders, and prohibit pardons for offences linked to alleged corruption (PSOE, 2015b). Furthermore, the party planned to return health care as a ‘right free to all’, reform the abortion law for 16 and 17 years olds, and repeal the labour reform’s main aspects (PSOE, 2015b). Many of PSOE’s new policies came from ideas 15-M put forward, particularly its policies on a minimum income, corruption, public health, tax, and pensions. However, the party stopped short at embracing the more radical 15-M proposals with the party remaining committed to the EU and social democracy.

4.3 Right2Water and the Labour Party

4.3.1 Background to Right2Water

‘The culture of protest has not been active in Irish life since independence’, wrote historian Roy Foster in the Financial Times in late 2013 on a piece questioning ‘why protest against the betrayal of so many standards in [Irish] public life has been so muted?’ (Foster, 2013). Foster wasn’t alone in posing such a question. Many political commentators, international observers, and academics wrote about the apparent Irish apathy and acceptance of austerity from 2009 onwards (Allen and O’Boyle, 2013; Brophy, 2013; O’Malley, 2014). Irish politicians also noted the lack of the protest with the then Minister of Finance, Brian Lenihan, commenting in 2009 that ‘in France you would have riots if you tried to do this’ when describing the steps the Irish government took in the early days of the economic crisis (Lucey, 2009). Ireland’s lack of protest was even picked up by Greek protestors who chanted ‘This is Greece, not Ireland! We the workers will resist!’ during an anti-austerity march in Greece in 2010 (Channel 4, 2010).

While Greece, Spain, and Portugal experienced protests, riots, and the birth of new social movements during the Eurozone crisis, Ireland became regarded as the ‘poster-child’ of austerity, accepting and implementing the measures placed upon it by the Troika without any mass demonstrations (Elliott, 2011; Wenkel, 2015). Despite the country’s 2008 banking crash being described as ‘the most expensive in banking history’ by the Governor of the Irish
Central Bank (Browne, 2011) and a series of austerity budgets from 2008 to 2014, which involved cumulative cuts to public spending, social welfare and raising of taxes of over €30 billion (Finn, 2015: 52), Irish citizens remained off the streets, or so went the narrative. The reality was that protests were organised, by pensioners, disability groups, anti-emigration youth groups, and students, although they were typically small, disorganised, and fragmented (Hearne, 2015b).

After five years of austerity, the narrative about Ireland seemed settled: it was the EU’s ‘model pupil’ with few demonstrations and no civil unrest with the head of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, hailing Irish people as ‘heroes’ for ‘taking the brunt’ of austerity policies (Hand, 2015). However, underneath the surface, cracks were beginning to show; the number of people suffering from deprivation had increased from 12% of the population in 2007 to 30.5% in 2013 (CSO, 2013) while more than 10% of the population had emigrated since the crisis (Cahill, 2014). After the government successfully rushed through legislation in late 2013 to set up Irish Water – the bailout agreement of 2010 between the Fianna Fáil-led government and the Troika included the introduction of household water charges – it was announced that water charges were going to come into effect from January 1st 2014 (previously water consumption for households was covered by general taxation). Communities, predominantly in working-class areas, began organising against the installations of water meters in early 2014. These groups communicated primarily online through Facebook and developed strong anti-austerity sentiments – from the beginning, it was clear that it was not just about water charges. Few of these community-based groups had any formal structures but in September 2014, they came together alongside a few trade unions to form the Right2Water coalition which declared itself a ‘public campaign by activists, citizens, community groups, trade unionists, and political parties/individuals who are calling for the government to recognise and legislate for access to water as a human right’ and to ‘abolish the planned introduction of water charges’ (Right2Water, 2014).

Right2Water began with a petition calling on the government to abolish domestic water charges and respect the people’s ‘human right to water’ which collected over 35,000

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18 The bailout of the private banking sector and developers cost the Irish public €64 billion, equivalent to just under a third of Ireland’s GDP (Hearne, 2015a: 309)
19 Data from the European Social Survey reveals that Irish citizens were protesting at higher levels than their European counterparts during this period. In 2012, 11.5% of the Irish population had taken part in a lawful demonstration in the previous 12 months. This figure compared to 3.1% in the UK and 6.9% in Portugal for the same year, two countries where austerity policies were also implemented (ESS Round 6, 2012)
20 Ireland went from having the highest net immigration levels in Europe in 2007 to having the highest rate of emigration in 2014. 17.5% of Irish-born people over the age of fifteen now live abroad – the highest proportion of all OECD countries (Kenny, 2015)
signatures. It then went about organising the first Right2Water national demonstration in October 2014 with around 30,000 protestors expected to turn out, a high figure for an Irish protest. In the end between 80,000 and 100,000 turned out according to the organisers with the demonstration followed up with four more ‘day of action’ protests in November and December 2014 and March and August 2015. These five Right2Water demonstrations have had between 30,000-140,000 people at each one, unprecedented protest numbers in modern Irish history. From the outset, the movement was more than just about water charges with a survey carried out on Right2Water participants finding that ‘austerity has gone too far’ was the most cited reason (60%) for protesting (Hearne, 2015b).

