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Different sides, same story. Common factors that contributed to the success of the populist radical parties in Spain

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ABSTRACT

Voting for Populist Radical Parties (PRPs) in Europe has been a frequent subject of study in recent decades. However, little research has analysed the common factors between ideologically opposed PRPs. In this article we fill this gap in the literature from an ecological perspective at the municipal level. Using the cases of Podemos and Vox in Spain, we analyse whether the same characteristics at the municipal level explain the electoral performance of both parties. To address this question we use the results of the four general elections in which both parties have run. The results confirm an archetype of municipal-level characteristics that explain the success of both PRPs in Spain. These parties had more support in (sub-)urban contexts; with high levels of political disaffection and high incomes. Furthermore, we compare these findings with the pre-existing literature for their European peers and test the peculiarity of the Spanish case.

1. Introduction

Europe's Populist Radical Parties (PRPs) are on the rise. Their growth in popularity, votes and seats have been disproportionate, both on the left and on the right (Mudde 2013). Most comparative studies have analysed the differences between their electorates, as Burgoon et al. (2019) or Rooduijn et al. (2017). This literature starts from the premise that ideological differences are sufficiently important that these parties cannot share the same electoral profile. But in the case of the PRPs, as Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt (2017) argue, even though they are ideologically opposed parties, they share a common denominator in their radical and populist strategy. This fact, which determines much of their discourse and narrative, is important enough to vindicate the importance of studies that focus not only on the differences but also on the similarities around PRPs.

The aim of this research is to shed light on this incipient literature analysing the similarities between PRPs. Unlike the rest of the research, in our case, we use an ecological perspective at the municipal level, which has so far been lacking in this type of comparative studies.

Although most research focuses on individual behaviour, there is a need for ecological analyses that take into account the contextual effect. Context is of great importance for the development of certain political attitudes (Agnew 1996). Among others, there is a great deal of research highlighting the importance of the contextual effect on the vote for Populist Radical Right Parties (PRRPs) (Patana 2020; van Wijk, Bolt, and Johnston 2019) and Populist Radical Left Parties (PRLPs) (Riera and Russo 2016). However, there is no relevant research that studies the similarities in contextual factors that explain the success of these parties. For this reason, and in order to try to fill this gap in the literature,

we start with the following research question: what common features at the municipal level explain the electoral performance of both PRPs? To answer this question, we use Spain as a case study for three reasons. First, Spain fulfills one of the fundamental requirements for studies of this type, it has two PRPs clearly located at each of the ideological extremes. Second, Spain is a particularly favourable country for this study because the two parties (both Podemos and Vox) have run in the same number of general elections and in the same time period. Third, for this country, there are studies with individual-level (Rama and Santana 2020) or discursive approaches (Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022). However, there are no articles with a geographic focus. For this reason, this study has the theoretical support of comparative research from other perspectives and, in turn, contributes to reducing the gap in comparative ecological studies of PRPs in Spain.

To carry out this study, from an ecological perspective at the municipal level, we analyse the vote shares of the two PRPs in Spain (Podemos on the left and Vox on the right) in the four general elections in which they have run. Using as a sample the nearly 8,000 Spanish municipalities, we present different OLS regression models for each party with fixed effects by election and region. Our findings suggest that the municipalities where PRPs received most support in Spain are (sub-)urban places, with high previous levels of political disaffection, and with high-income levels. Moreover, these parties were more successful in municipalities with a higher presence of young people.

The article is organised as follows. First, we present a theoretical framework on radical left and right-wing populist parties, the Spanish case study, as well as the hypotheses. Second, we explain the methodology used in this paper. Next, we present the empirical analysis. We conclude with a discussion of our results.

2. The rise of PRPs in Europe

During and after the Great Recession, support for the mainstream parties fell in many countries in Europe (Kriesi 2014). Due to its decline, the so-called challenger parties emerged (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). This is a type of party that, without previous government experience, challenges the dominance of the traditional parties. Some of them adopted radical and populist logic.

