

ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO

Permanent and Temporary Workers: Trust in Trade Unions in Times of Boom and Bust

Indefinidos y temporales: la confianza en los sindicatos en
tiempos de bonanza y de crisis

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses to what extent labour flexibility and the latest Great Recession opened a gap between stable and precarious workers with respect to their trust in unions. For this purpose, four surveys from the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research conducted during both the economic boom years and the recent Great Recession are utilised. A comparison of means and several linear regression analyses are applied. On a scale from 0 to 10, trust in unions fell from 4.5 in 2005 to 2.5 in 2014. However, the data indicate that neither labour flexibility nor the Great Recession fractured temporary and permanent workers with respect to their trust in unions.

KEYWORDS: trade unions; unionism; stable; precarious; precariat; permanent contracts; temporary employment.

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RESUMEN

El artículo analiza si la flexibilidad laboral y la última Gran Recesión abrieron una brecha entre los trabajadores estables y precarios con respecto a su confianza en los sindicatos en España. Para ello se utilizan cuatro encuestas del Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas llevadas a cabo en los años de bonanza y de la última Gran Recesión. Se comparan medias y se aplican varios análisis de regresión lineal. En una escala de 0 a 10, la confianza en los sindicatos en España cayó del 4,5 en 2005 al 2,5 en 2014. Sin embargo, los datos indican que ni la flexibilidad laboral ni la Gran Recesión fracturaron a los trabajadores estables y precarios en relación a su confianza en los sindicatos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: sindicatos; sindicalismo; estables; precarios; precariado; temporales; temporalidad.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, sociology has investigated the impact that shifts in occupational structures have on trade unions (Van Gyes, Witte and Pasture, 2001; Martín Artilles, 2023), the purported union crisis (Lipset and Meltz, 2004; Fernie and Metcalf, 2005; Martínez Pastor, 2022) and the nexus between unionism and civil society (Heery, Williams and Abbott, 2012). There have been studies evaluating the performance of unions and their relevance in the 21st century (Boeri, Brugiavini and Calmfors, 2001; Bennett and Kaufman, 2007) as well as the emerging organisational dynamics within union movements (Chun and Agarwala, 2016; Roiz Ceballos, 2022). In Spain, considerable attention has placed on how pivotal social changes of the 21st century, such as immigration (Cachón Rodríguez, 2000; Haba Morales, 2002; Baylos Grau, 2009), work-life balance (Miguélez *et al.*, 2007) and non-standard employment arrangements (Francesconi and García Serrano, 2004) have influenced trade unionism. Analyses have also delved into union membership, a traditional topic in union studies (Gutiérrez, 1994; Simón, 2003; Martín Artilles *et al.*, 2004; Cebolla Boado and Ortiz, 2014), participation in trade union elections (Malo, 2002; 2006) and the ramifications of crises on union representation (Sánchez Mosquera, 2022). Rodríguez Álvarez and González Begega (2022), utilising data from the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), observed a decline in trust towards unions in Spain following the 2008 crisis.

Nevertheless, scant attention has been given to a crucial inquiry: the impact of labour flexibility on workers' trust in trade unions. The research question of this article is as follows: Do workers with temporary contracts trust trade unions less than those with permanent contracts? Additionally, the article raises another previously unexplored issue: What were the effects of the latest Great Recession on the potential trust gap in trade unions between stable and precarious workers? Did this crisis produce a gap between them, or did it increase or decrease an existing one?

Fernández Macías (2002) previously compared trust in trade unions between permanent and temporary employees using data from the CIS in the nineties. He found no significant differences between the two groups. Polavieja (2003),

on the other hand, analysed the effects of contract type segmentation on union involvement using the same data and the *Encuesta de Conciencia y Biografía de Clase* (Survey of Class Awareness and Biography) from 1991. He concluded that having a temporary contract decreased participation in union activities and that, additionally, temporary workers subjectively identified less with the unions and felt more frustrated with them.

Addressing the study of salary earners' trust in trade unions is worthwhile for the following reasons. Firstly, because several decades have passed since the surveys used in the mentioned research were conducted. During these decades, changes in occupational structure have intensified, and labour market flexibilisation has continued its course, placing Spain at the forefront of temporary employment among all OECD countries until the latest labour reform in 2022.

