

For years right-wing populism was regarded as an irrelevant phenomenon in Spain. The recent success of Vox provides clear evidence that the transformation of Spanish politics is still under way. Today, both right-wing and left-wing populism – the latter represented by Podemos – coexist in an increasingly fragmented party system. This article shows that territorial mobilization has been an important factor in the emergence of these two competing forms of populism. In fact, their positioning on the so-called ‘centre-periphery cleavage’ at the moment of their initial success is their most notable element of differentiation. Right-wing populism in Spain is strongly anti-localist and anti-regionalist and this is clearly reflected in the territorial distribution of its support. On the other hand, left-wing populism had its electoral breakthrough particularly in those areas where demands for autonomy and even independence were stronger. This makes the Spanish case extremely interesting since most studies have not sufficiently considered the territorial dimension as a defining, and distinguishing, feature of right-wing and left-wing forms of populism.

Keywords: Populism; Territorial Politics; Vox; Podemos; Spain

Introduction

The main result of the April 2019 general election in Spain was a clear victory for the Socialist Party (PSOE) led by Pedro Sánchez. Yet the other big winner of that election was Vox, a new populist radical right party. After the crisis, political equilibria had already been dramatically altered and support for mainstream parties was significantly eroded by the rise of new challengers. Populism became a new disruptive phenomenon in Spanish politics. Yet it first took the form of 'left-wing', 'inclusionary' populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013) under the banner of Podemos, which triumphed in the general elections of 2015 and 2016. The other emerging actor, Ciudadanos, could not be categorised as populist but, rather, as a liberal, 'centrist' party advocating a renewal in national politics. Generally, for most of the post-crisis period Spain did not experience any significant rise in right-wing populism. This clearly contrasted with the situation in other Mediterranean European countries such as Italy and Greece, where exclusionary forms of populism, even extreme ones, had emerged or strengthened.

This article aims to provide an overview of the factors contributing to the unexpected rise of right-wing populism in Spain and compare this phenomenon to the previous wave of left-wing populism. Indeed, Spain can be regarded as one of the few European cases in which two competing forms of populism have emerged. Therefore, it provides valuable empirical evidence to detect the key differences between them. The analysis presented here mainly focuses on meso-level, aggregate data covering a range of social, economic, demographic and political variables across the 52 provinces of the country. It is shown that whereas immigration has been positively correlated with the rise of Vox, exposure to economic globalization has been a key factor in the success of Podemos. This seems to reflect the different focus that right-wing and left-wing populist parties have on socio-cultural and socio-economic issues.

Yet there is an additional factor of political competition, which has not been sufficiently analysed by comparative literature on populism, but seems particularly relevant in Spain: territorial politics. This article shows that the Spanish populist right has emerged as a key force of opposition against pro-federalist and pro-independence demands at the sub-state level. Interestingly, the populist radical left has positioned itself on the opposite side of the so-called 'centre-periphery cleavage'. This difference is crucial and, as shown in the empirical

analysis, accounts for a significant part of territorial variation in the success of the two forms of populism.

This study is structured as follows. First a framework considering the factors traditionally associated with the rise of right-wing and left-wing forms of populism is presented. This is followed by a more specific argument focusing on the relationship between populism and territorial mobilization in Spain. A quantitative analysis based on an original dataset including data from all 52 Spanish provinces is then developed to test the hypotheses presented in the theoretical framework. Determinants of Vox's electoral success in April 2019⁹ are compared to those of Podemos in 2015. The logic of this choice derives from the fact that in 2019, support for Podemos might have been affected by intervening, 'supply-side' factors, which would distort any direct comparison between the two parties. Generally, the article aims to look at to identify the 'ecological' factors favouring the emergence, rather than persistence, of populist parties. Finally, the conclusion is preceded by a discussion of individual-level data that seem to confirm the results of the meso-level analysis.

The success of competing populisms in Spain

Until 2018 Spain was regarded as an exception in the European political landscape. In an article published in 2015, Sonia Alonso and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser explained why the country was one of the few where populist radical right (PRR) parties were

almost non-existent despite the fact that there is growing political dissatisfaction with the political establishment and anti-immigrant attitudes are similar to those in other European countries with more successful PRR parties (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, 21)

Previous studies already pointed to the lack of opportunities existing for 'radical right' parties in Spain. A study by Llamared and Ramiro (2006), for instance, showed that two factors negatively affected their success: their organizational and ideological splintering and the competition of the centre-right People's Party (PP).

In fact, the only form of populism that emerged in the aftermath of the Eurocrisis was of the 'radical left' type. Podemos became a clear competitor of the established left and was able to

attract support of significant sectors of dissatisfied voters in the aftermath of the Great Recession (Ramiro and Gomez 2017). In the 2015 general election, this ‘movement party’ (Mosca and Quaranta 2017) entered the national parliament for the first time. The other new actor emerging in this period was Ciudadanos, a centrist political party, focused on the defence of Spanish territorial integrity and advocating the need for political regeneration (Orriols and Cordero 2016: 469). Rather than populist, the political organisation led by Albert Rivera has been defined as a new liberal party of the 21st century, ‘a real novelty in Spanish politics’ (Nuñez 2019: 206).

Yet the Spanish party system continued to evolve and another actor soon appeared first in the regional and then in the national political arena. At the end of 2018, Vox gained 11% of the vote in the Andalusian regional election. Its success put an end to the dominance of the Socialist Party in this region and favoured the formation of a centre-right government led by the mainstream People’s Party (PP) and including also Ciudadanos. As pointed out by Turnbull-Dugarte (2019: 1), ‘the 2018 regional elections in Andalucía marked the end of Spain’s exceptional status as a country with a party system free from the radical right’. This, on the one hand, seemed to increase the competitiveness of a right-wing political front ranging from Ciudadanos to Vox, which, for the first time, managed to oust the Left from power in its traditional stronghold. On the other hand, however, the PP started suffering from increasing competition on both sides of the political continuum. On the PP’s left, Ciudadanos appealed to moderate sectors of the electorate, concerned with maintaining the national unity of Spain, promoting economic modernization and fighting corruption and bad governance. The right flank of the party was instead challenged by Vox, which presented itself as an even more radical defender of national unity than Ciudadanos but also appealed to traditional values and conservative-nationalist feelings.