The appearance of new PRPs has been very prominent in Europe. On the left, the most notorious case occurred in Greece with SYRIZA (Tsakatika 2016), which went from 71 seats in the 2012 legislative elections to 149 in the 2015 elections. On the right, we can highlight the cases of the RN in France, the Lega in Italy, the FPÖ in Austria, the PVV in the Netherlands, the FIDESZ in Hungary, and the PiS in Poland. In contrast, in the post-crisis period, the rise was significant. Many of PRPs were consolidated in the 2014 European elections (UKIP in the United Kingdom or DF in Denmark). While for other parties these elections served as a window of opportunity (the M5S in Italy, *La France Insumise* in France, or the AfD in Germany). All these parties from the supply side of politics show that, although very different ideologically, they have a common populist – and radical – denominator (Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017). These strategic and discursive similarities make comparative studies between ideologically opposed political parties interesting, such as this one. In the following section, we characterise parties of the radical populist left and right.

2.1. An approach to the study of left and right PRPs

The PRL adopts radicalism as a critique of liberal democracy. However, these parties accept the norms and rules of the democratic system (March and Mudde 2005). They decide to be part of them to transform them and establish a system of direct democracy, the defence of the welfare state and fundamental rights, as well as the redistribution of wealth.[1] The goal of PRLPs is to undermine the appeal of the 'incompetent' political class and attract voters dissatisfied with mainstream parties' management. The PRLPs – including Podemos (Font, Paolo, and Myrto 2021) – execute these two premises with a populist 'inclusionary' strategy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013) and takes a vertical direction ('down-top') (Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022). The logic of his rhetoric and

discourse refers to the defence of a homogeneous people that represents the will of 'the people' in constant confrontation with the political and economic 'elites'. Some of the explanatory factors for its success refer to the socioeconomic deterioration caused by deprivation (unemployment and the quality of public services), by inequalities (income) and austerity policies (reduction of public policies) that undermine the welfare state (Ivaldi, Elisabetta Lanzone, and Woods 2017; Kriesi 2014). Consequently, the inability to resolve these conflicts makes the dichotomy between losers and winners of globalisation gain strength, causing disaffection against the political system and its representatives (Essletzbichler, Disslbacher, and Moser 2018; Rodrik 2018).

The PRR parties, according to Mudde (2007, 31) 'do not reject the democratic system even though they oppose some fundamental values of liberal democracies.[2] The core of these parties is formed by nativism (a combination of xenophobia and nationalism), authoritarianism (law and order), the use of populist discourse and rhetoric (Mudde 2007) and their radical condition (Betz 1994). To achieve its objectives, the PRR adopts a populist 'exclusionary' logic (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). This is because their rhetoric and discourse do not particularly emphasise the rejection of elites. They are more effusive in their defence of a homogeneous people and national identity against an enemy: external (immigrants) and internal (peripheral nationalisms). The explanatory factors are related to the symptoms of economic distress produced by globalisation (loss of socioeconomic status, access to the labour market and social protection) as well as its respective cultural dimension (disintegration of norms and values due to an external threat represented by the immigrants) (Norris and Inglehart 2018).

2.2. Case study: PRPs in Spain

To carry out this study on the similarities in the characteristics of municipalities that have supported PRPs, we focused our analysis on Spain. We have two reasons for choosing this country as a case study. Firstly, in Spain there is a gap in the literature analysing similarities in support for PRPs from an ecological methodology. There are some approaches at the individual (Rama, Cordero, and Zagórski 2021) or discursive level (Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022). Until now there has been no research from a municipal and geographical perspective. Secondly, Spain is a particularly favourable country for a comparative analysis of this kind. For more than 30 years it was a two-party system without representative populist parties. However, as a result of the rise of the party system after the Great Recession, new populist parties emerged on both the left and the right. This rapid emergence meant that in less than 8 years the Spanish parliament went from having no populist parties to having one on each side of the ideological spectrum. The arrival of the new parties in Spain – in addition to the presence of populist attitudes (Boscán, Llamazares, and Wiesehomeier 2018) – has meant an increase in populist discourses, messages and narratives (Lisi, Llamazares, and Tsakatika 2019).

In order to shed light on such comparative studies between PRPs of opposing ideologies – as Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt (2017) have previously done at the individual level for the Netherlands or Rama and Andrés (2020) for six European countries – it is necessary to discuss the labelling of these parties. In the case of Podemos, most authors agree that it is a PRLP (Damiani 2020; Ramiro and Gomez 2017). In fact, its populist strategy is a fundamental component (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2018). In its message, it is possible to identify *la gente* ('the people') and *la casta* ('caste'), referring to the economic and political elite (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016). Focusing on its electoral program (Podemos 2015) and the Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al. 2022), the two populist features of Podemos are its bet for more democracy and its profound rejection of caste. In the case of Vox, however, there is less consensus. On the one hand, there are those who argue that it is a radical right-wing party and that its populist component is in the background (Ferreira 2019; Marcos-Marne, Plaza-Colodro, and O'Flynn 2021; Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022). On the contrary, there are authors who consider it a PRRP (Martín, Paradés, and Zagórski 2022; Rama et al. 2021). After the Catalonia's conflict, it is possible to detect a nativist, authoritarian and populist discursive logic (Rama et al. 2021). Taking into account the electoral program (Vox 2019) and in accordance with the Manifesto Project platform