Secondly, this analysis is very novel as it attempts to discern whether trust in trade unions between these two groups varies depending on the economic cycle. The economic cycle has a significant effect on employment-to-unemployment transitions, especially among temporary workers. They are the first to be laid off when times are tough, and many often enter a cycle where they alternate periods of multiple temporary contracts with periods of unemployment (Muñoz Comet and Martínez Pastor, 2017). Thus, it is intriguing to understand the impact of the economic cycle on trust in unions among temporary and permanent workers. Does the crisis create a divide between them if one doesn't exist during times of prosperity? Or does it exacerbate an existing gap?

The third rationale for examining workers' trust in unions pertains to the constitutional recognition of their power. Unions serve as the primary intermediaries between labour sellers and buyers. Their agreements with employers affect a significant number of workers, regardless of their affiliation status. Collective agreements carry legal weight through *erga omnes* extension clauses. According to ILOSTAT data, collective bargaining coverage stands slightly above 70% in Spain (Martínez Pastor, 2022). Therefore, it is valuable to ascertain the level of trust salary earners have in unions and how labour flexibility and the Great Recession have impacted this trust.

2. Labour flexibility in Spain

Labour flexibility was introduced to Spain through temporary contracts, which were of little significance until the mid-1980s. The proliferation of temporary contracts can be traced back to the reform of the Workers' Statute in 1984. During a severe crisis and unprecedented levels of unemployment, the socialist government of that era implemented a series of measures to combat unemployment, including this reform. Up until then, there was a direct correlation between a temporary contract and the temporary nature of the task for which the worker was hired; one could not hire someone temporarily if the task was indefinite. As a result, temporary employment in Spain remained relatively low. The reform of the Workers' Statute in 1984 permitted the use of temporary contracts for tasks that

were not inherently temporary, aimed at reducing unemployment. The immediate advantage for employers was evident: the dismissal costs for temporary workers were significantly lower than for permanent ones. While these temporary contracts could not be applied to those who were already employed, they could be offered to new hires.

Faced with uncertainty about the performance of a new hire and considering the disparity in dismissal costs between temporary and permanent workers, employers overwhelmingly opted for temporary contracts when making new hires. Indeed, over the past few decades, it has been commonplace for approximately 90% of new contracts signed each month in Spain to be temporary. While the majority of salary earners were able to secure permanent contracts during their careers, a significant proportion continued working under temporary contracts in the mid-stages of their careers, constituting around 10–15% of salary earners (Martínez Pastor and Bernardi, 2011). The entry into the labour market for all generations entering employment since the mid-1980s has been through temporary contracts.

Several successive labour reforms implemented in recent decades aimed to reduce temporary hiring, but with very limited success. The reform of 2022 has been the most successful in this regard, as it managed to decrease the temporary employment rate from 25% to 17% in one year. However, concurrently, there has been a notable increase in the number of workers with discontinuous permanent contracts. Despite the reduction in temporary employment with this latest reform, the proportion of workers with temporary contracts at ages far from the typical entry into the labour market remains high. According to the Spanish labour force survey (EPA), 12% of salary earners aged 40 to 59 were in temporary positions in the second quarter of 2023.

For decades, the Spanish labour market has been characterised as divided between the stable—those with permanent contracts and better employment conditions—and the precarious—temporary workers with worse conditions (Polavieja, 2003). This division has resulted in greater fragmentation of the workforce, with a core of protected workers and another segment more exposed to instability, especially during times of crisis. This characteristic feature of the Spanish labour market may have implications for trust in trade unions. In the following section, it will be demonstrated that, *a priori*, there are reasons to believe that labour flexibility has eroded the trust of temporary workers by creating a division between them and the stable workers. These reasons are rooted in two concepts. Firstly, flexibility fosters a more individualistic mindset, one that is removed from traditional class commitments and indifferent to trade unions. Secondly, flexibility has led to a divide among salary earners, resulting in a conflict of interests between the stable and the precarious. The outcome could lead to a decreased trust of temporary workers in trade unions, as they may perceive that their interests were not adequately defended. However, alternative hypotheses have also been proposed that suggest the opposite. They argue that it is precisely the vulnerability of flexible workers that may have cultivated increasingly negative attitudes among them towards companies and positive attitudes towards trade unions. The following section elaborates on these hypotheses.

