

Demographic Change and Progressive Political Strategy in Spain¹

Ferran Martínez i Coma April 2011

The “Demographic Change and Progressive Political Strategy” series of papers is a joint project organized under the auspices of the Global Progress and Progressive Studies programs and the Center for American Progress. The research project was launched following the inaugural Global Progress conference held in October 2009 in Madrid, Spain.

The preparatory paper for that conference, “[The European Paradox](#),” sought to analyze why the fortunes of European progressive parties had declined following the previous autumn’s sudden financial collapse and the global economic recession that ensued. The starting premise was that progressives should, in principle, have had two strengths going for them:

- Modernizing trends were shifting the demographic terrain in their political favor.
- The intellectual and policy bankruptcy of conservatism, which had now proven itself devoid of creative ideas of how to shape the global economic system for the common good.

Despite these latent advantages, we surmised that progressives in Europe were struggling for three primary reasons. First, it was increasingly hard to differentiate themselves from conservative opponents who seemed to be wholeheartedly adopting social democratic policies and language in response to the economic crisis. Second, the nominally progressive majority within their electorate was being split between competing progressive movements. Third, their traditional working-class base was increasingly being seduced by a politics of identity rather than economic arguments.

In response, we argued that if progressives could define their long-term economic agenda more clearly—and thus differentiate themselves from conservatives—as well as establish broader and more inclusive electoral coalitions, and organize more effectively among their core constituencies to convey their message, then they should be able to resolve this paradox.

The research papers in this series each evaluate these demographic and ideological trends in greater national detail and present ideas for how progressives might shape a more effective political strategy.

We are grateful to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for their support of this project.

Matt Browne, John Halpin, and Ruy Teixeira

Contents

1 Introduction and summary

2 Recent election results and current situation in the country

6 Shifting coalitions

6 Immigration

10 Education

12 Social class

13 Age

17 Gender

18 Religion

19 Geography

21 The new progressive coalition

23 The new progressive vision

25 Conclusion

27 References

28 Endnotes

29 About the author

Introduction and summary

This report focuses on the most relevant trends in demographic change and their potential impact on progressive political strategy in Spain.

The first section of the paper summarizes the last national election results in the country and the extent to which they represent a decline or advance in voter support for progressives relative to the previous election. This section also discusses the political situation in the country and its evolution since the most recent election, including the effects of the economic recession on progressive forces and prospects for the next election.

The second section deals with the effect of demographic change on the support received by the Socialist Party and by the rest of the center-left. Some key variables such as immigration, education, social class, age, gender, religion, and geography are used to analyze the Spanish electorate's evolution since 1982.

The third section analyzes the social coalition supporting progressive policies in Spain. And the last section looks at the type of society progressives seek to build and the values that underline this society and potentially connect with voters.

Recent election results and current situation in the country

The Socialist Party, or PSOE, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, came to power after winning the 2004 election. President Zapatero’s first term in office, which lasted from 2004 to 2008, is defined by expansion of social rights; controversies regarding negotiations with the nationalist terrorist group ETA; aggressive opposition by the conservative Popular Party, or PP; and reforms of the different legal statutes in several regional governments.

The 10th general election since democratic elections were restored in Spain in 1977 was held on March 9, 2008. The victory, for the sixth time, went to the PSOE, which obtained 43.87 percent of the vote while the PP obtained 39.94. Previous election results are shown in Table 1.²

TABLE 1
Turnout and change in Spanish elections 1977–2008 (%)

Election year	Turnout	Socialist Party	Conservative	Communist-left coalition	Center party	Other	PSOE increase	PP increase
		(PSOE)	Party (AP/PP)	(PCE/IU)	(UCD/CDS)			
1977	78.83	29.32	8.21	9.33	34.44	18.7	-	-
1979	68.04	30.4	6.05	10.77	34.84	17.94	1.08	0.4
1982	79.97	48.11	26.36	4.02	6.77	14.74	17.71	-8.48
1986	70.49	44.06	25.97	4.63	9.22	16.12	-4.05	-0.39
1989	69.74	39.6	25.79	9.07	7.89	17.65	-4.46	-0.18
1993	76.44	38.78	34.76	9.55	1.76	15.15	-0.82	8.97
1996	77.38	37.63	38.79	10.54		13.04	-1.15	4.03
2000	68.71	34.16	44.55	5.45	-	15.84	-3.37	5.73
2004	75.66	42.59	37.71	4.96	-	14.74	8.33	-6.81
2008	73.85	43.87	39.94	3.77	-	12.417	1.28	2.23

Source: mir.es

During the first years of President Zapatero's government, the Spanish economy grew between 3 percent and 4 percent per year. But by 2008 the first symptoms of the recession appeared, and the election was held in that context.

The PSOE strategy consisted of obtaining a high participation rate—left-leaning voters tend to abstain more than conservative voters—and defending the government's achievements. The president won a high degree of social support and was the key element of the campaign.

On the other hand, the PP, led by Mariano Rajoy, ran a campaign beset by internal problems. PP based their strategy on demobilization of the potential socialist electorate. They used some of the crucial issues on the political agenda such as the territorial debate, the failed negotiation with the nationalist terrorist group ETA, the deterioration of the economic situation, and immigration concerns.

An analysis of the Sociological Research Center or CIS panel surveys shows that PSOE voters had the highest loyalty rate—the proportion of those who intend to vote for a party and do vote for it—at 87 percent. The PSOE was the most attractive party for those who were mobilized during the campaign.

In short, the PSOE won the 2008 election because: a) PSOE voters showed a higher level of loyalty than PP voters; b) the PP'S demobilization strategy did not seem to work and; c) PSOE was more successful in attracting votes from former abstainers.³

But what has happened since the 2008 victory? And how has the situation evolved?

The PSOE government renewed their simple majority in parliament after the elections of March 2008. The worldwide economic recession hit Spain later than it did other countries, so the PP's claims that the economic recession was already a reality did not get through to the majority of voters. Still, the economic recession eventually arrived, and it affected Spain more deeply than many other countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Spaniards perceive the economy as the main problem in their country. According to CIS surveys about 70 percent of respondents say unemployment is the country's main issue. The unemployment rate is 20 percent of the working population, which translates into 4.6 million unemployed. This situation is even more dramatic among those age 25 and under, where unemployment reaches a rate of 40 percent. The lowest level of Spanish unemployment was at 7.95 percent in 2007. From that moment on unemployment rose quickly and reached very high levels.⁴

This situation could affect the government, but evidence does not confirm that when the economy is in poor shape the opposition party is favored. Other elements may be important. Among them we can point to the ideology of the voters, government and opposition credibility, and perceived blame for the recession. An example of this is the PSOE victory in the 1993 elections in a very poor economic situation or John Major's reelection in the United Kingdom in 1992.

Polls in Spain, however, are currently showing a consistent decline in voting intention for the PSOE and an increase for the PP. Since the 1990s, left-leaning voters tend to abstain more than conservative-leaning voters. The CIS polls of 2009 and 2010 confirm this trend. And in fact, most PSOE voters are not turning to PP but to abstention. Both leaders, Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero and the head of the opposition conservative party Mariano Rajoy, perform poorly in the polls, obtaining grades below 5 on a 0-to-10 scale.