Despite Right2Water outlining intentions to further develop the movement, much of 2015 was dogged by political infighting with division over what tactics to use and whether to institutionalise and contest elections. After a brief hiatus while these two internal debates played themselves out, with no major demonstrations called by Right2Water for several months, the campaign organised a conference in June 2015, with guest speakers from Syriza and Podemos. A draft programme covering housing, employment, health care, education, debt, jobs, and democratic reform was agreed upon which led to the formation of Right2Change, intended to be the ‘political movement’ of Right2Water (Right2Change, 2015). A fifth well-attended Right2Water march at the end of the summer in 2015 showed that there had been no decline in mobilisation while the movement spent the latter half of the year holding open meetings across the country and producing a Right2Change policy document. Two further demonstrations were held in January and February 2016 while over 100 candidates (of 552 in total) running in the February 2016 general election signed up to Right2Change’s policy principles.21

Right2Water proved Foster’s and Lenihan’s claims about Irish citizens’ apathy incorrect. The movement emerged just as Ireland was being praised in Europe for its acceptance of austerity and its ability to recover. The impact of austerity had reached a tipping point in early 2014 – from the housing crisis and youth unemployment to emigration and the cumulative impacts of spending cuts, the water charges were viewed as an austerity measure too far. Right2Water became Ireland’s first citizen-led organiser of demonstrations in some time with it providing those feeling excluded from the recovery and suffering from the legacy of austerity an opportunity to highlight their grievances. It introduced people who had never protested before

21 Right2Change policy principles are on the following issues: debt justice, democratic reform, economics, education, equality, health, housing, jobs and decent work, national resources, sustainable environment, water (Right2Change, 2015)
to a new form of political action, with a majority of participants (54%) taking part in demonstrations for the first time ever (Hearne, 2015b: 2). As table 5 shows, the percentage of the Irish population taking part in protests increased from 5.9% to 13.1% in the space of 10 years. What is particularly noteworthy is that over a half of respondents (54%) indicated that they had voted for the Labour Party in the 2011 general election, making it the most popular party (in 2011) among anti-water charges protestors (Hearne, 2015b).

**Table 5: Percent of Irish population that take part in lawful public demonstrations***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Taking part in a lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data from European Social Surveys, 2004-2014 (ESS, Rounds 2 to 7)

**4.3.2 Impact on Labour Party discourse**

**Labour discourse, in opposition and government, 2008-2014**

From 2008, when the Irish economy first entered recession, until the general election of February 2011, the most outspoken critic of the Fianna Fáil led-government’s austerity policies in Irish politics was the Labour Party. At every opportunity, Labour criticised the government’s economic decisions, particularly the spending cuts and tax increases in the four austerity budgets between 2008 and 2010. The party was the only party in the Dáil (the lower house of the Irish parliament) to vote against the Bank Guarantee of September 2008 (a broad state guarantee of Irish domestic banks) while it was also critical of the terms associated with the 2010 EU/IMF bailout. In a speech attacking the 2009 budget, party leader Eamon Gilmore summarised Labour’s position on austerity when he said:

*No matter where the recession starts...the cry goes up, ‘Let there be pain. Pain for whom?’ It will not be the stockbrokers or the bankers but the patients on trolleys... We are told it is time for tough decisions, but tough for whom? It will be tough for people losing their jobs and having their entitlements cut. They are the people who will have it tough.* (Gilmore, 2008b)
Labour discourse over the next few years continued in a similar vein to Gilmore’s 2008 comments. The party was by far the most vocal opponents to austerity, from mid-2008 to February 2011, 52% of all speeches against austerity policies in the Dáil came from Labour TDs (members of parliament), despite not being the largest opposition party. As the recession deepened in 2009 and 2010, Labour’s rhetoric against austerity intensified with deputy leader, Joan Burton, remarking that austerity has ‘brought the return of the emigrant aeroplane’ and that ‘there is pain for the poor [but] money for the rich, particularly for the bankers’ (Burton, 2010). In the lead up to the election, Labour continued with their vocal opposition to austerity calling it ‘the naked triumph of ideology over economic pragmatism’ (Burton, 2011) while the most memorable soundbite of the election campaign came from Labour leader Gilmore when he said that the electorate will be making a decision between doing it ‘Labour’s way or Frankfurt’s way’ (McGee, 2011). Although Labour made radical, veering on populist, statements during this time, it ruled out co-operating or going into government with Sinn Féin, a party to its left, and other ‘hard-left protest parties and ragbags’ (Puirséil, 2012).