3. Theories and hypotheses

Building on the arguments advanced by Fernández Macías (2002), who synthesises the postulations of Lash and Urry (1987), Bilbao (1993; 1999) and Alonso (1999), there are grounds to suggest that temporary workers exhibit less trust in trade unions compared to permanent ones. Two mechanisms underlie this hypothesis. The first is linked to the concept of post-industrial identity. This argument can be outlined as follows. The shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society has led to alterations in the employment dynamic, consequently shaping a new identity among workers. The traditional industrial employment dynamic was characterised by stability and a long-term commitment between the company and the worker. The worker's identity could be characterised as collectivist and work-focused.

The advent of the post-industrial era reshapes the employment dynamic, which now leans towards greater instability and flexibility, aligning with a decentralised production model responsive to fluctuating demand. In this contemporary landscape, workers' identity leans towards individualism rather than the work-centric focus of industrial society, placing greater emphasis on consumption. This individualistic outlook, detached from collectivism, is particularly evident in short-term employment arrangements characterised by minimal commitment between worker and employer, thus being more typical of temporary workers. Bilbao (1999) explored the correlation between the emerging mindset of the post-industrial and "flexible" worker and their stance towards trade unions, stating: "This consciousness of individuality elucidates the temporary worker's disposition towards trade unions, which tends to be either directly negative or simply passive" (Bilbao, 1999, p. 138, cited by Fernández Macías, 2002).

Spain provides a compelling illustration of the transformation in occupational composition. In the mid-1970s, nearly a quarter of the workforce was engaged in the primary sector, with another 35% in the industrial sector. Services employed only four out of every ten workers. Fast forward four decades, and the primary sector now employs merely 4% of the workforce, while the industrial sector employs 22%. Consequently, services now encompass almost three quarters of the workforce. Additionally, there is a significant proportion of temporary contracts, comprising approximately 25% of salary earners during economic downturns and exceeding 30% during the latest period of economic upturn. However, following the aforementioned 2022 reform, the temporary employment rate decreased to 17% in 2023¹.

The other mechanism supporting the hypothesis that temporary workers trust trade unions less than permanent ones is based on the segmentation of the labour market between stable and precarious workers and the conflict that arises between them in defending their interests. According to the theory of the dual labour market, the labour market is divided into two clearly differentiated segments: the primary and the secondary (Piore, 1975). The primary segment is characterised by high wages, good working conditions, opportunities for advancement, equity, established procedures regarding labour standards and above all, stability. The characteristics of the secondary segment include lower wages and poorer working conditions, and short-term employment relationships.

Several authors have posited the idea that this segmentation of the labour market poses a conflict of interests between permanent and temporary workers. It is believed that workers in the secondary segment are a threat to the *status quo* of those in the primary segment, as they work under worse labour conditions, earn less and have short-term employment relationships rather than permanent contracts with higher dismissal costs. In this context, trade unions would have opted to prioritise the interests of permanent workers, given that they constitute their main source of membership, sidelining temporary workers (García Serrano, Garrido and Toharia, 1999). Polavieja (2001; 2003, p. 194) encapsulates this perspective when examining union representation strategies from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s: “Neither the content of collective agreements nor the dynamics of the wage determination process have been particularly favourable to the interests of temporary workers. Furthermore, the evidence [...] suggests that permanent workers have bolstered their bargaining position due to the cushioning effect provided by temporary workers.”

Standing (2013; 2014, p. 8) echoes similar sentiments, introducing a new social class termed the precariat. This class is characterised by insecure, unstable employment that rapidly transitions from one job to another, “often with incomplete contracts”. In a debate with Jan Breman (2014) regarding an article published in the *New Left Review*, Standing (2014, p. 12) contends that “the old proletariat still enjoys secure employment and benefits from both businesses and the state, so it is expected that their unions will prioritise their interests over those of the precariat. Breman and his supporters fail to grasp why the precariat rejects traditional unions.”

From this standpoint, it is reasonable to anticipate that temporary workers trust trade unions less than permanent ones (hypothesis 1).