But polls are only snapshots of a given moment, and since the elections are expected to be held in 2012 some things may change on the political scene. First of all, the government made a substantial change away from a policy mainly based on the expansion of social rights to one of fighting the recession. This policy shift consisted of two main steps. The first one was a classic social democratic approach, increasing social spending and protecting those who were suffering the most from the recession. The second, in May 2010, was a change in that emphasis, since the public deficit and debt increased very quickly and international markets panicked. Many citizens understood the need for some of the measures, but these were perceived as social cuts. The government response has been that the country needs to face the new situation in order to improve public accounts and modernize and reform the Spanish economy.

Secondly, both the PP's attitude and behavior are widely criticized, even among some of their voters. The PP supported only one of the important initiatives promoted by the PSOE: the Caja de Ahorros (savings banks) reform. In early February 2011 the Spanish government signed a general agreement on pensions and other important social reforms with both the unions and the main business association of the country. But the PP's position on that is not clear. The PP also opposed critical economic measures the government took in May 2010.

At the same time, many voters, while agreeing with PP, do not know what the conservative party's alternative proposals are. This could be a weak strategy since the public could conclude that the PP's measures are so unpopular that they prefer to hide them.

It is therefore quite possible the PSOE government will be re-elected if government measures prove correct by the time of the general election, the economic situation improves, and the PP continues its uncooperative behavior.

In Spain, the ideological left-right axis is dominant in national politics and the PSOE is the most important representative of the progressive spectrum. But the PSOE is not alone in that axis. Situated to its left is the communist-left coalition, or IU. IU was the third-most supported party—but “punished” in its number of representatives in parliament by the electoral system—between the general elections of 1996 and 2008. Over that time period, this coalition of left-wing parties lost almost two votes out of three and 90 percent of its seats, from 21 to 2 seats.

There are many reasons for the decline in IU voters since the 1990s. One of the most relevant is the effect of the electoral formula, which leads to a concentration of votes as well as to strategic voting. Specifically, in small districts, the incentives to vote for a third party such as IU are very low, and this is why many of their voters have moved to PSOE or abstained.⁵ In the 2004-2008 period some of the PSOE’s growth came from the IU’s decline.

When we compare the 2004 election results with those of 2008 we see that the left-wing forces declined from 51.8 percent to 49.9 percent of the vote. The left-wing bloc experienced a strong reconfiguration that benefited the PSOE, as IU and other small left-wing parties lost an important number of their votes. Consequently, they lost more representatives and did not keep their own group in parliament. The post-electoral poll by CIS showed that 20 percent of IU voters in the 2004 elections switched to PSOE.

As a result of all this, while in 2004 the PSOE attracted 82 percent of left-wing voters, in the 2008 election this figure reached 87 percent.⁶

The concentration of the vote in the two main parties, PSOE and PP, has been constant since the first democratic elections in 1977.⁷ This has increasingly polarized the Spanish political party system. As some analysts have pointed out, PSOE and PP received 84 percent of all votes cast in 2008—the highest level in the country’s democratic history—and obtained 92.3 percent of the seats.⁸ Previously, in 1989, PSOE and PP obtained only 65.38 percent of the votes and 80.57 percent of the seats. Bipartisan vote concentration was repeated in many of the 17 regional governments given the nature of the electoral formula and how the regional political competition is configured.

Shifting coalitions

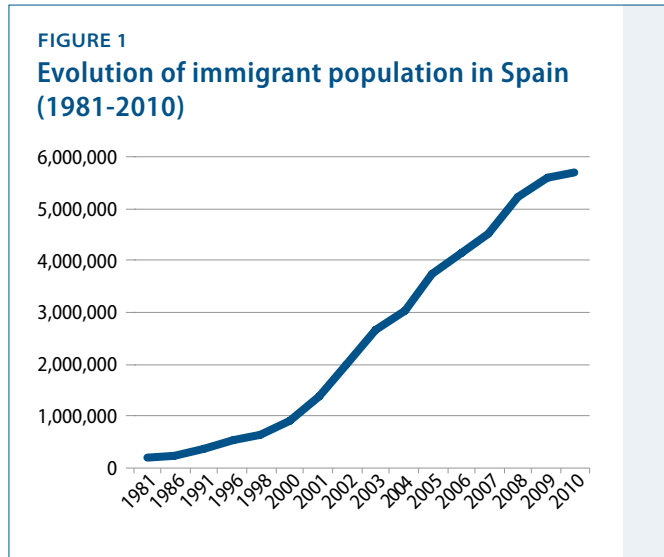
In the next pages we present the effect of demographic change on the PSOE's support. Some key variables such as immigration, education, social class, age, gender, religion, and geography are used to analyze the evolution of the Spanish electorate since 1982. This analysis will show how different demographic groups have voted and whether such patterns have changed. This will be done from two perspectives: participation and vote choice. This approach takes into account different studies published on the Spanish electorate from 1982 until 2000, which includes six elections. For the other two elections, 2004 and 2008, these analyses are combined with the CIS post-election surveys.

First, we detail changes in the last several decades that are making the country more diverse. This is a key issue since many immigrants will become citizens and have the right to vote.

Immigration

Spain has undergone a substantial transformation in recent decades. During the first half of the 20th century, many Spaniards migrated abroad—after the Civil War to Latin America, especially Mexico and Argentina, and during the 1960s mainly to other European countries. But migration flowed in the opposite direction toward Spain by the second half of the 1990s, as Figure 1 points out. This flow has considerably increased since then and overwhelmed the effects of emigration from Spain.

Spain has received more Latin American citizens than any country in Europe in addition to North African migrants. This is a phenomenon largely attributable to historical ties and common language. (see Tables 2 and 3)



Source: INE.

TABLE 2
Geographic origin of immigrants in Spain 2006

Ranking	Origin	Total	% total immigrants
1	Latin America	1,500,785	36.21
2	Western Europe	872,694	21.06
3	Eastern Europe	735,506	17.75
4	North Africa	614,436	14.83
5	Sub-Saharan Africa	170,843	4.12
6	Asia	132,474	2.72
7	India area	69,006	1.46
8	North America	27,292	0.66
9	Middle East	18,094	0.44
10	Oceania	2,363	0.06

Source: INE.

Spain’s economic growth during the last years of the 1990s and almost all of the last decade increased the incentives for immigration. Spain experienced the highest economic growth of the southern European countries. As a result, the country received more immigrants—and at a faster pace—than any other country in Europe.

We analyze below some of the challenges Spanish society faces regarding this issue since immigration is crucial both for the progressive agenda and for government in general. Legal immigrants should have the same rights and duties as nationals. But it is necessary to be cautious on how such an issue is portrayed for two reasons. The first one is the natives’ perspective. The second one comes from the effects of immigrants becoming full-right citizens.

How natives view immigration

Eurobarometer 64.2 asked the following question: “What do you think are the two most important issues our country is facing at the moment?” Figure 2 shows the relationship between the percentage of respondents answering “immigration” and the immigrant portion of the population.