It wasn’t long after the election that there was a noticeable change in Labour discourse with the party unanimously deciding to go into coalition with Fine Gael. The coalition’s ‘Programme of Government’ led to one socialist TD remarking that Labour should be prepared to ‘face placards in the streets because that is what is needed to stop the austerity programme that is coming down on the ordinary people’ (Collins, 2011). While it took longer than expected before Labour had to face such placards, the party drastically moderated its discourse in its first three years of government. Like PSOE in the Spanish election campaign of 2011, Labour attempted to evade debate about the government’s austerity policies, and tried to avoid using the term ‘austerity’ as much as possible. Phrases such as ‘difficult choices’ and ‘no magic solution’, were repeatedly used by Labour politicians with those criticising the government’s economic policies branded as living in a ‘fantasy land which is a comfortable place to be as it allows one to preach that people do not need to take medicine’ (Howlin, 2011).

From being the most outspoken critique of austerity from 2008 to 2011, Labour was now constantly having to defend and support austerity policies that were in fact more regressive than the previous government’s (ESRI, 2015). Not one Labour politician questioned austerity during this time (although four TDs that left the party between 2011 and 2013 did end up

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22 This compared to only 5% of anti-austerity speeches coming from Labour’s future coalition partners, Fine Gael, while 32% of anti-austerity speeches came from Sinn Féin and 11% came from Independent TDs.
speaking out against austerity).\textsuperscript{23} Entering 2014, Labour labelled the new year a ‘post-austerity era’, not anticipating a mass anti-austerity movement would develop that very same year. Just as communities were beginning to organise in opposition to the water charges, Labour’s discourse in the first half of 2014 centred on stability, jobs and, recovery.

\textit{Labour discourse after the emergence of Right2Water, 2014-2016}

With only 18 months left in the government’s term, and suffering poor results in the 2014 European Parliament and local elections, did Labour try and use Right2Water to distinguish itself from its centre-right coalition partner Fine Gael? Or did Labour continue to defend their austerity policies?

Labour politicians were certainly taken aback by the emergence of a mass protest movement, coming at a time when the narrative about Ireland seemed settled and the economy was beginning to grow again. Despite some small, fragmented protests, the party’s relationship with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the traditional organiser of large demonstrations in Ireland, ensured that there were no trade union organised protests against austerity between the years 2011 and 2013. As working-class communities began to organise against the installation of water meters throughout 2014, Labour TDs were singled out as ‘traitors’ to the working class, particularly on social media. Prior to the setting up of Right2Water, and the large organised protests that followed in late 2014, Labour attempted to play down the strength of the community-based groups that were taking shape across the country, and instead spoke about the economic recovery. After months of local community protests, and a few days before the first Right2Water demonstration in October 2014, the new Labour leader, Joan Burton, remarked that ‘all of the protestors I have seen seem to have extremely expensive phones, tablets and video cameras’ (Brophy, 2014). While the comment was taken out of context, community protestors nevertheless interpreted this remark as implying that because they were in possession of smartphones, they weren’t experiencing the effects of austerity or living in deprivation with Burton’s comment leading to a torrent of derision (McNamara, 2014). Unlike in Spain where PSOE took the demands of 15-M quite seriously from the off, Labour appeared to dismiss the protestors’ anger and criticism, disregarding them as they did with smaller leftists parties in 2011 as ‘hard-left protest parties and ragbags’.

After Right2Water organised, Labour wasn’t able to dismiss the public’s opposition to water charges, and austerity more generally, as readily as they did with the community-based

\textsuperscript{23} In the first year of the newly elected Dáil, from March 2011 to March 2012, Sinn Féin, socialist, and independent TDs took up where Labour left off with 47% of anti-austerity speeches coming from socialist TDs, 34% from Sinn Féin, and 18% from independents.