However, Fernández Macías (2002, pp. 140–141) presents arguments suggesting the opposite hypothesis, asserting that temporary workers may trust trade unions more than permanent ones. He indicates that the impact of flexibility on workers’ identity shift is not as significant as commonly assumed and could even counter the assertion made in the first hypothesis. If temporary workers face greater flexibility, insecurity and job instability, they are likely to develop negative attitudes towards companies rather than trade unions, which are theoretically expected to advocate for their interests as workers. Concerning the theory of segmentation and its implication of conflict between the interests of stable and precarious workers, the author observes that Spanish unions, unlike their American counterparts, are class-based rather than occupation-based, casting doubt on the notion that their strategy aims to segment the working class. The underlying argument of Fernández Macías (*ibid.*, p. 141) in proposing the hypothesis that temporary workers trust trade unions more than permanent ones is based on the need of temporary workers for their interests to be defended: “[...] the weaker their position in the labour market, the more they need support and institutional defence, the more positive their attitude towards collective defence of interests at work.”

If this argument holds true in terms of trust, it follows that *temporary workers trust trade unions more than permanent ones (hypothesis 2)*.

Having outlined why some may trust trade unions more than others, it is worth devoting a few lines to discussing the potential effect of the Great Recession. As is known, the unemployment rate in Spain rose from a low of 8% in the second quarter of 2007 to a peak of 27% in the first quarter of 2013. Given that temporary workers are the most vulnerable to unemployment and, above all, to alternating periods of unemployment with others where they string together temporary contracts, it is to be expected that during the Great Recession, the gap between the employment situations of temporary and permanent workers who retained their jobs would widen.

The impact on the disparity in trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers could have manifested in the two directions outlined in hypotheses 1 and 2. On one hand, it is plausible that permanent workers who retained their jobs perceived union efforts as successful, particularly amidst a context where one in every four workers was unemployed. Conversely, temporary workers, more susceptible to economic fluctuations, might have viewed union initiatives as less effective in serving their interests, leading to diminished trust. In this regard, Pérez Díaz (1987, p. 118) previously noted, in the aftermath of a crisis, that “in hard times, unions have established a clear hierarchy of priorities at the expense of those at the bottom.”

Should this pattern have occurred during the Great Recession, it is conceivable that the gap between temporary and permanent workers would have widened, with temporary workers placing even less trust in unions than their permanent counterparts (hypothesis 3).

Alternatively, the Great Recession could have bolstered the scenario posited in the second hypothesis. In a climate marked by high turnover and notable instability, particularly affecting temporary workers, their animosity towards employers may have intensified, coinciding with a more favourable perception of trade unions.

If this supposition holds true, one could anticipate that throughout the crisis, the disparity between temporary and permanent workers diminished, with temporary workers demonstrating increased trust in trade unions (hypothesis 4).

4. Data and variables

To examine these issues, the analysis utilised four surveys conducted by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS), as detailed in Table 1. The initial two surveys align with the zeniths of the preceding significant period of economic prosperity (in 2005 and 2006), while the latter pair correspond to the most challenging phases of the Great Recession (in 2013 and 2014). Leveraging these surveys facilitates the comparison of effects across these distinct historical periods.

Table 1*Surveys used in the analysis*

Survey number	Valid cases (salary earners responding to the dependent variable)	Fieldwork date
2588	1,154	12–18 January 2005
2657	1,154	18–25 October 2006
2984	951	1–8 April 2013
3021	935	1–7 April 2014

The samples are nationally representative, and their characteristics are akin; each of the four surveys encompasses the same independent variables under scrutiny and, as delineated, align with the peaks of prosperity and the depths of the Great Recession. Given that the article focuses on comparing temporary and permanent workers, only salary earners have been selected, although the author has also conducted other analyses with the entire sample².

In addition to comparing the means of trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers during periods of prosperity and crisis, a multivariable analysis has been designed. Specifically, a linear regression analysis has been employed. Through multivariable regression analysis, it is possible to isolate the effects of key variables (being temporary or permanent), while considering other control variables such as ideology, gender, educational attainment, age, social class and sector of activity.