TABLE 3
Country of origin of immigrants in Spain 2009

Ranking	Country	Total
1	Morocco	767,784
2	Rumania	751,688
3	Ecuador	440,304
4	Colombia	287,205
5	United Kingdom	222,039
6	China	151,547
7	Italy	150,667
8	Bulgaria	147,080
9	Portugal	126,928
10	Bolivia	117,106
11	Germany	109,438
12	Argentina	103,171
13	Dominican Republic	87,201
14	Poland	86,314
Total		4,791,232

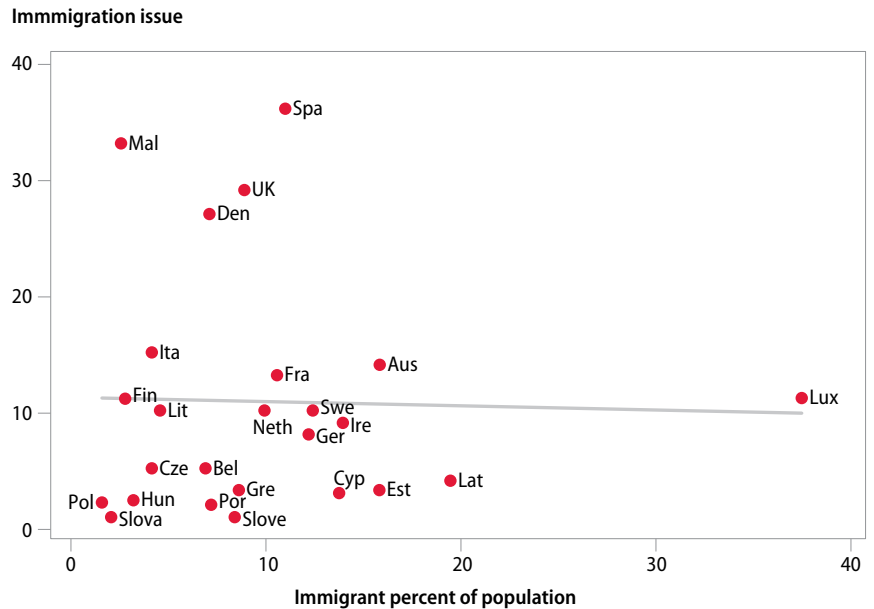
Source: Immigration Office, Labor and Immigration Department.

Spain showed the highest rate of public concern about immigration among the countries in the sample. In fact, the majority of respondents rated “unemployment” as the most important issue in every country except Denmark, Spain, Ireland, Malta, and the United Kingdom.

Figure 3 shows that while there does not seem to be a relationship between public concern about immigration and the portion of immigrants in the population, there is a clear correlation between such public concern and net immigration rates. Yet in both figures Spain is an outlier in the degree of concern about immigration in the country.

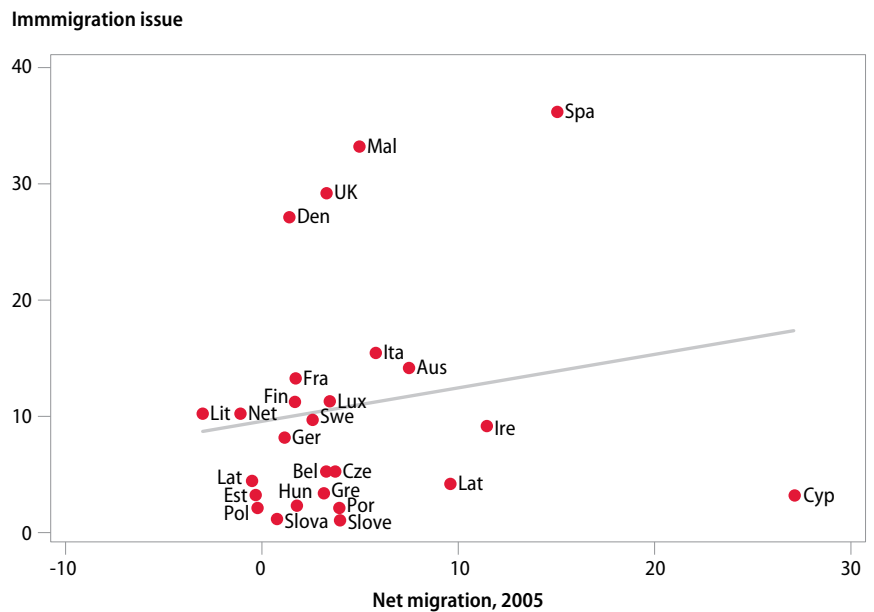
The arrival of immigrants has been linked to the expansion of the economy. In the same 2005 survey data only 24 percent of the citizens questioned thought that the economic situation was bad or very bad. But 61 percent of Spaniards still thought that there were too many immigrants in the country. As we might expect, attitudes toward immigrants grew more negative since 2005 following the economy’s increasingly poor performance.

FIGURE 2
Immigration issue and immigrant population



Source: Martínez i Coma, F. and Duval, R. 2009.

FIGURE 3
Immigration issue and net migration 2005



Source: Martínez i Coma, F. and Duval, R. 2009.

Immigrants becoming full citizens

Legal immigrants will be able to vote in the local elections of 2011 in Spain. It is estimated that over 500,000 of them will join the census. The only other thing immigrants will have to achieve in order to become full citizens will be the right to vote in the national and regional elections, since the basis for access to the welfare state in Spain is universal, regardless of citizenship status.

It is only a matter of time before immigrants' right to vote in national and regional elections becomes a national debate. Some legal and practical arguments are used to justify that immigrants shouldn't vote in national elections. But many of them are based on moral grounds. The decision on the vote is not cost free—serious consequences are at stake.

First, from an electoral perspective, the inclusion of immigrants may affect representation. At the local level, without considering the electoral formula for the distribution of seats, the addition of a further 20 percent to the electorate may not only decide who governs but could also create a new political party with real governing chances, given the multiparty nature of local elections. At the national level, the effects could be even more complicated.

Second, the areas with more immigrants may be more concerned with having their interests represented than the others given that immigrants are not distributed evenly across the country. This has a very clear implication for public policy since the incorporation of immigrants into the electorate may tilt the political balance in a city or region and consequently influence future policies.

Third, some specific issues related to immigrants may emerge in force even though the political preferences of immigrants are considered to be heterogeneous (some of them may lean toward the left and others toward the right).⁹ The native population may receive some of them well—those pressing for longer business hours, for example—while others may not be so well received—those opposed to opening Mosques, for example.

Fourth, some immigrant groups' values may be very different from the rest of society. For instance, previous unpublished research by the city of Barcelona found that Muslims are consistently more conservative in values and customs than any other immigrant group.

Fifth—and this is very much linked to earlier comments—not all immigrant groups are perceived the same way. Some are more accepted while others more rejected. For instance, in a September 2007 CIS survey, 36.7 percent of those surveyed state that some immigrant groups breed mistrust. Specifically, 31.2 percent state that they trust Latin Americans more than any other group. Conversely, 51.2 percent state that there are particular immigrant groups that are regarded as untrustworthy.