(Lehmann et al. 2022), its logic and populist discourse could be understood as *España viva* ('The Living Spain') as an approximation of the people. In contrast, there is an out-group (Ortiz and Ramos-González 2021) considered the 'anti-Spain', which refers to the political elite that protects: the external enemies (illegal immigrants) and the internal enemies of the country – the *golpistas* ('putschists') and the *separatistas* ('separatists') – as well as 'progressive' social movements. For more information on Podemos and Vox we provide an overview of their history and electoral support in the Appendix A.

In short, there are compelling reasons to consider Podemos as PRLP and in the case of Vox as PRRP some doubts arise. Taking reputable indicators as justification, according to PopuList we can consider both parties as populist (Rooduijn et al. 2019) and according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) they are also radical (Jolly et al. 2022).

2.3. Hypothesis

The purpose of this paper is to find out some of the common characteristics of the municipalities that favoured the success of the PRPs. Taking into account existing theoretical grounds for each type of formation, we present three hypotheses. Each of these assumptions refers to a factor that contributed to the success of the two PRPs.

First, we focus on the vote for the PRPs considering the type of habitat. This is a demographic variable of great importance in the case of Spain. This element is based on the traditional theory of cleavages by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and we seek to know what was the role of rural and urban environments in the success of these political actors.

On the one hand, the European PRLPs, traditionally, have had greater support in the metropolitan areas (Gomez, Morales, and Ramiro 2016; Ramiro 2016). The urban tendency of these parties can be explained from four perspectives: (1) not only from a proletarian base; but also from the middle classes (Ramiro 2016); (2) the presence of pluralism and diversity that favour their narratives as well as the inclusion of new social groups with concrete and heterogeneous demands that transcend traditional class schemes (LGTBI+, environment, feminism, etc.); (3) a high presence of young people who are closer to their discourses; and (4) a greater rejection of austerity policies (Blanco, Salazar, and Bianchi 2020). In the case of Podemos, some studies have highlighted the urban nature of its voters (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016).

On the other hand, the PRRPs, unlike the left, have had greater support in rural areas (De Lange and Rooduijn 2015; Dijkstra, Poelman, and Rodríguez-Pose 2020; Rickardsson 2021). These formations have gained notable support in rural areas for two reasons: (1) in many countries they have been able to capitalise the frustration about the deterioration to which many rural areas are subjected – in the literature this is known as left behind places – (Cramer 2016); and (2) it is plausible to think that appeals to traditional values are well received in rural areas, which are generally more conservative than cities (Huijsmans et al. 2021). However, the case of Vox represents an exception within the literature of its European peers. While the voter profile of these parties is older and less educated (Harteveld et al. 2015; Stockemer, Lentz, and Mayer 2018) associated with rural areas. Vox's support is more linked to a profile of highly qualified young people (Iglesias-Pascual, Hurtado-Rodríguez, and De Oliveira-Neves 2023; Marcos-Marne, Plaza-Colodro, and O'Flynn 2021; Turnbull-Dugarte, Rama, and Santana 2020), which in Spain has a greater presence in urban areas. So we can expect that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The vote for the PRPs in Spain was higher in urban municipalities than in rural ones.

Second, we check the relationship between political disaffection at the aggregate level and support for the PRPs. Populist narratives on the left and right of the ideological spectrum have generally used moments of political dissatisfaction as fuel for their electoral success (Akkerman,

Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017; Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange 2016). Through the use of a narrative against political elites, we found evidence in the literature that reveals the ability of the PRR to succeed in municipalities with high levels of previous political disaffection (Schulte-Cloos and Leininger 2021). For example, in Germany, in the 2017 federal elections, the AfD, among other things, was able to attract voters disaffected with democracy and the political establishment (Olsen 2018). But this is nothing new. There is a broad theoretical content that evidences the activeness of the PRR parties among the politically dissatisfied (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002). These parties have channelled the discontent of the losers of globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2008; Rodrik 2018) when, for example, they have succeeded in introducing anti-immigrant sentiment into public opinion (Kaufmann 2018, 2014; Rydgren and Tyrberg 2020).