The dependent variable is derived from the following question: “I would like you to tell me the level of trust you have in a series of institutions, using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you have no trust in it at all and 10 means you have a lot of trust in it.” Among these institutions, respondents are specifically asked about trade unions. Therefore, the dependent variable is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 10.

The key independent variable is employment status, which consists of two categories: salary earners with permanent contracts and salary earners with temporary contracts. Additionally, the following control variables have been included, which are recodings of the original variables, to construct these categories:

- Ideology: left, centre-left, centre, centre-right, right and no response.
- Gender: male.
- Age: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–64, 65 or older.
- Educational attainment: primary or less, initial secondary, vocational training, upper secondary, university.
- Social class: social class is based on the EGP scheme (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarrero, 1979). Categories have been constructed based on occupation

at 3 digits: high-service class (I), low-service class (II), non-manual workers in routine tasks (III), skilled manual workers and supervisors (V+VI), semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (VIIa + VIIb). Categories V and VI, and VIIa and VIIb, have been grouped due to the scarcity of cases in some of them.

- Sector of activity, based on Singleman (1978), with a specific category for the construction sector, significant in Spain: primary sector, industry, construction, distribution and commerce, business services, public administration (except social services), social services, consumer services.
- Crisis: this variable indicates if the survey was conducted during a boom period (the first two surveys, years 2005 and 2006) or during a period of economic and institutional crisis (the last two surveys, years 2013 and 2014).

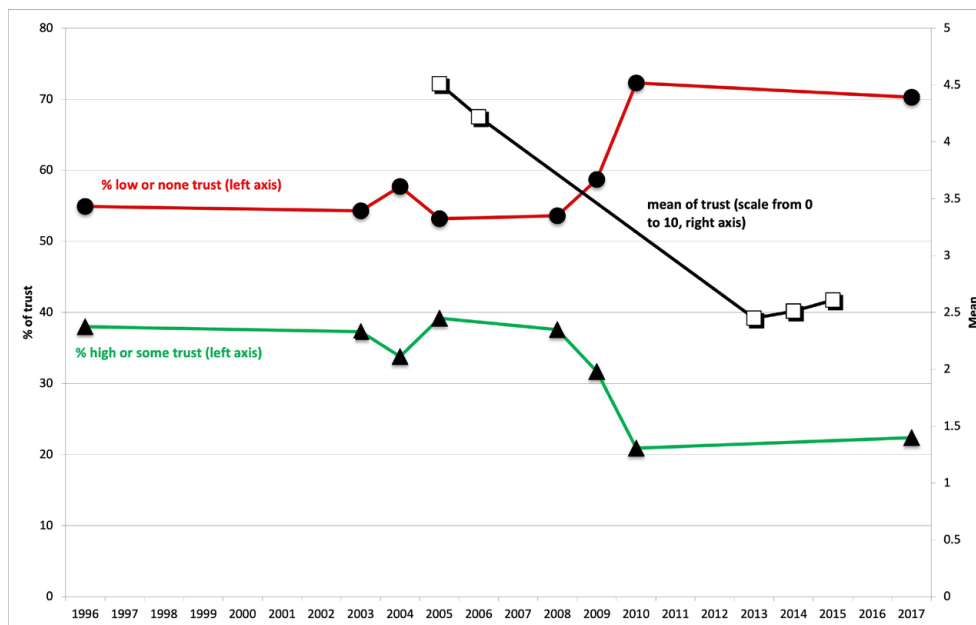
To examine differences in trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers, firstly, the means of both groups have been compared during periods of prosperity and crisis. Subsequently, a series of linear regressions have been conducted, detailed in the following section.

5. Results

Before delving into the results concerning trust in trade unions between temporary and permanent workers, it is prudent to outline the overall trend of trust across all Spaniards, not just salary earners, over the analysed historical period. Figure 1 illustrates the two available series from CIS surveys. The first one plots five points representing trust in trade unions using a scale from 0 to 10 points. The trend is evident (see the right axis): in 2005, the first year available, trust stood at 4.5 points, gradually declining to 2.4 in 2013 and 2.6 in 2015, the last year with comparable data in this series. Although not depicted in the figure, the evolution of trust in those years has also been computed solely for salary earners, the subsample used in the multivariable analysis and mean comparison. The trend is nearly identical.