Education

Literature on political science and sociology points out the high correlation between education and individuals' social class. An indirect link has also been observed between education and social class or age.¹⁰ As a consequence, education has not been as widely studied as a direct voting factor as other factors. Research on values, such as that by Ronald Inglehart, shows that educational levels indirectly affect citizens: It plays a role in configuring their subjective orientation.¹¹

No linear relationship exists in Spain between education and voter participation. In other words, one cannot affirm that better-educated individuals participate more than those who are uneducated or are mid-level educated. In fact, those with a mid-level education—such as high school—abstain more than those with lower levels. Those at university level have not followed any consistent pattern in any of the democratic elections. In sum, the hypothesis that those with higher educational levels participate more is not confirmed in Spain.

Another question is whether people vote differently according to their educational level. The conservative PP obtains higher levels of support among those with a higher educational level while the uneducated vote less for them. In clear contrast, PSOE wins more support among the less educated and less support among the most educated group. There are thus differences at the extreme end of the distribution though these are relatively small groups. There is no very clear leaning toward one of the main parties from the group with a mid-level education, which is the most important one in absolute numbers.

So while people do vote differently by education such differences are defined mostly by the extreme groups (the more and the less educated).

Table 4 shows that the PSOE’s voter composition by education evolved through time. Thirty-two percent of the PSOE’s vote came from those without studies in 1982, while in 2008 support among that group was 5.1 percent of the PSOE vote. In the last 25 years the average educational level in Spain has increased, and as a consequence, the percentage of those with “no studies” or “primary” studies has declined over time.

Table 5 shows the percentage of the vote that the PSOE obtained within each education level. It shows that the PSOE is consistently less attractive to those with a higher educational level. Thirty-four percent of those with a university degree opted for PSOE in the last two elections. But from 1989 to 2000 not even 20 percent of those with a university degree voted PSOE.¹²

TABLE 4
Composition of PSOE vote by education, 1982–2008

	No studies	Primary	Secondary	University
1982	32	35.6	24.2	8.2
1986	36.1	37.2	20.7	6
1989	34.6	39.2	22.1	4
1993	19.4	32.7	42.2	5.7
1996	16.8	32.1	42.5	8.5
2000	13.7	47	26.2	13
2004	7.4	22.8	54.7	15.1
2008	5.1	25.5	53.1	16.3

Source: CIS.

TABLE 5
PSOE vote support

	No studies	Primary	Secondary	University
1982	38.5	39.8	43.3	30.7
1986	44.5	38.5	33.8	22.5
1989	40.6	31.9	27.1	12.6
1993	47.7	33.6	28.4	15.3
1996	45.1	29.8	24.9	17.7
2000	29.9	21	18.3	15.6
2004	41.1	36	38	34.1
2008	46.9	42.5	40.4	34.5

Source: CIS.

Social class

Class is a classic defining variable for the social-democrat movement. It is a complex variable that traditionally includes education, wage, and type of job.

There is a debate in the academic literature on whether the social class divide still prevails. Mark Franklin and his collaborators offer a dealignment evidence-based hypothesis that class is less important than it used to be.¹³ Other research, however, shows that class remains a strong vote predictor.¹⁴ The evidence is abundant for Spain: Class does matter, but its explanatory power has decreased with time.¹⁵

Regarding participation, those with more resources—in a higher-class position—do participate more than the rest. But this is not a strong predictor. Moreover, different social classes vote differently and there is an identifiable pattern.

On the one hand, property owners, the “service” economic sector, and white-collar workers vote for the PP consistently more often than qualified and nonqualified blue-collar workers. On the other hand, qualified and nonqualified blue-collar workers consistently vote more often for the PSOE. In fact, these two groups accounted for a minimum of 40 percent of the PSOE’s vote in the 1996 election and as a vote share reached their peak in 1989 with 60 percent of the PSOE’s vote, as Table 6 shows.

TABLE 6
PSOE’s vote distribution by class (%)

	High class	Intermediate	Autonomous	Qualified manual	Non-qualified manual	Agrarian
1982	5.2	26.2	5.6	33.4	15.4	14.2
1986	7.6	18.5	5.2	34.3	22.7	11.8
1989	9.1	15.3	4.8	38.2	22.6	10
1993	10.4	24.8	10.4	36.2	7.2	11
1996	12	24.9	8.9	34	5.8	14.3
2000	13.1	16.8	5.7	27.9	21.4	15.1
2004	16.6	21.7	7.5	23.4	19.4	11.4
2008	24.9	12.7	7	22.8	24	8.6

Source: CIS.

TABLE 7
Distribution of class vote to the PSOE (%)

	High class	Intermediate	Autonomous	Qualified manual	Non-qualified manual	Agrarian
1982	27.5	37.1	23.7	49.5	44.6	34.2
1986	26.7	30.8	28	43.8	46.6	42.2
1989	21.7	22.9	21.4	39.4	38.1	42.5
1993	21.4	29.2	26.2	41.3	39.6	36.4
1996	20.1	25.5	23.1	34.8	37.1	34
2000	14.5	16.7	12.8	28.4	23.7	23.5
2004	31.9	36.5	35	43	41.8	37.8
2008	34.9	41.3	35.4	46	46.5	40

Source: CIS.

Table 7 also shows how different social classes vote for the PSOE. The PSOE is always more successful in getting the votes of the qualified and nonqualified manual workers while getting less support from the high class, intermediate, or autonomous workers.

Age

Turnout and abstention vary with age. Academic literature shows that younger as well as older people participate less than those in the middle-age group. In fact, participation normally reaches its peak when voters are between 55 and 64 and decreases afterward.

This is a constant feature of all elections in Spain from 1982 to 2008. The youngest—defined as voters between 18 and 34 years of age—abstain more than other citizens. And intermediate age groups do participate more often. But abstention among 35- to 44-year-olds has tended to increase in recent elections.

Senior citizens used to participate less than the middle-aged since they were not as much involved in public life and more concerned about health issues, for instance. In the last elections, however, they voted at higher rates. The importance of this group also will increase in the future given the demographic change Spain will experience in coming years.

In terms of vote orientation, popular wisdom states that seniors are more conservative than younger cohorts. It is not necessarily the case in Spain, however. The senior vote for PSOE in 1982 was underrepresented at only 11 percent, as can be seen from Table 8. But once the PSOE gained power and implemented its policies it started to win more positive evaluations, and consequently, votes from seniors and fewer from the youngest.

This trend was so acute that some analysts point out that the PSOE changed from being the party of the young in 1982 to being the party of the seniors in 1996, when they fell from power.¹⁶ Between the 2004 and 2008 elections—while the PSOE was in power again—senior representation in the PSOE vote was still around 20 percent, significantly higher than in the 1980s.

TABLE 8
PSOE's vote distribution by age (%)

	18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	+65 yrs
1982	20	22.7	19.3	15.5	11	11.5
1986	16.5	20.1	17.4	16.9	13.6	15.5
1989	13.4	19.5	18.4	19.6	11.8	17.2
1993	12.9	19.9	16.5	14	16.2	20.4
1996	12.2	17.7	18.2	14.3	14.9	22.7
2000	12	16.9	19.4	17	11.7	23
2004	14.2	20.8	19.3	15.8	10.8	19.2
2008	9.3	19.2	19.5	17.1	14.4	20.6

Source: CIS.