Hit by a series of corruption scandals, the PP had already been forced into opposition in 2018 by the Spanish Parliament, which voted a no confidence motion, allowing the Socialist Pedro Sanchez to become new Prime Minister (Marguiles 2018). Consequently, the PP changed its leadership – Mariano Rajoy, the former Prime Minister, was replaced by Pablo Casado. Once out of government, the party struggled to act as a ‘broad church’ connecting different tendencies within centre-right and right-wing sectors of the electorate. The results of the 2019

general election (Table 1) clearly showed that the PP was no longer the dominant party of the centre-right. This increasingly fragmented area of the political spectrum, including Ciudadanos, PP and Vox, remained electorally competitive but less than the centre-left represented by the incumbent PSOE and Podemos.

[Table 1 about here]

The 2019 election therefore saw the rise of a PRR party in Spanish national politics. What are its key characteristics? Following Cas Mudde's widely accepted definition, the populist radical right can be regarded as 'a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism' (Mudde 2011, 12). Nativism incorporates elements of nationalism and xenophobia. Therefore, people are essentially divided into two groups: those who belong to the national community and those who do not. The latter are seen as a serious threat to the homogeneity of the native group. Authoritarianism instead refers to 'the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Ibid.). Lastly, populism

is understood as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde 2007, 23)

Vox was created in 2013 by a group of disgruntled PP members led by Santiago Abascal, a former Basque legislator. The new party seems to meet the definition provided by Mudde. Although some scholars have defined it as a 'neofascist political party' (Franquesa 2019, 545), it is more appropriate to consider it an 'archetypal populist radical right' party (Dennison and Mendes 2019, 1). The definition of Vox as 'right-wing' populist is also adopted in one of the first studies published on this party. As stated by Turnbull-Dugarte (2019, 2), Vox's

populist approach of promising to "make Spain great again" alongside its nativist authoritarianism signal its fulfilment of Mudde's ... classification as a populist radical right party.

The next sections will provide more evidence of the right-wing populist characteristics of this party by discussing the contextual factors that have contributed to its success. It also presents hypotheses focusing on the success of left-wing populism, represented by Podemos. The Spanish case allows a comparison between two (competing) forms of populism in a multi-

level system. To be sure both left-wing and right-wing forms of populism have appeared in (a small number of) other countries, such as Greece, the Netherlands and France. Yet in none of these, territorial issues have played a role comparable to that of Spain. Germany, with the emergence of the Left (*Die Linke*) and Alternative for Germany, might be another interesting case given its territorial structure. However, its highly coordinated federal system and the lack of strong regionalist/sub-state nationalist parties (with the exception of Bavaria) make the impact of territoriality on political competition much less significant than in Spain.

Factors contributing to the success of right-wing and left-wing populist parties: application to the Spanish case

Conventional explanations of populist success: socio-cultural and socio-economic factors

According to the existing literature, a key aspect distinguishing right-wing populism from left-wing populism is that the latter is more focused on socio-economic issues, while the former tends to pay more attention to socio-cultural issues (Otjes and Louwerse 2015). Using the categories of 'exclusionary' and 'inclusionary' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013) left-wing populism tends to be more socio-economically inclusive (including the poor), whereas right-wing populism is more socio-culturally exclusive (excluding the 'aliens').

Both forms of populism can be (and have been) seen as a backlash against globalization, particularly in the aftermath of the financial crisis and Great Recession started in 2008. However, considering the distinction between socio-economic and socio-cultural issues highlighted above, they may have focused on different aspects of this phenomenon. As highlighted by Rodrik (2018), right-wing populists tend to emphasize the cultural dimension of globalization, particularly the impact of immigration, which is seen as an 'external threat' to the will of the people. On the other hand, left-wing populists are more concerned about the economic dimension of globalization, mainly understood in the form of trade and financial integration. This was also well summarised by Kriesi et al. (2006: 928):

The radical left's opposition to the opening up of borders is mainly an opposition to economic liberalization and to the threat it poses to the left's achievement at the national level. The populist right's opposition to the opening up of the borders is first of all an opposition to the social and cultural forms of competition and the threat they pose to national identity.

Generally, it can be expected that socio-cultural issues are more likely to be politically relevant and mobilising in contexts that have experienced high levels of immigration. Indeed, although not fully unanimous on this point (Golder 2016), literature has generally supported the thesis that a positive relationship between immigration and strength of right-wing populism may exist (Knigge 1998; Lubbers and Sheepers 2002; Golder 2003; Halla, Wagner and Zweimüller 2017).

Like many other PRR parties in Europe, Vox has also been defined as an ‘anti-immigration party’ (Dennison and Geddes, 2019) and a recent study by Dennison and Mendes (2019) suggests that it may have benefited from an increase in the salience of the immigration issue in the Spanish political debate. It is undeniable that the party has adopted a very hard line on immigration, calling for the immediate deportation of undocumented immigrants, particularly those who commit crimes, and an end to social policies aimed at integrating immigrants (Turnbull-Dugarte 2019, 3; Vox Manifesto 2019, 5–6). Therefore, it can be expected that in the 2019 election

H1. Vox was more successful in those Spanish provinces with higher levels of immigration

Another important aspect of globalization is trade openness or liberalization, which, while producing gains in terms of aggregate economic growth, is likely to have important distributional effects and create losers and winners (Kriesi et al. 2006; Rodrik 2018). More exposure to global trade may produce increasing demands for compensation and redistribution (Garrett 1998). In this context, the socio-economic focus of left-wing populist parties may be more electorally appealing.