The CIS dataset also features another indicator gauging trust in trade unions, using an ordinal scale with categories of high, some, low or no trust. The latest available data for this series is from 2017, dating back to 1996. In 1996, 38% of Spaniards had high or some trust in trade unions, while 54% reported low or no trust. The data exhibits significant stability until 2008; between that year and 2010, trust witnessed a steep decline. Those with high or fair trust dropped from 38% to 21%, while those with low or no trust surged from 55% to 72%. In 2017, the proportions remained remarkably similar to those of 2010.

Figure 1
Degree of trust in trade unions



Source: own research based on CIS databank series.

Thus, an initial analysis of the data suggests that the Great Recession markedly impacted trust in trade unions, both among the general population and salary earners. However, it is crucial to underscore that the erosion of trust was not exclusive to trade unions. As illustrated in Table 2, it affected all of Spain’s major institutions, suggesting that the crisis that commenced in the final quarter of 2007 transcended the economic sphere to become an institutional crisis. Distrust towards institutions during crises in Spain mirrors what occurred in the United States during the seventies crisis. Lipset and Scheiner (1987) identified a robust correlation between economic conditions and institutional trust. Their findings could potentially elucidate the events in Spain during the Great Recession: “Bad news implicitly or explicitly criticises the country’s leaders and institutions. It’s not just about things going awry, but also about attributing blame: the president, big business, the press, the military, Congress, or oil companies.” In Spain, the most criticised institutions were those most deeply entrenched in politics. Trade unions, as institutionally acknowledged social entities historically linked to political parties, were not immune to this phenomenon.

Table 2

Means of trust in institutions (scale from 0, no trust, to 10, high trust)

	2003	2005	2006	2014
Constitutional Court			5.01	3.35
Parliament	5.35			2.63
Monarchy			5.19	3.72
Autonomous Parliament		4.90		3.07
Political Parties		3.67		1.89
Business Organisations		4.47		2.94
Catholic Church			3.84	3.39
Trade Unions		4.51		2.51

Source: own research based on the trust in institutions series by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research.

After examining the general landscape of trust in trade unions and other institutions, the following lines are dedicated to analysing the differences between temporary and permanent workers. Table 3 presents the means of trust in trade unions for these two groups during the last major economic growth phase and the latest Great Recession, along with a comparison of whether the differences are statistically significant. As observed, during the boom period (data for the years 2005 and 2006), temporary workers had slightly higher trust in trade unions than permanent ones. The mean trust for the former was 4.6, while for the latter it was 4.4. However, the level of significance ($\text{sig} = 0.133$) indicates that the difference in trust is not statistically significant. During the boom period, permanent workers had slightly more trust in trade unions, although not to a statistically significant extent. However, during the crisis period, there were no differences in the mean trust between both groups. The mean trust in trade unions for permanent workers was 2.60, and for temporary workers, it was 2.63.

From this initial analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, during the boom period, there were no significant differences between temporary and permanent workers regarding trust in trade unions. Secondly, the Great Recession did not widen any gap between permanent and temporary workers. The effect of the crisis was evident: trust in trade unions decreased for both groups in a proportion precise enough to prevent any distance between them. In summary, this initial investigation indicates that neither labour flexibility nor the Great Recession had a differential effect on temporary or permanent workers significant enough to open a gap between them regarding their trust in trade unions. The data does not support any of the four hypotheses proposed.

Table 3

Means of trust in trade unions for workers with permanent contracts and temporary contracts during both the boom period and the Great Recession

	Mean		Standard deviation		Difference in means	t value	Sig. (bilateral)
	Permanent	Temporary	Permanent	Temporary			
Boom	4.43	4.61	2.32	2.32	-0.178	-1.50	0.133
Crisis	2.60	2.63	2.36	2.45	-0.024	-0.16	0.869

Source: own research based on microdata from CIS surveys 2588, 2657, 2984 and 3021. For the boom period, the first two surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 have been grouped, while for the crisis period, the last two surveys carried out in 2013 and 2014 have been grouped.