From another perspective, (Table 8), while in 2004, 35 percent of the PSOE vote came from the 18-34 age group it was 28 percent in 2008. The PP held steady with this group during this time period with 24 percent and 28 percent of the party's vote coming from this group in 2004 and 2008, respectively. As is well-known, younger voters played a crucial role in the 2004 election of José Luis Rodríguez-Zapatero. The PSOE received 40 percent of the 18- to 24-year-old vote in 2004. (see Table 9)

TABLE 9
Distribution of cohort vote to the PSOE in the elections (%)

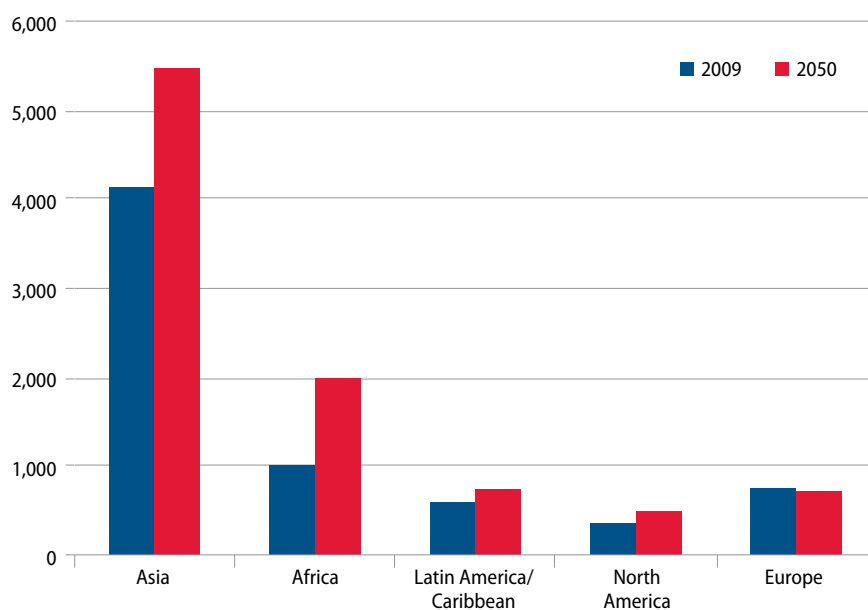
	18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	+65 yrs
1982	50.4	43.9	39.6	34.5	32.6	30.3
1986	16.5	20.1	17.4	16.9	13.6	15.5
1989	27.2	28.1	35.6	30.8	32.7	33.9
1993	25.9	31.2	31.3	29.5	33.7	39.2
1996	22	24.5	29.9	28.6	28.7	35.7
2000	12	16.9	19.4	17	11.7	23
2004	40.4	39.2	38.9	40.9	33.3	33.7
2008	38	38.1	40.1	43	44.6	40

Source: CIS.

All the available projections indicate that in Spain and in Europe the “millennial” generation—those born in 1978 or later—will not gain in importance as they have in the United States because Europe’s demographic future is different from that of North America and the rest of the world. Europe is the only region in the world with declining population, as Figure 4 shows.

How does Spain fit into this context? The highest number of people was in the 15- to 34-year-old group, roughly 13 million, and the number of people above 65 was about 8 million in Spain’s population pyramid for 1995, distributed by age.

FIGURE 4
Population of world regions in 2009 and projected to 2050



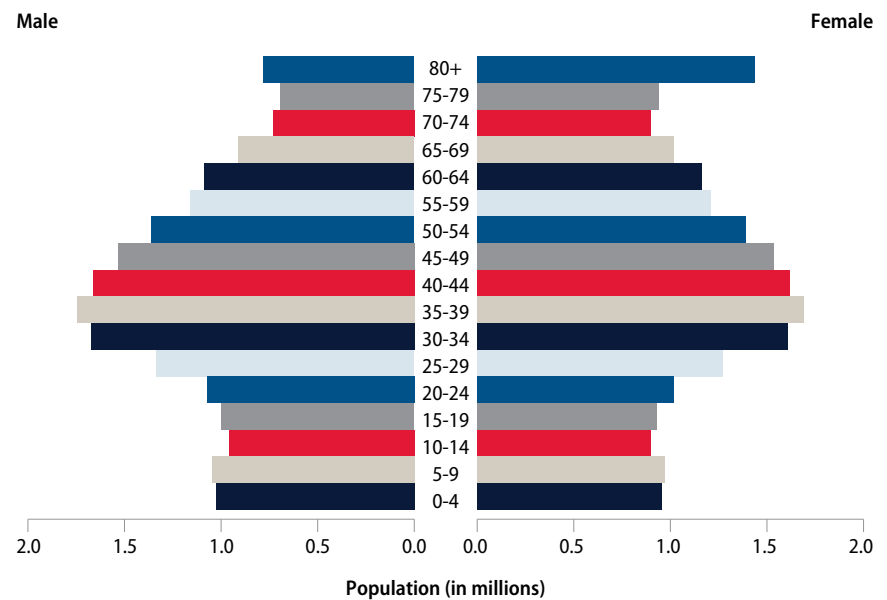
Source: Population Reference Bureau, 2009 World Population Data Sheet. Haub, Carl.

Figure 5 shows that 15 years later the situation changed. The group from 15 years ago that was between 15 and 34 years old is now between 30 and 49 years old and is the largest segment of the population with around 13 million people. Those between 15 and 34 represent about 9 million while those above 65 are above 8 million. Those under 30 are no longer the dominant segment.

Projections for 2020 show continued change along these lines. But if estimations are accurate, the most dramatic change will occur in about 40 years' time (see Figure 6). In 2050 the group that today is between 30 and 49 will be 70 and older, and will be the largest age segment. Seniors above 80 will be more than 4 million and there will be 13 million over 65. The group between 30 and 49 will be slightly more than 8 million and the youngest, from 0 to 24, will be about 6 million.