Podemos has clearly paid particular attention to the economic effects of globalization. In his article on the links between globalization and populism, Rodrik (2018) considers this party (together with Syriza in Greece) as an exception in Europe, where (right-wing) populism has been mainly focused on socio-cultural issues. In some respects, he sees the party as more similar to the anti-globalist populist left of Latin America in its opposition to a neoliberal model of growth based on unregulated economic openness and dominated by a small number of powerful actors. Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods (2017) have stressed that Podemos’ anti-establishment rhetoric is directed not only against politicians ‘but also against the privileged

economic and financial elites, and the large...corporations embodying a neoliberal hegemony'. Therefore, in its first general election

H2. Podemos was more successful in those Spanish provinces which were more exposed to economic globalization

Additionally, 'inclusion' of the poorer sectors of society is often associated with left-wing versions of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Therefore, one may expect that Podemos' initial success started in those areas where poverty issues were more pressing, regardless of how exposed they were to economic globalization. Indeed, since its foundation, the party's struggle against corruption and the dominant forces of globalization has been accompanied by its support for measures aimed at reducing poverty (Rodon and Hierro 2016, 343). These include a universal basic income for those under the poverty line (in a country with very high levels of unemployment) and energy price caps for low-income households (Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017, 364). According to Sola and Rendueles (2018, 112), Podemos contributed to the 're-politization and rescuing' of debates focusing on anti-poverty measures. It can therefore be hypothesized that

H3. Podemos was more successful in those Spanish provinces characterized by higher levels of deprivation

Spain: the peculiar role of territorial politics

Conventional theories have not provided a systematic assessment of the link between rising populism and territorial mobilization. The latter is associated with the so-called 'centre-periphery' cleavage, defined by Lipset and Rokkan as

local oppositions to encroachments of the aspiring or the dominant national elites and their bureaucracies: the typical reactions of peripheral regions, linguistic minorities, and culturally threatened populations to the pressures of the centralizing, standardizing, and 'rationalizing' machinery of the nation-state. (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 14)

To be sure, literature has acknowledged the fact that some regionalist parties have combined their demands for increasing regional autonomy (or even independence) with forms of left-

wing or right-wing populism. For instance, the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) and the Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*) have been regarded as good examples of regionalist parties adopting a right-wing populist discourse (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005; Art 2008). On the other hand, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru have been more inclined to resort to left-wing populism in their struggle against austerity (Masseti 2018). Yet it is not clear how ‘state-wide’ populist parties would address the territorial issue. Spain is an interesting case because the two main populist parties, Podemos and Vox, compete across the whole Spanish territory – they are, therefore, state-wide parties – but have to adapt to a political system characterised by multi-level governance and significant territorial demands represented by regionalist and sub-state nationalist parties (Subirats 2006; Wilson 2012).

Interestingly, according to Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015, 40), a ‘cleavage structure characterised by an entrenched conflict between peripheral and state nationalisms’ seemed to prevent rather than favour the emergence of a PRR party in Spain. The two authors argued that a PRR party could not play the nativist card in a context characterized by multiple ‘national peripheral’ identities. Additionally, the ‘state-centralist’ position was firmly occupied by the PP and this left little space for the emergence of an even more centralist and nationalist force to its right. In sum, the Spanish case seemed to suggest that PRR parties struggle to emerge at the ‘state-wide’ level when (1) the existence of sub-state nationalisms and strong regional identities makes their anti-immigration (exclusionary) messages less easy to frame and (2) they have to compete with strong centre-right parties, which effectively represent centralizing tendencies.

In light of this, how can the developments in 2018 and 2019 be explained? If we follow the logic of the first point of the argument summarized above, the radicalization of the centre-periphery cleavage, driven by the Catalan crisis (a ‘territorial crisis’ [Dowling 2017]), should have further reduced the chances of success for a Spanish PRR party. Indeed, it could be argued that in a context of increasing territorial tensions a ‘state-wide’ PRR party would be even less likely to gain support from ‘voters who might have anti-immigrant attitudes or adhere to the populist set of ideas but identify with another national community (e.g. Catalonia)’ (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015, 28).

However, strong demands for autonomy or even independence coming from some regions, might trigger equally radical reactions and demands for (re-)centralization in other regions within the same country. This could in turn be exploited by nativist forces, which do not exclusively focus on immigrants but also on internal ‘enemies’ (Mudde 2007, 69-70), accused to undermine the unity of the national community. This is what happened in Spain. It is telling that, at the end of 2018, the Catalan crisis played a very important role in a geographically and politically distant region: Andalusia. Turnbull-Dugarte (2019, 1) effectively shows that ‘concerns over devolution, likely engendered by the Catalan separatist crisis, predominantly explain voters’ preferences for the right-wing challenger’ in the 2018 Andalusian regional election. More importantly, the author adds that these concerns are made worse by the perceived inability of mainstream, state-wide parties to respond effectively to the territorial challenge (Ibid.). This second point ultimately rescues the theory developed by Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser. As highlighted above, they argue that sub-state territorial mobilization needs to *be accompanied by* the existence of a strong mainstream party representing the ‘centre’ of the centre-periphery cleavage in order to hinder the success of a PRR party at the state-wide level. The weakening of the PP, hit by corruption scandals and forced into opposition, removed the second condition and, consequently, opened up an opportunity for Vox.

In fact, territorial issues played an even more important role than immigration and the economy in Vox’s electoral campaign. The party can be regarded as a representative of ‘state-centric ethnic nationalism’ (Calzada 2018) and advocated the re-centralization of powers to Madrid (Ibid., 345). Unsurprisingly, the first section of its manifesto for the 2019 general election was entitled ‘Spain, Unity and Sovereignty’ (*España, Unidad y Soberanía*), to stress the main theme of its electoral campaign. Immigration, another key issue for the party, was only discussed in the third section of the manifesto. The economy section was even less prominent and came in fifth place, following the one on security and law and order.

The first point of the first section in Vox’s manifesto called for the suspension of autonomy in Catalonia. This was followed by other radical statements: the banning of political parties that are believed to undermine national unity, the protection of Spanish national symbols and language, the suspension of regional police systems, the transformation of Spain into a unitary system, with only one government and one parliament and the re-centralization of key

regional competencies such as education, healthcare, security and justice (Vox Manifesto 2019, 1–2). No other party – not even the PP and Ciudadanos – adopted such an extreme position in the debate on centre-periphery relations. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that in the 2019 general election,

H4a: Vox was more successful in those Spanish provinces where territorial political mobilization (i.e. support for regionalist or pro-independence parties) was weaker

Interestingly, the Spanish left-wing populist party, Podemos, took a very different approach to territorial issues. It is true that Podemos emerged as part of a reaction against austerity, a theme that dominated political debates particularly after the so-called Eurozone crisis. Yet by 2015 territoriality had already become central in the political debate. A first Catalan ‘self-determination referendum’, which was declared illegal by the Constitutional Court, took place in 2014. In 2015, two months before the Spanish general election, the pro-independence block won the Catalan regional election. Podemos could not ignore this and, quite interestingly, it adopted an accommodative position towards territorial mobilisation, even in its most radical forms. Vidal and Sánchez-Vitores (2019: 87) have convincingly demonstrated that ‘political issues’, including regionalism, were dominant in the 2015 electoral campaign (more than economic ones) and Podemos was the only state-wide party with a very strong support for more regionalism (Ibid. 88, 90).