In the case of the left, the volume of literature that analyses this relationship is considerably smaller. Some PRLPs such as SYRIZA used protest strategies to channel the discontent of many voters with the austerity policies (Tsakatika 2016). In the case of Podemos the root of its emergence is due to the capitalisation of the '15-M Movement'. But it is discontent with the political class that explains much of the irruption of Podemos (Ramiro and Gomez 2017). As Riera and Russo (2016) found at the time of their breakthrough in the European elections, we believe that this factor is persistent over time and has also influenced the general elections. So we can expect the second similarity to be the following:

H2: *Support for the Spanish PRPs was higher in municipalities with large levels of previous political disaffection.*

Finally, we focus on unemployment, a common economic indicator. What is the electoral reaction of people when they lose their jobs or find themselves in contexts with high unemployment rates? Populist parties have traditionally been an efficient vehicle for channelling the discontent of unemployed voters (Essletzbichler, Disslbacher, and Moser 2018; Rooduijn and Burgoon 2018). Although, the relationship between unemployment and the vote for populist radical formations has not been symmetrical between the left and the right. The discursive differences focus on the fact that the PRL addressed the economic consequences as a result of the austerity policies carried out by governments in times of crisis – weakening of the welfare state – (Ivaldi, Elisabetta Lanzone, and Woods 2017), while the PRR situates the globalisation as the cause of unemployment.

For PRR is plausible to think that the most economically vulnerable are attracted to its protectionist and anti-globalisation discourse – it only finds empirical evidence in 30% of cases (Stockemer, Lentz, and Mayer 2018) –. In certain contexts, this relationship is subject to the presence of a high proportion of immigrants (Rydgren and Tyrberg 2020). In the case of the PRL, this relationship finds more empirical consistency (Mádr 2021; Riera and Russo 2016). In fact, the unemployment condition is one of the differences that Rooduijn et al. (2017) found in their study on PRL and PRR voters. Even so, we understand that using an aggregate logic such as the one we propose in this investigation, high levels of unemployment would have favoured the electoral success of Vox – as well as of Podemos – due to the feeling of economic grievance.

H3: *The vote for the PRPs in Spain was higher in municipalities with high levels of unemployment.*

3. Methodology

The present research aims to analyse whether the three characteristics of the municipalities presented above have affected the PRPs of Spain, Podemos (on the left) and Vox (on the right) in the

same way. To do so, we take as a sample all general elections in which these parties have stood as candidates.[3] We used a novel database created *ad hoc*. Accordingly, we analysed the four national elections held between 2015 and 2019.[4] This database is available from Sánchez-García and Negral (2023) and its variables can be consulted in Table B1. The ecological methodology at the municipal level used in this work implies that our database is composed of a total of 31,893 observations.[5] This database, therefore, contains all the municipalities in Spain with data for all the variables available for each of the four elections.[6]

Using the aforementioned database and with the determination to test the hypotheses of this research in the most honest way possible, we use the linear regression model based on Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) as the statistical reference technique. Thus, we propose the following parametric model:

$$\%V_{e,m} = \alpha + \beta_1 C_m + \beta_2 D_{t-1,m} + \beta_3 U_{t,m} + \gamma \vec{x} control_{t,m} + v_r + v_e + \varepsilon_{e,m} \tag{1}$$

Where V – our dependent variable – represents the percentage of votes of the PRP (Podemos and Vox) for each municipality $_m$ in each general election $_e$ of the year $_t$; β is the coefficient of each of the three main independent variables – cities and suburbs (C), previous disaffection (D) and unemployed (U) –; $\vec{x}$ is a vector of different types of control variables for the year $_t$; v represents the regional $_r$ and election $_e$ fixed effects and ε the error.

The study has two dependent variables: the percentage of the vote in each municipality for Podemos[7] on the one hand, and for Vox, on the other. As mentioned above, both parties ran for the first time in national elections in December 2015, although their dynamics were very different. Podemos managed to gain a strong foothold in the Spanish parliament in the first elections. Its representation gradually declined to 35 MPs in the last legislature. In contrast, Vox did not achieve national representation until the two elections of 2019. In 2015 and 2016, its national vote share was less than 0.3%.