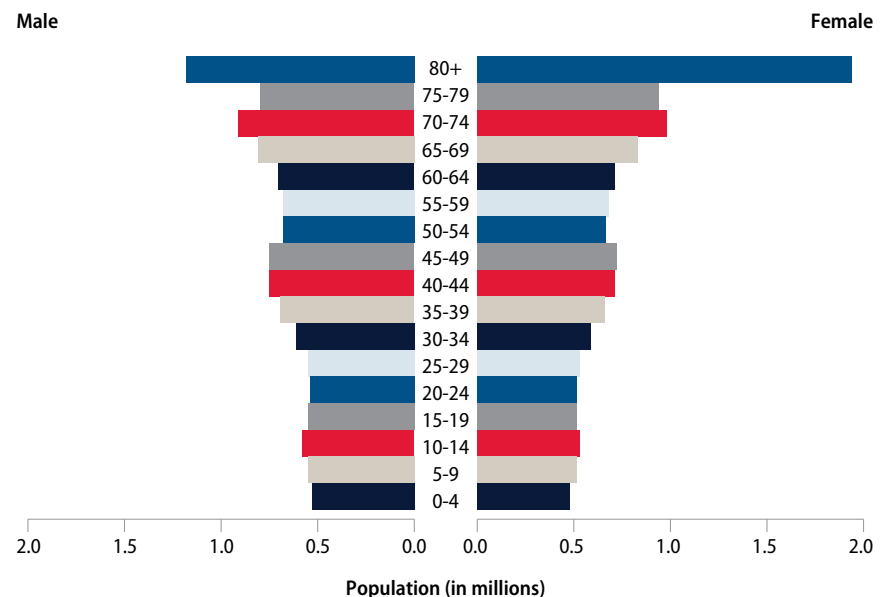
This trend will affect society over the next 40 years. Consequently, progressives need to change, adapt to the new age structure, and offer new policies and narratives.

FIGURE 5
Age and sex distribution for the year 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

FIGURE 6
Predicted age and sex distribution for the year 2050



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

This trend holds true for many other European countries such as Italy (where it will be even more significant), France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, and Poland. Accordingly, as reported by demographer David Miles,¹⁷ we should expect that:

- By the middle of this century the ratio of people of working age to those of retirement age will for several countries stand at only around one-half the current level in the absence of massive immigration or catastrophic illnesses. The proportion of the population under 30 will see a sharp fall.
- Over the next 50 years a consistent but not steady rise in the relative numbers of over 65-year-olds is forecast.
- Over the next 10 years there will be a significant rise in the proportion of the population in the second half of their working lives (age 45-65). These people should do the most saving, in theory. Such change could have a powerful impact on saving behavior in both the public and private sectors. It is also likely to affect labor supply, tax rates, and real wages.

In a nutshell, seniors vote more than the young—and there will be more of them in the future. It is clear that progressives need to target them. The question, though, is whether senior voters hold consistent convictions that can be targeted effectively. More analysis is necessary on this particular question.

Gender

Spanish women vote as much as men, as in almost all Western democracies. Between the first elections and 1989 participation differences declined, and differences are not significant since then.

Spanish women were in the past considered to be more conservative than men for two interrelated reasons. The first was their socio-occupational role. Since most women were mainly dedicated to taking care of their families and the home their link with politics was weaker than men's. In other words, politics was mainly considered a man's business. The second is related to religion. Women were more religious—or at least were more frequently involved in the Catholic Church, which is traditionally conservative in Spain. When they voted, therefore, they were more conservative.

Spanish society radically transformed, however. And one of its social advances in the last three decades is the incorporation of women into the labor force—a process not yet complete. Moreover, the church does not play as predominant a role as it used to though it still maintains a privileged role, position, voice, and power. Progressive governments were not able to limit this role as much as they could and should.

As a result of these factors women do not vote as conservatively. In fact, only in 1982 did women vote proportionally less for the PSOE than men. Since then women proportionally vote PSOE more than men, though only significantly in 2008 (see Tables 10 and 11). A curious aspect is that while there is little gender difference between the PSOE and PP vote, the IU, or former Communist party, obtains more support from men than women.

One problem remains regarding gender. How is it possible that progressives historically called for equality but did not gain stronger support from women voters? In Spain, for instance, women’s rights have improved dramatically, and the PSOE mainly drove such changes. But that didn’t translate into a surge of votes from women.

There are two possible explanations for such a situation. The first is that conservative parties were successful in deactivating an issue that could be very harmful to them. The second is that progressives weren’t able to exploit it as fully as they should. These possibilities need further study.

Religion

Religion is a classic variable that almost all electoral analyses in Europe take into account. The church and political conservatives in Spain are very closely linked.

Religious strife deeply divided Spanish society in the years before the Civil War. The church sided with the insurgents when the war began, and when Francisco Franco won the institutional Catholic Church strongly collaborated with his dictatorship. The church was not a unitary actor, however, and some Catholic sectors were anti-Franco.

TABLE 10
PSOE’s vote distribution by gender (%)

	Men	Women
1982	54.8	45.2
1986	48.4	51.6
1989	45.9	54.1
1993	47.3	52.7
1996	48	52
2000	45.9	54.1
2004	47.8	52.2
2008	46.4	53.6

Source: CIS.

TABLE 11
Distribution of gender vote to the PSOE (%)

	Men	Women
1982	43.3	34.7
1986	38.3	37.3
1989	30	32.1
1993	31.1	32.4
1996	27.9	28.5
2000	19.4	20.8
2004	37.2	38.1
2008	38.4	42

Source: CIS.

A gradual secularization of society began in the 1970s, as in other European countries. But the secularization became more pronounced at the outset of the democratic period. This process went hand in hand with a sharper separation between church and state.

Catholics in Spain vote more often, particularly compared to atheists and nonbelievers. They are the most important part of the electorate. It is also the case that Catholics who assiduously attend religious services and are involved in socialization and relationship networks vote more than other Catholics. Moreover, they vote more conservatively: Among acknowledged Catholics, those who attend religious ceremonies are more likely to vote for the conservative PP. Seventy-five percent of Spaniards today are Catholics. About 13 percent are nonbelievers, 7.5 percent are atheists, and 2 percent profess other religions. But among Catholics only about 25 percent attend services once a month or more.

One more point about the church. The church hierarchy in Spain is deeply conservative and antidemocratic to some extent. For “historical” reasons they benefit from the most privileged state financing scheme in Europe. Every Sunday mass is broadcast on public television because of past habits that still persist. Moreover, active Catholics are a minority but they are very noisy, and orchestrated by the church and the PP. Lately they have taken a clear stance against progressive policies through demonstrations and particularly against the PSOE government.

Geography

The geographical patterns of the Spanish vote are not written in stone. There are many reasons for this.

First, competition among parties is not the same at the three levels—local, regional, and national. One would expect that bigger cities would have more progressive voters at the local level. But the city of Madrid, the largest in Spain, has voted for the conservative PP since 1991. Barcelona, the second largest, has voted for the PSC—the Catalan branch of the PSOE—since 1979.

What about the outskirts of these cities? In Madrid the northern towns traditionally vote PP while in the south they vote more for the PSOE, though the PP vote increased in recent elections. In the towns around Barcelona the power of the PSC is so dominant that it has been called the “red belt” for many years. Moreover, in

many towns there are independent candidacies since there are 8,111 municipalities. So, for example, in the last local elections in 2007 the PSOE obtained 35.31 percent of all the votes and the PP 36.01 percent, but independents gained 6.29 percent of all votes. The other 22.39 percent was distributed among regional parties.

These regional parties lead to the second reason why there is no straightforward geographical pattern or split. In some regions the identity debate is highly relevant politically, and where it is strongest it makes the main national parties second and third forces.

Consider Catalonia. The conservative nationalist CiU, under the leadership of Jordi Pujol, kept the presidency of Catalonia for 23 years. The Catalan branch of the PSOE, the PSC, was the main opposition party. The PP's best result was third place in the 1999 autonomic elections. The same happened in the Basque Country with the conservative nationalist PNV. There was a nationalist president for more than 25 years there.