41
groups. However, Labour failed to comment, either in the Dáil, in a press release statement, or through interview, on Right2Water’s first two rallies that took place in October and early November 2014. A few weeks later in mid-November, Labour were eventually forced to respond after anti-water charges protestors blocked Joan Burton’s car with a sit-down protest after she spoke at an event in Jobstown, a working-class suburb of Dublin. While the protest was not organised by Right2Water, Labour’s discourse on anti-water charges protestors, including Right2Water activists, immediately hardened with Labour severely criticising the actions of the demonstrators. Reflecting on the Jobstown protest, Burton remarked that ‘when I was in that car I was worried about the parallels with fascism’ (Kelly, F., 2014). The following month, Labour Senator John Kelly described protestors at a Right2Water rally as ‘thugs who wanted nothing other than to cause anarchy in this country’ (O’Regan, 2014) while another Labour Senator described Right2Water activists on social-media as a ‘cohort of keyboard warriors’ (Gilroy, 2014). Labour’s stance on the protestors was similar to that of Fine Gael’s and the mainstream media’s, with the movement’s actions criticised heavily in the months following the first three large Right2Water protests and the Jobstown incident. Despite being described as ‘professional protestors’, ‘thugs’ and ‘fascists’ by Labour politicians (Roche, 2015; Ryan, 2015) and accused of being infiltrated by IRA dissidents and ‘spreading like a virus’ in the media (Cusack, 2014; Sunday Times, 2015), the Right2Water movement continued into 2015.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, Labour’s rhetoric of recovery and economic stability intensified. As the party hardened its stance against Right2Water, it too hardened its stance when it came to defending its austerity policies. After attempting to avoid any talk or discussion of austerity from 2011 to 2013, Labour was now justifying the decisions and spending cuts it took during those first three years in government in an assured and confident manner. Labour used the Right2Water movement to show what the alternative to a Fine Gael-Labour coalition would look like: chaotic and populist. In the wake of mass Right2Water demonstrations, Labour spoke about the ‘chaos’ and ‘anarchy’ that would occur if the Fine Gael/Labour coalition were voted out of office and parties that supported the Right2Water movement were voted in. This narrative was made clear in comments by Labour Ministers and TDs such as that in 2015 by Minister Brendan Howlin when he said bluntly of the social movement ‘consider this anarchy alongside the case for stability’ (Howlin, 2015a). By 2015, Ireland had

24 One Fine Gael TD went even further than Burton, saying that the ‘rise in [anti-water charges] demonstrations would lead to an “ISIS situation” ’ (O’Connell, 2014b)

25 The Jobstown incident led to the arrest of 19 of the protestors, including Paul Murphy, a socialist TD. All 19 have been brought to trial of chargers of false imprisonment. In total, 188 arrests have been made since November 2014 in regard to anti-water charges protests (McEnroe, 2015)
the fastest growing economy in Europe and this, along with lowering levels of unemployment (down from 15% in 2011 to 8.6% in early 2016), dominated Labour economic discourse. While the party’s social discourse was dominated by discussions on abortion, drugs de-criminalisation, and same-sex marriage.

Entering the general election campaign of early 2016, Labour discourse centred around three main issues: economic recovery, social issues, and employment. The party further moderated its message with Minister Howlin remarking that ‘a vote for Labour is a vote for balance - a balance between left and right, a balance between liberal and conservative’ (Howlin, 2016) while party leader Burton encouraged voters to vote number one Labour and number two Fine Gael (under the PR-STV electoral system, a voter can give multiple preferences). Few of Right2Water’s demands outside of the issue of water charges were openly discussed by Labour with the social movement not leading to any sort of U-turn when it came to Labour discourse on issues such as reform, greater democratisation, debt justice, and austerity. As can be seen in table 6, these issues were actually more prominent in Labour’s 2011 manifesto, despite the 2016 manifesto being 36 pages longer. While references to the recovery, health, and housing increased, issues that Right2Water campaigned on such as debt justice, reform, and greater democratisation featured less in the 2016 manifesto.

**Table 6: Right2Water issues in Labour election manifestos, 2011-2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References to…</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austerity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water (charges)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater democratisation</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt justice/renegotiation of EU-IMF deal</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recovery</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A score is assigned for each reference to any of the issues found in the manifestos

** No. of pages in 2011 manifesto = 96; no. of pages in 2016 manifesto = 132.
4.3.3 Impact on Labour Party policy

Labour policy, in opposition and government, 2008-2014

As Labour’s discourse changed greatly during their years in opposition and government, so too did their policy. Labour leader Eamon Gilmore set out his party’s economic policy when the crisis first hit in mid-2008, and it remained consistent until the end of 2010, with him calling on the government to ‘bring forward a medium-term fiscal strategy that will restore order to the public finances on a phased basis, ‘maintain investment in key economic and social areas’ and ensure ‘necessary efficiencies are achieved without impacting on frontline services’ (Gilmore, 2008a). However by early 2011, Labour was only half-heartily advocating for Keynesian-like policies to be adopted, as while arguing in its 2011 manifesto that the Fianna Fáil-led government’s ‘austerity programme does not allow sufficient room for economic growth and employment creation’, Labour didn’t fully argue for tax cuts and spending increases, rather calling for the more ‘orthodox’ strategy of fiscal austerity, tax increases and spending cuts (Labour Party, 2011: 13). Labour did however call for a ‘stimulus package’ to be implemented as the ‘excessive austerity in the Fianna Fáil plan, endorsed by Fine Gael, poses an unacceptable risk to economic recovery’ and challenged the ‘there is no alternative’ consensus accepted by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, arguing the ‘need for a plan B’ (Labour Party, 2011: 13). Central to the party’s economic policy was the renegotiation of the EU/IMF bailout deal with Joan Burton arguing that ‘a host of commentators…have concluded that the terms of the EU-IMF deal are impossibly onerous for Ireland’ (Burton, 2011). If elected, Labour promised to ‘engage with the EU and the IMF to renegotiate the deal, so as to achieve fair and realistic terms for Ireland and for the Irish people’ (Labour Party, 2011: 9). Labour also argued that a balance needed to be achieved between tax increases and spending cuts when tackling the deficit, with their policy advocating for tax increases constituting around 48% of the required budgetary adjustments (and the other 52% on spending cuts) which compared to Fine Gael’s policy that tax increases should only account for 25% of the required budgetary adjustment (Lucey, 2014).