To assess whether this effect persists while considering other variables such as ideology, gender, age, educational attainment, social class and sector of activity, a multivariable analysis has been conducted. This analysis will determine the net effect of these variables and whether the equality between permanent and temporary workers regarding trust in trade unions hides a compositional effect.

Table 4 contains four columns. The first column reflects the coefficients of the linear regression analysis applied to the four surveys conducted between 2005 and 2014, without distinguishing between periods. The second column displays the results for the boom period (years 2005 and 2006); the third, for the Great Recession period (2013 and 2014) and the fourth, the coefficients related to the interaction between all variables and the “crisis” variable. This fourth column indicates whether the differences between the coefficients obtained in the boom and Great Recession periods are statistically significant.

The multivariable analysis reveals that there are no significant differences between permanent and temporary workers even when considering the other variables in the model. *Ceteris paribus*, temporary workers do not differ from permanent ones either during prosperity or during the Great Recession. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data does not support any of the hypotheses proposed in the theoretical section. Temporary workers do not trust trade unions any more or less than permanent ones, and the Great Recession did not have a differential effect on them.

Regarding the control variables, several aspects are noteworthy. Firstly, the devastating effect of the Great Recession on trust in trade unions, aligning with what occurred with other institutions. In the first column, it is evident that, holding other variables constant, the Great Recession decreased trust in trade unions by 1.82 points. To illustrate, across the four analysed surveys, right-wing individuals trust trade unions 0.73 points less than left-wing individuals. Therefore, the crisis had a similar effect on trust in trade unions to what would have occurred with a social change in which all salary earners had become more than twice as right-wing.

The effects on the other variables are notable due to their lack of significance, except for ideology—which is quite predictable, as right-wing individuals trust trade unions less than left-wing individuals. On the other hand, the analysis reveals that younger individuals tend to place more trust in trade unions (0.31 points higher than the reference category, 30–39 years old). Moreover, among education levels, those with vocational training (VT) are the only group showing significant differentiation from those with upper secondary education (0.21 points higher, a difference similar to that between women and men, with women exhibiting greater trust in trade unions). Lastly, individuals in the high-service class, who are better positioned within the occupational structure, display the lowest level of trust in trade unions among salary earners (0.30 points lower than those in the low-service class, the second-best positioned in the class structure).

Finally, the interaction model confirms that the Great Recession did not create any gap between temporary and permanent workers. Indeed, the sole significant effect of the crisis was a shift in the stance among salary earners identifying as centrist (see the interaction column). Keeping other variables constant, during the boom period, there were no statistically significant differences in trust in trade unions between centrist, left-leaning and centre-left salary earners. However, the Great Recession widened a gap between centrists and left-leaning salary earners: during the crisis, centrists placed significantly less trust in trade unions than left-leaning individuals.

Table 4

Linear regressions on the likelihood of trusting a union (0–10 trust)

	2005–2014	Boom	Great Recession	Interact.			
Ideological scale							
Left (ref.)							
C. left	0.10	0.25	-0.11	-0.36			
Centre	-0.31	**	-0.04	-0.68	**	-0.64	**
C. right	-0.46	**	-0.42	*	-0.51	*	-0.08
Right	-0.73	**	-0.70	**	-0.76	**	-0.05
No contesta	-0.84	**	-0.73	**	-0.98	**	-0.25
Gender							
Female	0.20	*	0.34	**	0.05		-0.29
Age							
30–39 (ref.)							
18–29	0.31	**	0.34	*	0.27		-0.07
40–49	-0.16		-0.06		-0.25		-0.18
50–64	-0.12		-0.23		-0.05		0.18
Educational attainment							
Lower secondary (ref.)							
Primary	0.16		0.24		0.11		-0.13
VT	0.21	+	0.25		0.17		-0.09
Upper secondary	0.10		0.08		0.13		0.05
University	0.07		0.19		-0.07		-0.26