So where there is strong traditional nationalist feeling this translates into votes, and consequently, into seats. The examples of Catalonia and the Basque country make this clear. But these nationalist parties' influence cannot be taken as a general rule since in some regions where there is not such an intense nationalist feeling the party system imitates the national level (two main parties, PSOE and PP, obtain the votes of most citizens). That is the case for Castilla La Mancha, Andalucía, and Extremadura, which the PSOE has governed for more than 20 years. The same is true in some other regions such as Madrid, Murcia, and Valencia, where the PP has held power for more than 16 straight years.

Finally, in the national context, it should be stressed that vote distribution matters. The Spanish electoral system favors the concentration of the vote in big parties due to a minimum provincial threshold of votes to obtain seats and relatively small provincial areas. So in many provinces there are only two parties—namely, PSOE and PP—with any real chance of obtaining representation.

The new progressive coalition

President Rodríguez Zapatero has built a very strong social coalition aimed at expanding individual freedoms. This coalition is based on women and some groups traditionally excluded from politics such as dependents, immigrants, and homosexuals. The government put special emphasis on enhancing equality policies. The “Ley de Dependencia,” or dependence law, is creating the fourth pillar of the welfare state in Spain not only for dependents but also for those who take care of them, mainly women. Such social policies created controversy in many conservative circles.

At the same time, the PSOE government is quite sensitive to regional demands for more self-governance. The process of proclaiming and applying new regional statutes is proof of that. The Catalan statute, the first to be implemented, was controversial—the PP led a campaign against it—but once the Catalan Parliament was established many other regions such as Valencia and Andalucía did the same. In fact, some articles in the statutes of Valencia and Andalucía are literal copies of Catalonia’s. And while the PP tried to revoke the Catalan statute in the Constitutional Court it did not do this for either the Valencian or the Andalusian statutes. Such behavior by the PP has also generated an anti-PP vote among some groups in these regions.

But the government’s actions were not limited to the expansion of civil rights. It introduced more traditional social democratic policies. For instance, the minimum wage was raised and pensions were increased yearly above inflation under former Labor and Social Issues Secretary Jesús Caldera (2004 -2008).

The government also regularized an important number of immigrants who were in an irregular situation. Many of these immigrants may become Spanish citizens at some point, and consequently will have the right to vote. This is an important group that the PSOE must take into account to continue building the social democratic coalition.

Both the PSOE coalition's strengths and weaknesses should be considered during analysis. Its strong points are its ability to expand rights that had been forgotten or simply not even considered. In a word, the main asset for the PSOE government has been inclusion: of dependents, women, immigrants, and gays.

The problems of the coalition are that while the expansion of some social rights is cost free—there are no cost differences in same-sex marriage compared to traditional marriage—the promotion of other rights is more expensive, and given the country's economic situation it may be difficult not only to maintain them but even to keep some of them.

In fact, some measures that were taken during good economic times—and considered populist by many—such as the 400 euro refund on the income tax had to be abolished. This affected the government's credibility. Moreover, the rapid increase in unemployment may negatively affect the PSOE's success.

Besides the economic situation, the aging population and immigration are two other elements social democrats must consider. The ideological evolution of the young is particularly worrisome. Younger voters were key in the 2004 and 2008 elections. But when asked which ideological "label" they feel closest to the youngest cohorts (18 to 24 years old) first say "liberal" and only then "socialist." This might not be a problem if all the remaining age groups behave similarly, but this is not the case. The "socialist" label is the most preferred for all the other age groups.

A "liberal" in Spain is different from a "liberal" in the United States. A U.S. liberal votes for the Democratic Party. The self-proclaimed liberal party in Spain is the PP, not the PSOE. Hence the significance of youth's ideological leanings.

The new progressive vision

“The new progressive vision” for Spain is an ongoing process that should be vigorously discussed and debated. This new vision should help knit together the disparate elements of the emerging progressive coalition in Spain, uniting them around a common reform program that can successfully deal with economic and demographic challenges. The following are some key points that should be incorporated into a new progressive vision.

- **Market reforms are progressive when they reduce privileges.** In this sense, competition and the free market are left-wing values and progressives must propose and defend them. Traditionally the narrative is reactive, and progressives tend to focus on the market’s unfairness. Competition and the free market are, however, left-wing values because they are, by definition, against the domination of the majority of the people by the few, which contradicts the idea of freedom.
- **Spain needs a strong and transparent state.** A strong state consolidates the progressive principles and the welfare state. But a transparent state is also necessary because transparency implies accountability and leads to efficiency.
- **At the same time, progressives should fight against those who act to maintain their privileges and block reform, no matter who they are.** Some reforms social democrats promoted years ago have improved the lives of many who now may feel their status quo is threatened. In a sense a conflict exists between a reformist left and a conservative left. Such conservatism is bad for the success of a social democratic reform program.
- **The equal opportunities principle should be constantly present in progressives’ narratives and policies.** Equality of opportunities in employment, education, and promotion as well as in work conditions help to make progress toward real equality.

- **Progressives should commit to effective and efficient government.** An evaluation of the results from policies, institutions, and civil servants' work is useful to orient public policymaking and spending.
- **Progressives should remind citizens that social advances should not be taken for granted.** One of social democracy's main problems is that the bulk of citizens may take some things for granted when they should not. Public hospitals did not always exist. Nor did public schools. Spain now enjoys one of the highest percentages in university education, which is mainly attributable to previous socialist efforts in education. But this was not always the case. Policy makes a difference. This does not mean that social democrats need to stir up fear. Fortunately, circumstances in Spain, Europe, and the United States are better than they used to be. But neither politics nor policies can be taken for granted, and progressives must insist on this.
- **Progressives should focus on the environment.** Big policies involving strategic actors such as energy companies are necessary for environmental sustainability. But progressives should place more stress on the regular everyday actions of citizens. Citizens' awareness also influences the public sphere and behaviors in society as a whole.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the most relevant trends in demographic change and their potential impact on progressive political strategy in Spain. Here are the key results.

In the first section, we summarized election results in the country and demonstrated how, since the first democratic elections, the vote in Spain has been increasingly concentrated in the two main parties, PSOE and PP.

In the second section we looked at how support for the Socialist Party has changed across a number of different socio-economic variables.

- Immigration is a crucial issue both because of natives' reactions and because of the political impact from immigrants becoming full-rights citizens.
- Regarding education, we showed that in Spain there is no linear relationship with participation and that PSOE obtains more support among the less educated and less support among the most educated group.
- In terms of class, those in a higher class position do participate more than the rest, but more importantly, they vote more conservatively. Qualified and non-qualified blue-collar workers, on the other hand, consistently vote more often for the PSOE.
- As for age, the youngest voters do not consistently favor the PSOE more than older voters. Additionally, in contrast to the United States, the millennial generation will not gain in importance due to the rapid aging of Spanish society.
- On gender, women participate as much as men and are generally slightly more likely to vote PSOE than men, though only in 2008 was this difference large.
- Religion matters in Spain and those who most assiduously attend religious services vote more than the rest and they vote more conservatively.
- Finally, we did not find fixed patterns on geographical vote distribution.