On the issue of charging for water, the party made it clear in their manifesto that ‘Labour does not favour water charges, which do not address the immediate needs of those who currently receive intermittent or poor water supplies’ (Labour Party, 2011: 29).

As we have seen in the previous section, Labour’s discourse changed quite rapidly after going into coalition with Fine Gael. While Labour were successful in forcing Fine Gael to make budgetary concessions – tax increases have comprised about 42-44% of all budgetary components...
adjustments since 2011 (much closer to Labour’s desired 48% than Fine Gael’s 25%) – the party was forced to make numerous policy U-turns in the first few years in government, no more so than on water charges (Lucey, 2014). From firmly rejecting the idea of water charges in their 2011 manifesto, Labour was now overseeing the setting up of Irish Water in government. In May 2014, party leader Gilmore defended this and other policy reversals by insisting in an interview that ‘if we hadn’t done what we did in the last three years we would probably, as many people predicted, be into a second bailout with the prospect of 30% reduction in public expenditure and payments’ (O’Connell, 2014a). A month after making this comment, and a few months before Right2Water was formed, Labour TD Alan Kelly was appointed Minister for the Environment, with responsibility over Irish Water. This is significant as the smaller coalition partners are usually limited on how much influence they have on government policy, but with Kelly now Minister for the Environment, Labour obtained greater control over the future direction of Irish Water. Did Right2Water therefore have a greater impact on Labour policy?

**Labour policy after the emergence of Right2Water, 2014-2016**

As we have seen, Labour was taken aback by the first couple of Right2Water protests in the latter half of 2014, with the sheer size of the demonstrations putting enormous pressure on the government to respond. What’s more, just a week after the first major protest, it was announced that two thirds of all households had failed to register for Irish Water before the October 21st deadline with the government forced to extend the deadline by a month (Hearne, 2015b: 6). On November 19th, just before the extended deadline, the government announced a substantial U-turn, details of which were released in a statement by Minister Kelly titled ‘This is a significant moment for the country’ (Kelly, A., 2014). In it, Kelly stated that the water charges were to be reduced, with two flat rates replacing the intended metering system. This included capping the charge at €160 for a single adult household and €260 for all other households until 2018. The fees were to be subsidised with a water conservation grant of €100 per year for eligible households, leaving the net cost per year at €60 for a single adult and €160 for other households.26 Furthermore, in an attempt to address Right2Water’s concerns about privatisation, the government introduced legislation that a plebiscite would have to be held if a government planned to privatise Irish Water. With direct reference to Right2Water protestors, Labour leader Burton remarked that ‘we have listened to concerns and frustrations expressed regarding Irish Water’ and that ‘we have delivered a new charging

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26 A metering system would have worked out costing a couple living together using the expected average of water usage to be charged €415 a year (Money Guide Ireland, 2014)
structure that is affordable and that provides certainty and clarity about what people will have to pay’ (Burton, 2014). However, Right2Water responded by insisting the concessions didn’t go far enough, that it was always more than just about water, and the movement continued into the new year.

In the broader policy field, Labour maintained the policies it had pursued prior to the emergence of Right2Water. Labour politicians stressed that the years 2014 and 2015 were a new ‘post-austerity era’ and that the decisions taken by the government between 2011 and 2013 ‘allowed us to make the break away from austerity’ (Nolan, 2014). The 2015 ‘post-austerity’ budget however offered income gains to the top 40% of households but continued losses for the remaining 60% (Finn, 2015). And while Burton said that the ‘tangible evidence of the recovery is the fiscal space available for 2016 – the scope we have to increase public spending and reduce taxes’, more than half of Irish citizens (56%) claimed that they have not felt the benefit of the recovery while 79% believed the recovery has been on a two tier bases with numerous banners at Right2Water marches featuring the slogans ‘what recovery?’ and ‘recovery for who?’ (Burton, 2015b; Murphy, 2016; Hearne, 2015b). As Right2Water called for a ‘fairer recovery’, and for debate on housing, education, democratic reform, debt, and health, Labour’s economic policy if anything hardened and by early 2016, the party promised that if re-elected into government, they would implement further tax cuts for middle-class earners (Doyle, 2016) despite a majority of the population favouring public investment over tax cuts (Murphy, 2016).