In its first general election manifesto, Podemos (Manifesto 2015, 188) already recognised the right of self-government and self-determination of peoples (*derecho de decidir*) and the national plurality of Spain (*naturaleza plurinacional de España*). The party even campaigned for the opening of a constituent process not only in Catalonia, but also in Spain. By amending the Constitution the plural character of Spain would therefore be officially recognized (Payero López 2015, 245). Studies focusing on the success of Podemos seem to confirm this more pluralistic and pro-autonomy profile of this party even when combined with some elements of ‘patriotism’ (Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017, 368). Evidence collected after the 2015 general election, also showed that Podemos attracted significant support from voters that favoured devolution, particularly in contexts such as Catalonia, Galicia and Valencia (Rodríguez-Teruel, Barrio and Barberà 2016). The party even forged alliances with regionalist

movements (*En Comú Podem* in Catalonia, *En Marea* in Galicia, and *Compromís-Podemos-És el Moment* in Valencia).

Generally, left-wing populism represented by Podemos lacks the ‘centralizing’ character of its opposite version and this results in an explicit acceptance of pro-autonomy demands, even acknowledging the legitimacy of pro-secession positions if driven by popular (bottom-up) support. Therefore it can be hypothesized that

H4b: Podemos was more successful in those Spanish provinces where territorial political mobilization (i.e. support for regionalist or pro-independence parties) was stronger

Mapping electoral success

The importance of territoriality is evident in the two maps presented belowⁱⁱ, which rely on data provided by the *Ministerio del Interior de España* (MIE). Figure 1 shows the distribution of Vox’s electoral breakthrough in 2019 across the 52 provinces of Spain (including Ceuta and Melilla), whereas Figure 2 focuses on Podemos’ results in 2015, its first successful general election.ⁱⁱⁱ The difference between the two maps is striking even accounting for similar success stories in big metropolitan communities such as Madrid and Seville. Vox had its strongest performances in the provinces of the two Castiles (the ‘core’ Spanish regions [Alonso and Rovira Kalwasser 2015, 36]), Andalusia and, more generally, the centre-south of the country. The party also received a large share of the vote in the two ‘exclaves’ of Ceuta and Melilla. On the other hand, Podemos’ most significant victories occurred in the ‘peripheral’ Catalan provinces (Barcelona, in particular), Valencia, Balearic Islands, the Basque Provinces (including Navarra), Galicia and Canaries.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

This geographical discrepancy needs to be explained by testing both conventional hypotheses and, more importantly, the ‘territorial mobilization’ hypothesis formulated at the end of the previous section. For this reason, the unit of analysis adopted in this study is the province, since it is at the provincial level that significant variation and differences in the distribution of initial support for the two populist parties are observed. This ‘meso-level’ analysis follows a

long tradition of research aimed at explaining regional, district or municipal variation in electoral results (Golden 2004; Vampa 2016; Halla, Wagner and Zweimüller 2017; Abbondanza and Bailo 2018). The logic of inference is also similar to that of ‘macro-level’ studies that analyse cross-national variation in aggregate electoral data rather than relying on individual-level observations (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Swank and Betz 2003; Golder 2003; Wheatley, Robbins, Hunter and Humphreys Ginn 2019).

The following empirical analysis is cross-sectional (number of observations is 52) and relies on an ordinary least squares regression model with robust standard errors. Dependent and independent variables are presented below.

Dependent, Independent, Control Variables

The dependent variable of this study, as shown above, is the share of the vote obtained by Vox and Podemos at the provincial level in the years of their electoral breakthrough: 2019 and 2015. In this way it is possible to identify the contexts where these two versions of populism had their *first* significant impact. Results in European elections are not analysed since, given their ‘second order’ character and significantly different levels of turnout (van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996), they are not fully comparable to those of general elections.

Variation in support for the two parties across the 52 Spanish provinces is explained by considering independent variables that are linked to the hypotheses presented above (see Appendix A for more information and Appendix C for summary statistics). Immigration (H1) is measured as a percentage of the provincial population composed of foreign citizens (Golders 2003, 445). Economic globalization (H2) is operationalized in terms of exposure to international trade, that is, the total value of goods that each province imports and exports (Golden 2003, 1258). Deprivation (H3) is measured by an index including per capita GDP and employment rate within each province. H4a and H4b consider how a tradition of sub-state territorial mobilization has affected the success of the two parties. This can be assessed by considering the average strength of regionalist and sub-state nationalist parties – i.e. their total share of the vote – in the two elections before their breakthrough. Considering two elections, rather than one, allows to obtain more robust results since a province scoring consistently high

in two consecutive elections will be characterized by greater opposition to centralization than one with more inconsistent results.^{iv}

A set of control variables has also been included. The quantitative analysis presented below considers the legacy of left-wing and right-wing established parties in the provinces, which might have impacted on the success of Podemos and Vox. It also considers the population size of the provinces (more information in the Appendix B).

Results

Table 2 summarizes the results of the OLS models for Vox and Podemos in 2019 and 2015. It also includes standardized coefficients, which help us assess which variables have the greater impact on the success of the two parties. The most striking result is the one linked to the territorial hypothesis (H4). As expected, the coefficient is negative for Vox and positive for Podemos. Additionally, as shown by the standardized coefficients, the strength of territorial mobilization seems to be the most important factor associated with the success of Vox and the second most important one for Podemos. This provides strong evidence in favour of the argument that territorial politics has played a crucial role in explaining the geographical distribution of early support for new populist parties in Spain. Additionally, there is a clear difference between right-wing and left-wing populisms in their approach to regionalism and autonomy. The first represents those ‘core’ areas of the country where sub-state territorial demands have been weaker, the latter has been more electorally competitive in more ‘peripheral’ areas where such demands have been stronger. In sum, the territorial factor seems to be the key element of contrast between the two forms of populism in Spain.