The third section analyzed the social coalition supporting progressive policies in Spain. President Zapatero has built a social coalition with the objective of expanding individual freedoms, which is one of the most positive results of his time in

office. But some of the social reforms he implemented that improved the economic situation of the vulnerable are expensive, and given the economic difficulties, it may be hard to keep some of these.

Finally, the last section provided some principles and values that could guide the type of society progressives seek to build.

More research is needed if we want to expand and refine the general progressive narrative. Society and the world have changed. Just compare today to 30 years ago. Given the transformations we have gone through, how much did the values structure of Spanish society also change? How has the economic crisis affected the expectations of our citizens and their perceptions of the left, broadly defined?

We do not know much about these questions, so we should make no easy assumptions and investigate them with rigor. We have a lot of work to do in order to transform society. Let's get moving.

References

- Cainzos, M. 2001. "La evolución del voto clasista en España, 1986-2000." *Zona Abierta*, (96/97): 91-171.
- Evans, G. 1999. *The End of Class Politics? Class Voting in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fernández-Albertos, José and Ferran Martínez i Coma. forthcoming. "Los efectos de la campaña y de los debates electorales." José Ramón Montero e Ignacio Lago, eds. *Elecciones 2008*.
- Font, J. and Ramiro, L. forthcoming. "La concentración del voto de izquierda: ¿cambio de preferencias o voto útil?" José Ramón Montero e Ignacio Lago, eds. *Elecciones 2008*.
- Franklin, M., Mackie, T. and Valen, H. et al. 1992. *Electoral Change: Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- García Viñuela, E. and Artés, J. 2009. "Una estimación del voto estratégico de Izquierda Unida al Partido Socialista en las elecciones generales del período 2000-2008." *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (128): 35-55.
- González, J. 1996. "Clases, ciudadanos y clases de ciudadanos." *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (74): 45-76.
- González, J. 2001. "Clases, cohortes, partidos y elecciones: qué sabemos de la experiencia española (1986-1996) y qué podemos aprender de ella." *Revista Internacional de Sociología* (29): 1-23.
- González, J. 2004. "Las bases sociales de la política española." *Revista Española de Sociología* (4): 119-142.
- Gunther, R., Montero, J. R., and Botella, J. 2004. *Democracy in Modern Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Haub, Carl. 2010. "Population Growth and Its Implications for Development."
- Heath, A., Jowell, R, and Curtice, J. 1985. *How Britain Votes*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Inglehart, R. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lago, I. 2005. "El voto estratégico en las elecciones generales en España (1977-2000)." Madrid: CIS.
- Martínez i Coma, F. and Duval, R. 2009. "Hostility Toward Immigration in Spain." Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor.
- Miles, David. 1999. "Modelling the Impact of Demographic Change upon the Economy." *The Economic Journal* 109 (452): 1-36.
- Ocaña, F. and Oñate, P. 2007. "Elecciones excepcionales, elecciones de continuidad y sistemas de partidos." *Elecciones Generales 2004*.
- Pallarés, F., Riba, C. and Fraile, M. 2007. "Variables socioestructurales y comportamiento electoral en las elecciones generales españolas. Una perspectiva evolutiva 1979-2000." *Revista de Estudios Políticos* (135): 109-158.
- Rodón, T. 2009. "El sesgo de participación en el sistema electoral español." *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (126): 107-125.

Endnotes

- 1 Irene Ramos, head of politics, citizenship and equality at Ideas Foundation, was responsible for the coordination and the technical revision of the paper with the assistance of Marta Plaza, junior research fellow at Ideas Foundation. The paper includes comments by Carmen de Paz, head of the Ideas Foundation's International Network.
- 2 The basic elements of the Spanish electoral system, which affects the way in which the political system is configured, is determined by the d'Hondt electoral formula, a 3-percent provincial (district) threshold of the valid votes and closed and blocked electoral lists. There are 350 seats, with a minimum number of two seats per province (with the exception of Ceuta and Melilla with only one seat each), and the rest of the 248 seats are distributed according to population.
- 3 José Fernández-Albertos and Ferran Martínez i Coma, "Los efectos de la campaña y de los debates electorales," in José Ramón Montero e Ignacio Lago, eds. *Elecciones 2008* (2010).
- 4 20 percent unemployment rate according to December 2010 data from the Active Population Survey by the National Statistics Institute.
- 5 E. García Viñuela and J. Artés, "Una estimación del voto estratégico de Izquierda Unida al Partido Socialista en las elecciones generales del período 2000-2008," *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (128) (2009): 35-55.
- 6 J. Font and L. Ramiro, "La concentración del voto de izquierda: ¿cambio de preferencias o voto útil?" In José Ramón Montero e Ignacio Lago, eds. *Elecciones 2008*.
- 7 The number of parties, which tells us about the concentration of political power and is the most accepted instrument to measure it, has declined in Spain since the first elections in 1977. (F. Ocaña and P. Oñate, "Elecciones excepcionales, elecciones de continuidad y sistemas de partidos," *Elecciones Generales 2004* (2007).)
- 8 R. Gunther, J.R. Montero, and J. Botella, *Democracy in Modern Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p: 221-225.
- 9 There is a general lack of data on political preferences of immigrants.
- 10 A. Heath, R. Jowell, and J. Curtice, *How Britain Votes* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985).
- 11 R. Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- 12 Figures from the CIS survey data tend to understate overall support for the PSOE particularly in earlier years, so the subgroup figures in the tables will also tend to be low in absolute terms. But the relative patterns of support by subgroup still provide valuable information.
- 13 M. Franklin, T. Mackie, and H. Valen, et al. *Electoral Change: Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 14 G. Evans, *The End of Class Politics? Class Voting in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 15 M. Cainzos, "La evolución del voto clasista en España, 1986-2000," *Zona Abierta*, (96/97) (2001): 91-171; J. González, "Clases, ciudadanos y clases de ciudadanos," *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (74) (1996): 45-76; J. González, "Clases, cohortes, partidos y elecciones: qué sabemos de la experiencia española (1986-1996) y qué podemos aprender de ella," *Revista Internacional de Sociología* (29) (2001): 1-23. See also, F. Pallarés, C. Riba, and M. Fraile, "Variables socioestructurales y comportamiento electoral en las elecciones generales españolas. Una perspectiva evolutiva 1979-2000," *Revista de Estudios Políticos* (135) (2007): 109-158.
- 16 J. González, "Las bases sociales de la política española," *Revista Española de Sociología* (4) (2004): 119-142; Pallarés, Fraile, and Riba, "Variables socioestructurales y comportamiento electoral en las elecciones generales españolas. Una perspectiva evolutiva 1979-2000," (2007).
- 17 David Miles, "Modelling the Impact of Demographic Change upon the Economy," *The Economic Journal* 109 (452) (1999): 1-36.

About the author

Ferran Martínez, Ph.D., is a sociologist and political scientist. He collaborates as an expert with Ideas Foundation.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Center for American Progress