Despite their different dynamics, we choose these four general elections for two reasons. Firstly, from a methodological point of view, in a comparative study such as this one, homogeneity in the electoral context in which the elections took place as well as in the time criterion – the same number of elections – is transcendental. Secondly, although Vox did not obtain representation in the first two elections, it is equally important to know the characteristics of the municipalities even before it burst onto the political scene. In any case, the incorporation of the 2015 and 2016 elections does not imply any methodological bias, as the regression models have been run with fixed effects per election. Moreover, we believe that general elections, as first-order elections, are the most appropriate for this type of analysis – thus avoiding the contamination effect of endogenous factors that occurs in regional and local elections –.

In Figure 1 we can see the geographical distribution of the average vote for Podemos and Vox in the four selected elections. Support was notably different for each of the formations. The vote for Podemos was concentrated in the peripheral municipalities of the peninsula – and to a lesser extent in the metropolitan area of Madrid –. While Vox obtained a greater reception in the centre of the country – including Madrid and its beltway – as well as the southeast coast (Region of Murcia and Almería). Although the spatial distribution seems diametrically opposed – with the exception of Madrid – our hypotheses propose a common nexus in the characteristics of the municipalities where the PRPs had the most support at the time of their national electoral irruption.

In order to test the validity of our hypotheses, we set out below the different measurements we have taken for our independent variables:

Type of municipality

In the direction of analysing H1, the first step is to methodologically address the typology of municipalities. In this sense, some authors for the Spanish case propose to consider a dividing line at 10,000 inhabitants, so that any locality above 10,000 inhabitants is considered urban and, if it is
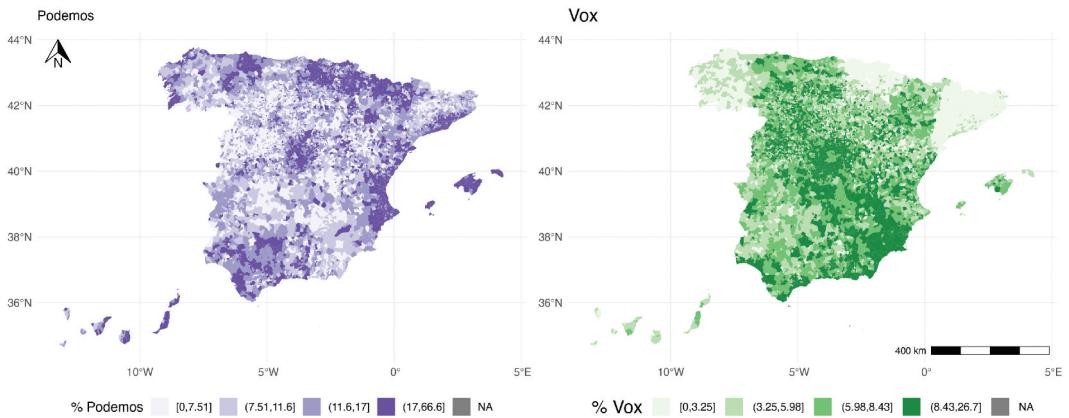
Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the average PRP vote by quartiles (2015–2019).

below 10,000 inhabitants, it is labelled as rural (Collantes and Pinilla 2019). However, this categorisation does not take into account some particularities of the municipality when determining its nature, such as population density or the type of neighbouring localities. In an attempt to mitigate these problems, we use the Degree of urbanisation (Degurba). This indicator developed by Eurostat (2019) classifies the municipalities into three categories: cities, towns and suburbs, and rural areas. To carry out this division, they use a combination of criteria of geographical contiguity and minimum threshold of population per km^2 for each local administrative unit.

Although this indicator originally had three categories, for the interests of our research we operationalised it in a dichotomous way. As some studies, such as Sánchez-García and Rodon (2023), have already done, we differentiate between cities, towns and suburbs, on the one hand, and rural areas on the other. We justify this decision on two grounds. First, we consider that this measurement adapts more reliably to the traditional rural-urban divide (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), without intermediate categories that could obscure the comparison. Second, given the markedly rural nature of Spanish demographics, suburban environments, in addition to being considered as cities (Alloza et al. 2021), in fact, act as such. Most of the municipalities that are considered suburban border cities, which, to a certain extent, entails a sociological contagion in the urban dynamics themselves.

Previous abstention

In H2 we consider the possible effect of political disaffection on the PRP vote. As a methodological approximation to this variable, we have taken previous electoral abstention at the municipal level as a measure of political disaffection (Bélanger and Nadeau 2005). This variable, calculated from data from the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Spanish Government, shows the percentage of the population out of the electoral roll that did not go to the polls in elections $t - 1$ for each municipality. In practical terms, for example, when we measure the vote for Podemos and Vox in 2015, we use the electoral abstention of the 2011 general elections.