[Table 2 about here]

H1 is also confirmed. Vox received a significantly larger share of the vote in those areas of the country that have experienced a larger influx of migrants. This is the second most important effect in the model, as suggested by the standardized coefficient. The effect of immigration on support for Podemos is instead negative, although barely statistically significant. So, also this factor seems to mark a difference between left-wing and right-wing forms of populism, although to a lesser extent than territorial mobilization.

According to H3, deprivation would have been more positively associated with the rise of inclusive populism (controlling for immigration and other factors). However, this does not seem to be the case in Spain, since the effect of deprivation on support for Podemos is negative, although not statistically significant. However, the party led by Pablo Iglesias obtained good results in provinces that are more exposed to international trade (globalization coefficient is positive and statistically significant). This confirms the hypothesis that left-wing populism emerges as a reaction to economic, rather than cultural (i.e. immigration), forms of globalization (H2). Exposure to global economic forces may have a positive effect on per capita GDP and levels of employment. Yet it often leads to an unequal allocation of resources (Rodrick 2018, 16) and this factor – rather than overall levels of deprivation captured by the variable testing H3 – may play an important role in explaining the success of more progressive forms of populism.

The political legacy of more established state-wide parties does not seem to have a direct positive effect on the results of the two parties. After controlling for the other variables, the link between PP vote in previous elections and support for Vox appears very weak. It is even negative and statistically significant when we consider the association between left-wing legacy (PSOE and IU) and vote for Podemos. This provides more evidence in support to the argument that the initial success of the two populist parties was more affected by territorial mobilization (linked to the centre-periphery cleavage) than by traditional competition between state-wide left-wing and right-wing parties.

Lastly, Podemos seems to have been significantly more successful in more populous provinces and this shows that the initial success of this party was greater in metropolitan than in rural areas of the county. On the other hand, this variable does not seem to significantly affect support for Vox, even though the higher electoral threshold existing in less populated provinces should penalize smaller (new) parties.

In sum, Vox is the party representing the provinces of the Spanish 'core', where territorial mobilization is weaker and immigration has become an important phenomenon. Podemos instead emerged in more geographically peripheral, but relatively populous, provinces, where sub-state territorial demands have been stronger and exposure to economic globalization has been higher.

Additional evidence: individual-level data and trajectories after the breakthrough

The analysis presented above relies on meso-level data. The *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) also conducted post-election surveys in 2015 and 2019, which contain individual-level data. Unfortunately, these surveys are of limited help for this analysis since 1) they do not include clear information about voters' perceptions towards immigration and globalization 2) some provinces do not have enough observations^v and, most importantly, 3) the 2019 survey does not provide data on voters' preferences for more or less regional autonomy. Interestingly, however, the 2015 includes a question on centre-periphery relations and shows that more than one third of voters supporting more autonomy or even independence for their region chose Podemos (see Appendix D). In this group support for other parties was considerably weaker (Figure 3). This confirms the importance of territorial politics in explaining support for an emerging populist party in Spain.

[Figure 3]

The data reported in Table 3 refer to some indicators that, despite the limitations highlighted above, are comparable between the two surveys (2015 and 2019). They seem to confirm the findings of the meso-level analysis. In 2015 and 2019 Podemos was regarded as the second-best choice by 25% and 20% of regionalist parties' voters (column 1). Interestingly, in 2019 Vox had by far the lowest share in this group (0.5%). Column 2 suggests that, if in 2015 only citizens with strong regional identities had voted, Podemos would have been the largest Spanish party. This share declined in 2019 but still remained considerably higher than that of Vox (0.7%). If instead we consider traditional socio-economic identities, we see that the discrepancy between Vox and Podemos is less marked. As shown in column 3, it is true that Podemos has been particularly strong among working class voters – not so surprising for left-wing populist party. Yet in this case the gap with Vox is much less substantial (and support for the latter in this group is very similar to its overall strength within the broader electorate). In sum, Vox and Podemos seem to be more clearly alternative to each other when considering territorial/identity issues than traditional socio-economic characteristics of the voters.

[Table 3]

Lastly, this paper has focused on the general elections in which the two parties had their first breakthrough (2015 and 2019). A question that should be answered is: what happens next? Figure 4 shows how the correlation between provincial results of the two parties and territorial mobilization has changed over time from 2015 until the most recent general election in November 2019 (2019N). What emerges in the case of Podemos is a significant weakening of the positive association between the two variables. In the case of Vox we can only compare the April 2019 election with 2019N, in which the party further expanded its support. The negative correlation is confirmed although slightly weakened. Of course, it is too early to reach some conclusions on how the relationship between success of these parties and territorial politics evolves over time. Yet the declining strength of the correlation in the case of Podemos may suggest that this party has struggled to reconcile its 'double' role of state-wide party and supporter of regional autonomy and self-determination. Future research should explore this aspect in more detail.

[Figure 4]

Conclusion

A clear picture emerges from the analysis presented above, pointing to a tension between provinces of Spain where support for more regional autonomy (and even independence) is diffuse and those where these demands have been almost completely absent. It is in the latter context that the populist right has established its main constituencies. The 'us versus them' dichotomy, which characterises populist discourse, is not only used against immigrants but it is mainly framed as a reaction of the 'Spanish people', supporting a unitary, homogeneous state, against forces of federalism and independence accused of undermining the integrity of the nation.

In the case of left-wing populist Podemos, the 'us versus them' dichotomy seems to run in the opposite direction. The 'them' is not only represented by the economic and political elites but also by the forces of centralization, which are believed to limit communities' right to self-government and self-determination. Clear opposition to authoritarianism and hierarchy, often regarded as attributes of the populist radical right, resulted in a very different territorial distribution of support for Podemos at the moment of its first success in a general election. Indeed, unlike Vox, the party was particularly rewarded in areas where a tradition of sub-

state territorial mobilization was stronger. Generally, the fact that the two types of populism have clearly positioned themselves on opposite sides of the centre-periphery cleavage seems to reflect the increasingly polarized nature of territorial competition in Spain (Vidal and Sánchez-Vítores 2019).