	2005–2014	Boom	Great Recession	Interact.
Employment status				
Permanent (ref.)				
Temporary	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
Social class				
Low service (II) (ref.)				
High service (I)	-0.30	+	-0.17	-0.37
Routine non-manual workers (III)	-0.01		0.16	-0.10
Supervisors and skilled manual workers (V and VI)	0.14		0.31	0.01
Semi-skilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (VIIa and VIIb)	-0.07		0.07	-0.18
No response	0.00		0.31	-0.57
Sector of activity				
Industry (ref.)				
Primary	0.17		-0.03	0.45
Construction	0.25		0.42	+
Distribution	-0.03		0.00	-0.17
Business services	0.10		-0.05	-0.05
Public administration (except education and health)	0.06		-0.15	0.22
Social services	0.14		0.20	0.11
Personal services	0.06		0.13	-0.03
No response	0.26		0.00	0.66
Crisis	-1.82	**		-1.11
Constant	4.50	**	4.15	**
R-squared	0.16		0.04	0.04

Source: own research based on microdata from CIS surveys 2588, 2657, 2984 and 3021.

6. Conclusions

Neither labour market flexibilisation nor the Great Recession created a gap between temporary and permanent workers in terms of trust in trade unions. Regarding the impact of flexibility, two arguments foresaw increased distrust among temporary workers. The first argument pertained to the shift in labour identity emerging in the post-industrial society and with the advent of flexibilisation. Given the loss of a collectivist identity centred on work among workers most affected by flexibility (temporary workers), it was expected that they would have less trust in trade unions compared to permanent workers. The other argument predicting the same effect was related to the conflict of interests between temporary and permanent workers and the unequal attention they have received from trade unions. According to this argument, trade unions would have focused on defending permanent workers, leading temporary workers to trust them less. However, the data do not confirm either of these hypotheses, as seen by the lack of significant differences between temporary and permanent workers regarding their trust in trade unions: both groups trust them equally. The data also does not confirm the opposing hypothesis, which predicted greater trust among temporary workers. This hypothesis was

based on the idea that in the era of flexibilisation, it was conceivable that temporary workers, who are most affected by flexibility, would have a more negative attitude towards companies and a more positive attitude towards the collective defence of worker interests.

Conversely, the impact of the Great Recession was evident: trade unions were caught in the downturn of trust experienced by Spain's major institutions. Furthermore, this decline was comparable for both temporary and permanent workers. If there wasn't a significant disparity between them concerning their trust in trade unions during the period of economic prosperity, the same held true during the Great Recession.

These findings bring mixed implications for trade unions. The positive aspect is that labour flexibility has not fractured workers' trust in them. Despite indications that temporary workers engage less in union activities and feel less connected to trade unions compared to permanent workers, this has not resulted in diminished trust in trade unions compared to those with permanent contracts, neither during times of economic prosperity nor during the crisis. Based on the findings, it cannot be concluded that the union strategy in collective bargaining resulted in a division among salary earners, at least in terms of trust in trade unions. If, as argued by some authors, unions prioritised the interests of permanent workers over temporary ones, this did not impact the trust of temporary workers in trade unions compared to that of permanent workers.

The concerning aspect is that the Great Recession led to such a significant decrease in trust in trade unions, plummeting to 2.6 points on a scale of 0 to 10, a collapse akin to that experienced by other institutions. It seems that the Great Recession did not exacerbate differences among salary earners, as all displayed low trust in trade unions. From this data, can it be inferred that a society with little trust in trade unions deems them unnecessary? Regarding this, and in the absence of data in Spain, it is useful to refer to other international studies that compared some indicators related to workers' attitudes towards trade unions. Lipset and Scheiner (1987) found low trust in trade unions among American citizens in the 1970s, but upon analysing other indicators, they concluded that Americans had ambivalent feelings: they approved of the function of trade unions but condemned their behaviour. According to the data they analysed, Americans believed that trade unions were necessary to protect workers from arbitrary corporate actions and that without them, workers would earn less and have worse working conditions. At the same time, trade unions were perceived as too powerful and as institutions that only worked for their own benefit. On the other hand, Panagopoulos and Francia (2008), when analysing surveys on opinion towards trade unions in the United States, concluded that despite the lack of trust in them and their leaders, citizens maintained strong support for the work of these organisations, as the majority believed them to be essential for defending workers' rights.

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Notes

- 1 All the data in this paragraph has been computed by the author relying on the Spanish labour force survey (EPA).
- 2 No significant variations in outcomes emerge when employing the complete sample.

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