Being aware that part of the discontent on which the PRPs were nourished came from the mainstream parties (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). We think that this is the best – and perhaps only – approach to measuring political disaffection at the municipal level. However, the objection raised affected Vox to a greater extent than Podemos where we found that, at the individual level, an important part of its voters came from abstention (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016).

Unemployed

Finally, to methodologically address H3 we use the percentage of unemployed. Extracted from the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, this variable gives the percentage of people in each municipality who were unemployed in the year of the reference elections.

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in this study are available in Table B2. The correlation between our independent variables can be seen in Figure B1. The main function of the rest of the variables is to exercise methodological control over the municipalities, although, in addition, we can expect them to shed light on the interpretation of the results. These, as can be observed, are of a different nature – geographical, compositional, socio-demographic or economic –. We assume that some control variables may be missing. However, the scarcity of complete and available indicators at the municipal level in Spain makes it impossible to incorporate more controls. In any case, the treatment of the data takes all the necessary precautions to avoid falling into ecological fallacies (Robinson 1950).

4. Results

Figure 2 represent the standardised coefficients of the OLS regression models for Podemos and Vox.[8] All these models have regional and election-fixed effects. In Figure C1 we show the predicted effects of each of these independent variables on the vote for Podemos and Vox.

As for the regression models, we offer two models depending on whether it incorporates (M1) – or not (M2) – the logarithm of the income variable. This variable does not have accessible data for smaller municipalities, so to avoid possible selection biases we use M1 as a benchmark. M2 is only used to test the effect of income on the PRP vote.

Firstly, we focus on the type of municipality. In order to test hypothesis 1, we find positive and statistically significant coefficients for the PRP vote in (sub-)urban areas with respect to rural areas. Although the type of municipality affects both parties in the same sense, the effect of this variable is substantially greater for Podemos. In this line, we can consider that both parties have had markedly (sub-)urban support. Especially for Podemos, which in addition to having higher coefficients than Vox in cities and suburbs also has higher coefficients for the logarithm of the population.
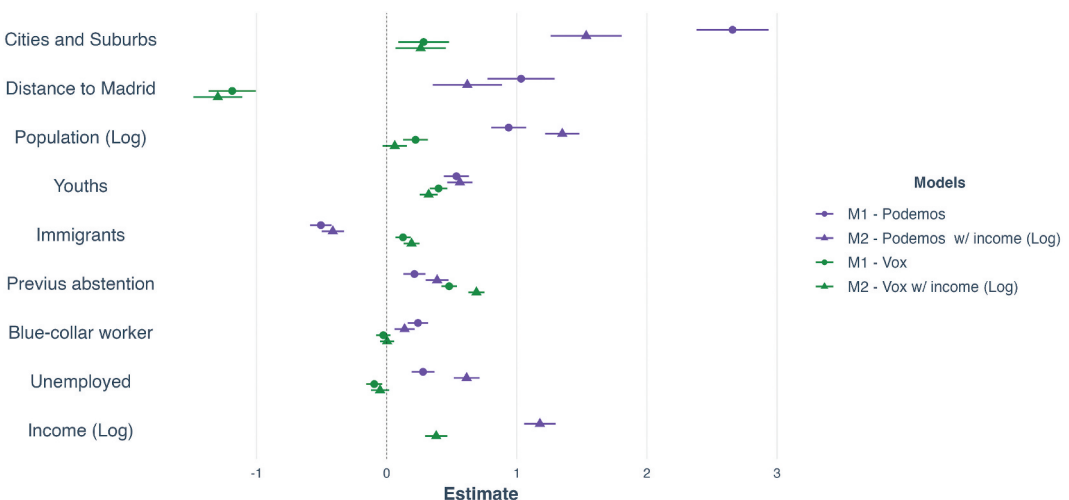

Figure 2. Standardised coefficients of the OLS regression models for Podemos and Vox votes share.

Secondly, we focus on hypothesis 2. In both cases, we observe a positive and statistically significant relationship between the percentage of previous electoral abstention and support for PRPs. This variable has a larger effect on the PRR. While for Podemos a one percentage point increase in the previous abstention meant that its vote was on average 0.03 points higher. This same increase had more than double (0.07) the effect on Vox.