What are the implications of these findings? This study addresses questions that are relevant for literature on populism as well as studies focusing on territorial politics. It has sought to explain the success of populist parties in Spain. This country is particularly interesting in the European context because it has experienced the success of both left-wing and right-wing forms of populism. Additionally, it provides interesting insights into how populists compete in countries where sub-national politics plays an important role. So far, the literature has mainly paid attention to *regionalist* left-wing and right-wing populist parties, but little has been said about the role of *state-wide* populist parties in multi-level settings and their approach to territorial issues. The results presented here seem to suggest that populist parties of the radical right tend to link their populist discourse to the promotion of national unity against centrifugal forces that threaten to undermine it. On the other hand, state-wide left-wing populists tend to adopt a more bottom up approach, recognizing people's right to autonomy and even self-determination against centralizing pressures coming from political elites in national government.

Of course, this paper focused on the electoral 'breakthrough' of the two parties, but future research could look at how the link between territorial politics and support for populist parties evolves over time. Additionally, it is too early to say if this finding can be generalized to other countries. Future studies could test the hypotheses presented here at the micro-level, by relying on survey data, and in other multi-level contexts where territorial politics has played an important role.

Evidence from the United Kingdom with the UK independence Party (UKIP) first, and the Brexit Party more recently, seems to lend further support to the conclusions of this article. Indeed, also in this country, a 'state-wide' PRR party has mainly appealed to the English 'core' (Welling 2010) and has been relatively weak in peripheral areas, where sub-state territorial mobilization has been stronger (Scotland is a clear case). On the other hand, at first glance, the Italian case could be seen as very different from the Spanish one. Indeed, the Northern League,

a formerly regionalist party, campaigning for federalism and even independence of the so-called *Padania* (Agnew and Brusa 1999), is now among the strongest PRR parties in Western Europe (Hamann, Nič and Puglierin 2019). However, the party has undergone a significant transformation. In the process of becoming a state-wide PRR party, it has almost completely abandoned its pro-federalist agenda (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone 2018). Today the party is called the League and has dropped any reference to the Italian North in its name. Of course, it is not (yet) a radically centralizing force like Vox, but it is undeniable that the transition from regionalist to state-wide nationalist party has determined a significant shift in the rhetoric of the party leader, Matteo Salvini, who now continuously celebrates Italian national identity and unity. Interestingly, Salvini, who used to be a strong supporter of Catalan independence, openly endorsed Vox in the 2019 general election, with a Tweet:

“My heartfelt wishes to Santi Abascal and Vox friends so that they can bring about the same change the League has brought about in Italy with our government” (Salvini’s Tweet, 27 April 2019, author’s translation)

Endnotes

ⁱ Throughout the text the focus is on the April 2019 election. The November 2019 election is only briefly mentioned before the conclusion.

ⁱⁱ Both maps have been created by the author with MapChart (www.mapchart.net)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ranges are based on 20th, 40th, 60th and 80th percentiles of the distribution in provincial results

^{iv} This also allows to reduce the leverage of ‘flash parties’

^v 6 provinces have less than 30 observations in 2015

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Table 1. Electoral results of 2019 general election in Spain

| | Votes | | Seats (% of seats in brackets) | |
|---|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| | % | % Change from 2016 | Seats won | Change from 2016 |
| PSOE | 28.7 | +6.1 | 123 (35.1) | +38 (+10.8) |
| Unidos-Podemos | 14.3 | -6.8 | 42 (12) | -29 (-8.2) |
| <i>Centre-Left/Left</i> | 43 | -0.7 | 165 (47.1) | +7 (+2.6) |
| PP | 16.7 | -13.3 | 66 (18.8) | -71 (-20.3) |
| Ciudadanos | 15.9 | +2.8 | 57 (16.3) | +25 (+7.1) |
| Vox | 10.3 | +10.2 | 24 (6.8) | +24 (+6.8) |
| <i>Centre-Right/Right</i> | 42.9 | -0.3 | 147 (42) | -22 (-6.4) |
| Other (regionalist and pro-independence parties) | 14.1 | +1 | 38 (10.9) | +15 (+4.3) |

Source: Ministerio del Interior de España (<https://www.generales2019.infoelecciones.es/>)

Table 2. Explaining the initial electoral success of right-wing and left-wing forms of populism across 52 Spanish provinces

| | Vox 2019 | | Podemos 2015 | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| | Coefficient | Standardised | Coefficient | Standardised |
| Immigration (H1) | 0.34*** (0.09) | 0.35*** | -0.20* (-0.11) | -0.20* |
| Globalization (H2) | 0.01 (0.01) | 0.06 | 0.03* (0.01) | 0.19* |
| Deprivation (H3) | 0.5 (0.3) | 0.19 | -0.49 (0.38) | -0.18 |
| Territorial Mobilization (H4) | -0.24*** (0.09) | -0.65*** | 0.12*** (0.05) | 0.35*** |
| Left-Right Legacy | 0.04 (0.14) | 0.08 | -0.18* (0.08) | -0.22* |
| Population size (log) | -0.49 (0.7) | -0.1 | 2.8*** (0.63) | 0.53*** |
| Constant | 14.1 (13.26) | --- | -11.9** (5.86) | --- |
| R-squared | 0.63 | | 0.61 | |
| N | 52 | | 52 | |

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01. Robust standard errors in brackets.

Table 3. Support for Spanish parties in different groups of voters

| | 1. Potential support among voters of regionalist parties (%) | | 2. Support among voters with stronger regional identity (%) | | 3. Support among working class voters (%) | |
|----------------|---|-------------|--|-------------|---|-------------|
| | <i>2015</i> | <i>2019</i> | <i>2015</i> | <i>2019</i> | <i>2015</i> | <i>2019</i> |
| Podemos | 24.5 | 20 | 26.5 | 17.5 | 27.6 | 17.9 |
| Vox | | 0.5 | | 0.7 | | 9.1 |
| PSOE | 9.1 | 14.2 | 14.2 | 20.2 | 24.3 | 37.7 |
| PP | 2.2 | 2.9 | 8.6 | 4.9 | 17.4 | 7.2 |
| Cs | 9.1 | 4.9 | 4.4 | 3.8 | 15.8 | 15.9 |

Sources: see Appendix (D)

Appendix

A. More information on independent variables

Immigration. Data are provided by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE). A different measure could have been used: the increase in the share of immigrants from the late 1990s until the date of the election. INE shows that immigrants as a share of the Spanish population have increased from 1.6% in 1998 to 10.1% in 2018. Basically almost all immigrants residing in Spain today moved to this country in the last two decades. For this reason there is an almost perfect correlation between *total* share and *change* in the share of immigrants across the 52 provinces ($r=0.98$). Therefore, the first variable is used as a proxy for both to avoid multicollinearity in the regression model.