While Labour, as the smaller coalition partner, were always up against the centre-right Fine Gael in getting their policy proposals implemented, the party’s economic policy edged more to the centre from 2011 onwards and was in no way halted back to the left after the emergence of Right2Water, if anything moving further to the centre-right. Labour’s social policy also remained virtually unchanged, with emphasis placed on post-materialist issues, such as same-sex marriage and drugs de-criminalisation, rather than issues such as health and education while there was no policy debate on democratic reform, debt justice, or emigration in the 2016 election campaign despite Right2Water’s efforts. None of Right2Water’s policy demands, apart from water charges, were addressed by Labour with the party continuing with the same economic policies pursued between 2011 and 2013 as they did in between 2014 and early 2016. It should also be added that Labour’s policies before taking office in 2011 were similar in many aspects to those of Right2Water, as we have seen, with the party critical of austerity and the impact it can have, yet Labour made no intention to make a return to such anti-austerity policies after the emergence of Right2Water.
4.4 Analysis

As previously highlighted in this paper, causality is a major issue when it comes to measuring social movement impact, particularly measuring social movement impact on parties where numerous variables can have effects, as we saw when reviewing the party change literature. However, as this paper has looked at party behaviour both before and after the peak mobilisation of social movements, it’s possible to make some tentative generalisations as some clear patterns emerge. What the two cases in this paper reveal is that social movements can not only have a considerable impact on both party discourse and policy but that social movements can also have other kinds of implications for parties, even when parties don’t support or engage with a social movement.

Unlike with previous Spanish leftist social movements, which PSOE supported and co-opted some of its activists, PSOE was unable to offer support or even cooperate with 15-M due to the movement’s apartidista nature and the fact that much of 15-M’s anger was directed at PSOE. Despite this, the party still attempted to channel some of the movement’s demands as 15-M exerted pressure on PSOE to commit to reforming both its own internal structure and the Spanish state. 15-M put many issues on PSOE’s agenda, particularly in the areas of corruption, tax, reform, and a basic income. The question is whether PSOE would have incorporated such issues and proposals into their discourse and policies regardless of the presence of an anti-austerity movement. It’s difficult to say for certain but when reviewing PSOE pre-2011 and post-2011, many issues the party took on were closely linked to those 15-M campaigned on. For instance, there were only 4 and 5 references to corruption in PSOE’s 2008 and 2011 manifestos respectively but 71 references to it in the party’s 2015 manifesto. While corruption in Spanish politics has always been an issue, it was 15-M that really forced parties and politicians to confront corruption with ‘action on corruption’ one of the most important goals pursed by 15-M participants.

15-M benefited from three open windows of opportunity: PSOE being in opposition, PSOE’s growing electoral vulnerability, and public opinion in their favour. The fourth condition that the literature found to be important when explaining movement-party interaction was ideological coherence, and while there were some shared views between PSOE and 15-M, PSOE stopped short at fully embracing 15-M’s more radical ideas. For instance, while PSOE distanced themselves from austerity and neo-liberalism from 2013 onwards, the party didn’t reject outright the capitalist system while they maintained a pro-EU stance, unlike 15-M who repeatedly criticised the EU and its economic model. PSOE struggled in its attempts to frame
itself as the party of both reform, in the hope of appealing to 15-M and more leftist voters, and stability, in the hope of appealing to disgruntled PP voters and its more centrist voters. PSOE reverted to the ‘old-school’ strategy of demanding the tactical vote of the left but by not taking any one clear ideological stance, the party failed to convince the electorate of its relevance at a time when many voters were looking for change (Kennedy, 2015). This reveals the constraints all parties operate under, not just those in government, and the challenge they face due to partisan realignment and citizen withdrawal Mair wrote about (2013). PSOE remained part of a European social democratic party family that seems unable to advance an alternative policy capable of obtaining the support of the electorate.

The case of the Labour Party on the other hand is quite different. The party’s more moderate centre-left character, the ideological distance between the party and Right2Water, and its semi-stable long-term electoral performance, made it always unlikely Right2Water would have a major influence on the party or force the party to re-consider its austerity policies. What appeared to be the greatest factor for the lack of engagement however was the fact that Labour was in government during the time period in question. As we saw, Labour politicians were outspoken, and arguably populist, in their statements on austerity during the years 2008 to early 2011. ‘Labour’s way or Frankfurt’s way’ was the infamous slogan used by its party leader in the 2011 election campaign, a rally cry that wouldn’t have been out of place at a Right2Water demonstration if one replaced the word ‘Ireland’ with ‘Labour’. Such anti-austerity sentiments disappeared immediately from Labour discourse after the party went into government with its discourse not changing after the emergence of Right2Water in 2014. On closer inspection however, it appears that Right2Water did have an impact on the party, albeit not the one might predict a leftist social movement to have on a social democratic party.