Finally, we test hypothesis 3 to see how the presence of unemployed people affected the PRPs' vote. For both Podemos and Vox we find a statistically significant relationship between the presence of unemployed people and support for the PRR (M1) – the significance of this relationship disappears when we add the logarithm of income as a control variable –. However, the results show the opposite effect. While the PRR performed better in contexts with lower unemployment rates, the vote for the PRL was higher in municipalities with higher levels of unemployment. Therefore, the results reject hypothesis 3.

In short, the empirical analysis has allowed us to contrast the two common characteristics at the municipal level for the support of PRPs. Moreover, we can complement this information with other interesting results. In particular, as we present in the discussion, we can highlight the positive effect of income and the presence of young people for both, as well as the opposite sign of the coefficient of distance to Madrid.

5. Discussion

In this century, since the Great Recession, the emergence of new PRPs has been increasing. Some cases, such as Spain, have had to wait longer for the arrival of these new parties. However, in just four years, the party system in this country exploded with the entry into the Spanish parliament of Podemos in 2015 and Vox in 2019. Spain now has two radical and populist formations on both the left and right of the ideological space. So far, many articles have focused on the success of these separate parties. In this sense, despite being radically opposed ideologically, comparative studies between PRR and PRL are necessary not only from an individual (Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017; Rama and Santana 2020) or discursive (Ramos-González and Ortiz 2022) perspective but also geographically, as we have proposed. Using an ecological methodology at the municipal level in Spain, our research has found some common characteristics of the municipalities that have supported the PRPs the most since their first elections (2015) until the last elections held (10 November 2019). The idiosyncrasy of these municipalities is based on the following pillars. Our main finding has been to shed light on the profile of Spanish municipalities where support for PRPs has been strongest. These are (sub-)urban municipalities, with high levels of previous political disaffection and not economically disadvantaged. That said, how do these results fit with the literature?

First, in terms of the nature of the place where the PRPs were most successful. Our results have shown that both parties since the first general elections in which they contested have had a markedly (sub-)urban character. This feature, which is not at all surprising in the case of Podemos and the PRL (Ramiro 2016), is surprising for Vox. While its European peers perform better in rural areas in the Netherlands (Harteveld et al. 2022), Sweden (Rickardsson 2021), or Finland (Patana 2020), the Spanish PRR, even though it is a discursively rural party (Valero 2022), has found more support in the metropolis. We can explain this type of support for the PRPs from two perspectives: (1) From a compositional point of view, metropolitan areas generally have a higher presence of young people, a group that, as our empirical analyses and other research show (Rama, Cordero, and Zagórski 2021), are more likely to vote for these parties. (2) In a sense of political preferences, some of the factors that most affect and can condition voting in cities are, for example, phenomena associated with housing (Adler and Ansell 2020; Essletzbichler and Forcher 2022), the environment (Audikana and Kaufmann 2022), or local margination (Harteveld et al. 2022). All of these issues are more prevalent in urban areas and have been fertile ground for PRPs. This finding is extremely useful because it allows us to show the importance of the rural-urban cleavage in

supporting PRPs, even controlling for other contextual characteristics of the municipality – unlike most individual-level studies that analyse this cleavage without the relevant municipality controls –.

Second, contextual political disaffection plays a key role in the success of the PRPs (Schulte-Cloos and Leininger 2021). Our empirical analyses have confirmed that the higher the previous levels of political disaffection – understood as electoral abstention – the better the electoral performance of the PRPs in Spain in each of the elections. This connects with the populist narrative that appeals to people who feel dissatisfied and disconnected with the established political system, which does not respond to their demands (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002). The reasons for this disaffection are not clear at all. Initially, we might think that it has economic roots (Kriesi et al. 2008; Rodrik 2018). However, as we will show below, it is not the globalisation losers or economically disadvantaged municipalities that supported the PRPs in the majority. Factors that could explain this disaffection could be the crisis of representation or political distrust generated by bipartisanship and corruption.

Third, we initially argued that the presence of unemployed people might have benefited the performance of PRPs. The empirical analysis has confirmed this relationship only for Podemos, while Vox obtained more support in contexts with higher employment rates. These results, linked to the findings on the income effect, confirm that Vox, far from being the party of the losers of globalisation like its European peers (Essletzbichler, Disslbacher, and Moser 2018), is a more successful party in contexts of affluence (Iglesias-Pascual, Hurtado-Rodríguez, and De Oliveira-Neves 2023). In the case of Podemos, although it has performed better in municipalities with high unemployment rates, income has a strong positive effect on its support. This result challenge previous literature on economic grievance and PRL. In short, economic variables have shown us that PRPs in Spain are a *rara avis*. Not only are they not the standard-bearers of economic grievance or the losers of globalisation, but they have found support in the richest municipalities. This could mean that in the narrative of these parties the 'host ideology' is more important than the populist discourse.