Economic globalization. In order to account for international exposure of the province in relation to its underlying wealth, the sum of imports and exports is calculated as a share of the provincial gross domestic product (GDP). Data for imports and exports have been taken from the *Cámara de Comercio de España* and GDP data from INE.

Deprivation: Per capita GDP and employment rate are strongly associated ($r=0.7$ in 2015 and $r=0.78$ in 2019). Therefore, they have been standardized and added to form an index. The signs of the resulting scores have then been reversed from negative to positive and vice-versa. In this way, higher scores correspond to lower GDP per capita and employment (i.e. higher levels of deprivation). Again, INE provides all these data.

Territorial mobilization. Data are provided by *Ministerio del Interior de España* (MIE). Evidence has shown that in regions like Catalonia, where territorial mobilization has been traditionally high, even those who are not in favour of independence overwhelmingly support regional autonomy (*Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* 2019, 31). Therefore, given its pro-centralization position, it is expected that Vox will struggle to gain support in provinces where regionalist and pro-independence parties have been stronger (negative association). On the other hand, Podemos, having been more sensitive to territorial demands and having recognized their democratic legitimacy, will be more competitive in these contexts (positive association).

B. Control Variables

Left-Right legacy. Both Vox and Podemos have a rather clear ideological position, the former is on the right of the political spectrum whereas the latter is on the left. As such, they might have benefitted from political dissatisfaction with the more established parties of the centre-right and centre-left. Populist parties do not only play a 'prophetic' role, by addressing issues that mainstream parties have ignored for long time, but may also be 'purifiers' (Lucardie 2000). They may accuse their more established rivals of having betrayed a set of principles and may therefore present themselves as the true representatives of those principles. Vox is a clear example of this, having being founded by disgruntled members of the PP, who were unhappy with the moderate approach of the party towards territorial issues and traditional values. Similarly, Podemos appealed to left-wing voters disappointed with the economic record of the PSOE in government (in 2011 the party left Spain in precarious financial and economic conditions). The new party-movement could also seek support from a relatively important sector of the electorate that in the past had opted for more traditional far left parties, particularly the United Left (*Izquierda Unida*, IU). Therefore the model includes previous election results of PP for Vox and combined share of PSOE/IU for Podemos.

Population size. An analysis based on provincial data should take into account the population size of each province. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, the electoral system of Spain is quite disproportional and rewards larger parties in less populated provinces, since they allocate fewer seats (Gallagher 1991). Secondly there might be an urban-rural cleavage that also affects territorial electoral results: some parties appeal more to voters living in large metropolitan areas, whereas others have a more rural electoral basis. Population size is strongly (almost perfectly) correlated to district magnitude ($r=0.998$) and population size of the largest provincial city ($r=0.95$), which can be regarded as an indicator of "urbanization". For this reason population size is used as a "proxy" for the other two variables.

It can be hypothesized that given its younger and more innovative profile, Podemos had more success in large, urbanized provinces, whereas, despite the existence of a higher electoral threshold, Vox was more competitive in rural areas, where appeals to traditional values are more likely to be electorally rewarding (Tapjador and Mezu 2009; Kriesi 1998). The regression model, therefore, includes a population variable. Given its highly skewed distribution, its log transformation is used. This is the procedure usually adopted by studies considering regional population as an independent variable (see, for instance, Charron, Dijkstra and Lapuente 2014).

C. Summary statistics of dependent, independent and control variables

a) Vox, 2019

| Variable | Average | Standard Deviation | Minimum | | Maximum | |
|---|---------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|----------|
| | | | Value | Province | Value | Province |
| Electoral result (%) | 10.8 | 4.8 | 1.6 | Gipuzkoa | 24 | Ceuta |
| Immigration (% of population) | 8.7 | 4.9 | 2.37 | Jaén | 19.7 | Almería |
| Economic Globalization (% of GDP) | 47 | 38.2 | 9.06 | Ávila | 186.9 | Huelva |
| Deprivation (standardized index)* | 0 | 1.9 | -4.3 | Álava | 3.3 | Cádiz |
| Territorial Mobilization Legacy (% of vote 2015-2016) | 6.2 | 12.9 | 0 | Albacete (and others) | 48.2 | Lleida |
| PP/Right legacy (% of vote 2015-2016) | 34.5 | 10.2 | 9.15 | Gipuzkoa | 48.9 | Ávila |
| Population size (log) | 13.2 | 1 | 11.4 | Ceuta | 15.7 | Madrid |

*The larger the score, the higher the level of deprivation (negative scores suggest low levels of deprivation)

b) Podemos, 2015

| Variable | Average | Standard Deviation | Minimum | | Maximum | |
|--|---------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|------------|
| | | | Value | Province | Value | Province |
| Electoral result (%) | 18.1 | 5 | 11.4 | Melilla | 28 | Pontevedra |
| Immigration (% of population) | 8.9 | 5 | 2.6 | Jaén | 19.7 | Almería |
| Economic Globalization (% of GDP) | 41.3 | 29.8 | 7.5 | Zamora | 126.4 | Huelva |
| Deprivation (standardized index) | 0 | 1.5 | -4.4 | Alava | 3.2 | Cádiz |
| Territorial Mobilization (% of vote 2008-2011) | 8.5 | 13.8 | 0 | Albacete (and others) | 49.5 | Gipuzkoa |
| Left legacy (% of vote 2008-2011) | 43 | 6.075793 | 31.25 | Murcia | 57.5 | Sevilla |
| Population size (log) | 13.2 | .9 | 11.3 | Ceuta | 15.7 | Madrid |

D. Sources Figure 3 and Table 3

Figure 3. 2015 Post-election survey (CIS). Question: Preference among different alternatives of territorial organization of the state in Spain (*Preferencia entre diferentes alternativas de organización territorial del Estado en España*)

Table 3, column 1. 2015/2019 Post-election surveys (CIS). Question: Probability from 1 to 10 to vote for this party. Voters of regionalist parties assigning scores from 6 to 10 to the parties in the table are considered.

Table 3, column 2. 2015/2019 Post-election surveys (CIS). Question: Nationalist sentiment. Voters who declare a stronger or exclusive regional identity are considered.