Right2Water ultimately had a twofold impact on the Labour Party: it first consolidated it as a centrist party whose voters are primarily liberal and middle-class and it second strengthened the party’s narrative of stability, recovery, and maturity. While Labour faced pressure from Sinn Féin and other smaller socialist parties in the last decade as remaining the party of the working class, Labour’s response to the Right2Water movement consolidated their move from a party close to the working class and trade unions to a party that draws on most of its support from an urban middle-class. In its descriptions of the protestors, Labour sided with the establishment and the more right-wing parties, referring to them as ‘thugs’, ‘fascists’, and ‘professional protestors’, which led to working-class voters turning away from the party. By the end of 2015, only 6% of S2DE (working-class and the unemployed) voters would vote for Labour compared to the 29% of S2DE voters that would vote for Sinn Féin (B&A, 2015).
This compares to the 23% of S2DE voters that voted Labour and the 14% that voted Sinn Féin in the 2011 election (Hutcheson, 2011: 14). Right2Water led to Labour taking a more centrist position and as public opinion didn’t change as a result of the Right2Water movement (ideology remained centrist while there was no major drop in support for Ireland’s established parties like there was for the PP and PSOE in Spain), Labour didn’t feel that they would be at a disadvantage by not changing their centrist discourse, and instead remained committed to its more liberal voters by focusing on social and post-material, rather than material, issues from 2014 onwards.

Secondly, Labour’s discourse on stability, recovery, and maturity strengthened in response to Right2Water as they used the movement to show what an alternative to a Fine Gael/Labour coalition would look like: full of chaos, anarchy, and populism. The party remained anchored to its pro-austerity stance even after the emergence of Right2Water. The Right2Water movement provided Labour the opportunity to frame themselves as ‘adults’ that were ‘responsible’, unlike Right2Water who are a ‘small group of people…who just want anarchy’ and who ‘live in a fantasy world’ (Connolly, 2015). Ultimately, Labour discourse changed from the electorate having a choice between ‘Labour’s way or Frankfurt’s way’ to a choice between ‘chaos or stability’ (Howlin, 2015c).

So, what factors caused PSOE to embrace the ideas and demands of 15-M more than Labour did with Right2Water? X1 (whether the party is in opposition) appeared to have a strong effect insofar that a party in opposition was more likely to engage with or support a social movement (and thus become impacted by it) but it appeared to be less of factor when it came to impact in a broader sense. For instance, Labour didn’t support or engage with Right2Water in any meaningful way, yet it was still impacted by the movement with Right2Water leading Labour, and the Irish government, to change policy on water charges and consolidate the party’s centrist position on austerity. PSOE in opposition on the other hand were much more open to taking on board 15-M’s ideas and proposals. In saying that, it’s important not to overstate the constraining effect of being in government can have as PSOE did positively engage with 15-M when they were still in government from May to December 2011 (although their 2011 manifesto didn’t incorporate much of 15-M’s demands).

X2 (whether the party is electorally vulnerable) appeared to have an effect, but one that was harder to identify. PSOE was considerably more vulnerable than Labour during the years the social movements were active with PSOE attempting to appeal to 15-M participants in the hope of preventing a further decline in their electoral support. Labour on the other hand
maintained its core support of around 10% and despite the party being voted by many of those that participated in Right2Water, Labour didn’t appeal for their support or channel any of the movement’s demands electorally, despite still being somewhat electorally vulnerable.

X3 (whether the party shares ideological traits with the movement) appeared to have a strong effect as PSOE, who were closer to 15-M than Labour were to Right2Water, were much more willing to embrace ideas the anti-austerity movement put forward, particularly around reform, basic income, and corruption. In contrast, there was little ideological coherence between Labour and the left-leaning Right2Water with Labour shifting towards the centre during its years in government and remaining there after the rise of Right2Water. The current situation in Spain where PSOE are in discussions to enter coalition with Podemos in early 2016 is inconceivable in Ireland, with Labour stating that it won’t consider entering government with a party to its left (all of whom have been active in Right2Water). The centrist tendencies of Labour remained strong during its term in government, making cooperation with Right2Water highly improbable, unlike for PSOE whose overlap with 15-M on many issues made them more willing to channel some of the movement’s demands electorally in the hope it would lead to an increase in support.