Table 3, column 3. 2015/2019 Post-election surveys (CIS). Question: Socio-economic conditions. Voters identifying as qualified and unqualified manual workers are considered.

Figures

Figure 1. Mapping Vox's electoral breakthrough in 2019



Figure 2. Mapping Podemos' electoral breakthrough in 2015

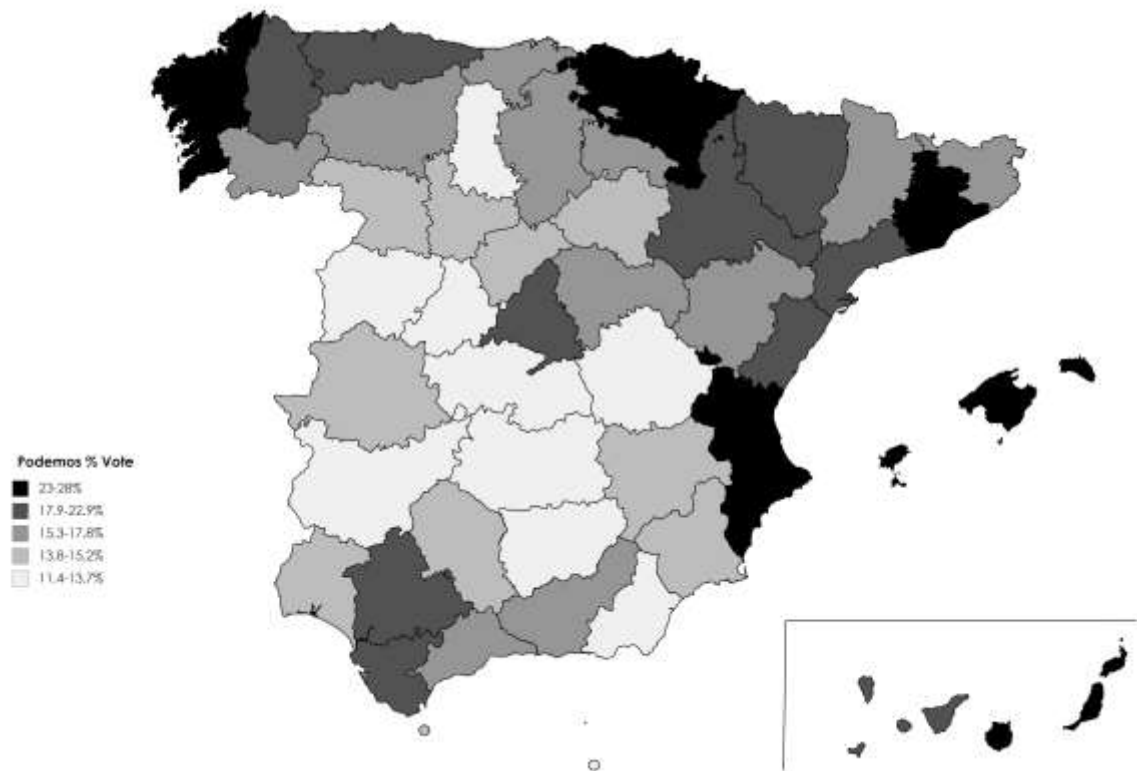


Figure 3. Support for Spanish parties (%) among voters in favour of more regional autonomy or independence (year 2015)

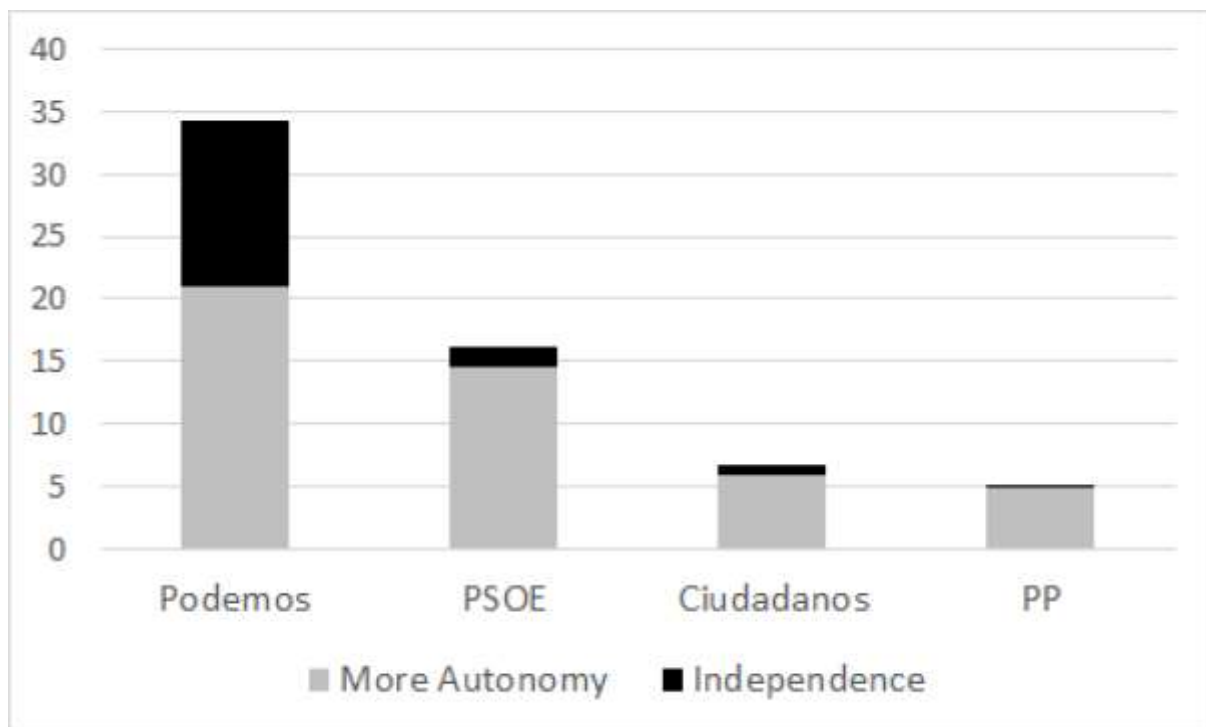


Figure 4. Correlation between party electoral success and support for regionalist parties from 2015 to 2019