X4 (whether public opinion shifts in a direction towards supporting the general aims of the social movement) also appeared to have a strong effect. From early on, PSOE realised that a majority of the Spanish population were behind 15-M with the party losing support the moment 15-M appeared on the political scene. With public opinion supporting 15-M, PSOE acted favourably towards the movement, fearing that failing to do so would have a detrimental impact on the party in the lead up to the 2011 general election. However, PSOE found it difficult to balance appealing to both far-left voters (of whom there was more of after the emergence of 15-M) and an ever increasing number of centrist voters (see figure 4). On the other hand, Labour didn’t feel the need to get behind Right2Water with public opinion not shifting to the left, despite the rise of a leftist social movement, while there was no increase in support for left-wing parties. While public opinion was behind the movement when it came to the issue of water charges, the public was less engaged with Right2Water’s anti-austerity message with Labour not believing it would be advantageous for the party if it chose to adapt a more anti-austerity stance. In saying that, the fact that public opinion was behind the movement on water charges played a part in causing the government to change policy, a U-turn that rarely happened during the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government.
This paper has found that social movements can have different kinds of impacts on political parties. As we have seen, just because Labour didn’t support Right2Water, didn’t mean that Right2Water had no impact on the party. It is therefore necessary for researchers to be more specific when it comes to the concept ‘impact’, with it possible to identify two types of impact: (i) **intended impact** – when a social movement has an impact on a party that leads to the party supporting the ideas of the movement or taking on board its proposals/demands (eg. a leftist movement causing a party to take a more left-wing stance or an environmental movement causing a party to take a more green-friendly stance) and (ii) **unintended impact** – when a social movement has an impact on a party that is not to the movement’s desired effect (eg. an anti-immigration social movement causing a party to take a more pro-immigration stance or an anti-austerity movement causing a party to become more steadfast in their defence of austerity). From the paper’s comparison study, we can say that the four independent variables can lead to both intended and unintended impact taking place.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate whether anti-austerity social movements have an impact on social democratic parties and explore the conditions such impact is more likely to take place. From the outset, this paper made it clear that social movements having impact on political parties is rarely an articulated movement goal but with the two actors existing and acting in the same political arena, they are always going to come into contact with each other with impact therefore a possibility. Despite this, the impact social movements may have on political parties was largely absent from both the party change and social movement outcome literatures. This paper aimed to shed some light on this long overlooked interaction.

Ultimately the paper found that the relationship between social movements and political parties is both under-theorised and under-researched, and mistakenly so. The few studies that have looked at the interaction between social movements and parties have typically looked at left-wing parties, finding that such leftist parties have been more inclined to take on board social movements’ demands and provide support to the movements’ mobilisations. However, while this may have been true for New Social Movements concerned with post-materialist issues (such as the ecologist and LGBT rights movements), social movements that were material in their demands were largely left unstudied (arguably because there have been so few large-scale materialist social movements since the 1960s).

Among the two cases examined, it was indeed the most-likely case, PSOE, that showed higher responsiveness to the anti-austerity movement as compared to the Labour Party, proving the hypothesis correct. However, this paper also showed that the traditional explanations for the social movement-party interactions are far from exhaustive. First, the explanations fail to account for unintended impacts, i.e. impacts that are not desired by a social movement. Right2Water had an impact on Labour but it was far from the intended impact with Labour becoming more defensive of its austerity policies and centrist after the emergence of the leftist Right2Water movement. It is necessary for researchers to develop a more nuanced and thorough definition of impact when examining party-movement relationships in the future. Secondly, the explanations fail to explain why social movement impact on parties does not translate into complete partisan support. The case of PSOE presented a most-likely case of social movement impact but despite 15-M’s impact being significant at levels of party discourse and policy, PSOE did not fully embrace 15-M’s positions with it remaining as ‘the left that attracts the centre’. This shows the limitations of the political opportunity structure theory – despite windows of opportunities open for 15-M,
PSOE did not get fully behind the movement. Thirdly, the explanations fail to take into account specific and unique characteristics of parties. While both PSOE and Labour are social democratic parties, they differ in terms of radicalism, openness, and their historical development, all which were crucial in determining whether the party would embrace the movement, with the political opportunity structure approach unable to take into account the party's internal structure, struggles, and decision-making processes.

This paper re-affirms the importance of public opinion in the party change literature but overall, the four conditions, while relevant in explaining social movement impact on parties to an extent, fail to explain the complexity of the interactions between social movements and political parties. Both an enhanced methodological approach and a theory solely focusing on social movement impact on parties (rather than social movement impact/outcomes more generally) are required in order to study social movement-political party interaction more systematically in the future. This paper has revealed that while social movements may indeed have both intended and unintended impact on parties, current methodological and theoretical difficulties prohibit researchers from making any generalisable findings.
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**Appendix A**

*Vote share of social democratic parties in general elections in EU countries*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean vote share 1945-2015</th>
<th>Mean vote share in last two elections</th>
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<td>↓ 5.0</td>
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* EU countries that were part of the Eastern Bloc, the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia were omitted as no free elections took place in such countries until the early 1990s and therefore, no long-term trends can be identified.
** Cyprus general elections from 1970
*** Spanish and Portuguese general elections from 1975
Appendix B

Vote share of PSOE and the PP in opinion polls and general elections 2006-2015*

* Data from Sigma Dos opinion polls, 2006-2015 (and 2008, 2011, and 2015 general elections)