In short, the contribution of this article is to have found an archetype of municipal-level characteristics that explain the success of PRPs in Spain. Having analysed support for PRPs of opposing ideology but united by their radical and populist discourses, we have identified a common denominator from a geographical point of view. For the literature on radical and populist parties, these findings are important for several reasons. First, they show some of the peculiarities of Spanish PRPs with respect to their European counterparts. In general, we can highlight the higher support for these parties in richer municipal contexts. In particular, we find some results that are disruptive with the rest of the European literature, for example, in the case of (sub-)urban support for Vox. Second, we fill the gap in the literature in comparative studies between PRR and PRL from an ecological point of view. Such contextual studies at the municipal level are not only important because they explain part of the success of populist parties, but also correct some of the imperfections of individual-level studies. Among others, the individualistic bias of ignoring the importance of context, both socially and geographically, in electoral behaviour.

After all that has been said, we honestly assume that this article has limitations. Among the most important, the empirical analysis may not present all the variables it should. However, in Spain, there are many municipalities of very small size (in 2015 almost 15% of municipalities had less than 100 inhabitants) that make it impossible to access reliable indicators that respect the country's privacy policy. For this reason, and although great efforts are being made by public administrations, ecological studies in Spain involve this type of inconvenience.

Finally, future research might extrapolate this type of ecological study on the common characteristics of municipalities that support PRPs to a greater extent in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France or Greece where there are parties of this type on both sides of the ideological spectrum. Moreover, in view of the results, it could be interesting for future work to delve deeper into the centre – periphery cleavage in Spain and support for Podemos and Vox.

Notes

1. On the contrary, extreme left parties, for example, are extremists because they reject democratic systems and values (March 2011) – understood as opposed to any type of consensus with the 'bourgeois political structures' –
2. Whereas, for example, the extreme right is essentially 'anti-system' (Ignazi 2003) since it is "anti-democratic in opposing the fundamental principle of people's sovereignty" – the institutional system (2007, p.31) –, as well as the principle of social equality – democratic, cosmopolitan and universal values (Rydgren 2007) –
3. In the case of Podemos, as we set out in the theoretical framework, it was founded in 2014 and has obtained representation in the Spanish parliament in the four elections held between 2015 and 2019. However, Vox, which was founded in 2013, did not PMs until the April 2019 elections. In this sense, although Vox was born in 2013 and ran in the elections, it did not break into the national scene until the regional elections in Andalusia in December 2018.
4. A brief summary with important data on these elections is available in Table C1.
5. The disaggregated N for each election is 8,092 (December 2015), 8,091 (June 2016), 7,827 (April 2019) and 7,827 (November 2019). We have worked with data from all 8,131 municipalities in Spain. However, we have eliminated all those cases in which there were missing values for some of the variables used in the empirical analysis.
6. This number may vary depending on the availability of data on the variables. The most notorious example is income. The Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE or National Statistics Institute) only offers this data for 6,744 municipalities in 2015, 6,798 in 2016 and 6,522 in 2019. Despite this, we have considered it to be a sufficiently important variable to remove it. Moreover, there is no indicator that can offer us, alternatively, an approximation of the income of the municipalities.
7. We operationalise under this category in addition to Podemos, its regional brands "En comú Podem" in Catalonia, "Compromís-Podemos-És el moment" in the Valencian Community, "Podemos-En Marea" in Galicia and Unidad Popular (Izquierda Unida) in 2015 – before the coalition between Podemos and Izquierda Unida –.
8. The table with the non-standardised coefficients of the OLS models can be seen in Table C2. These models are developed with the 'lm_robust' function of the 'Estimatr' package (version 0.30.6) of R.

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Vox. 2019. "100 medidas para la España Viva."

Appendices

Appendix A. Populist Radical Parties in Spain

Podemos

Podemos was born in 2014, in the context of the Great Recession, with the clear objective of turning social dissatisfaction into political change (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016). The party began its journey in the 2014 European elections, obtaining 7.9% of the votes and 5 seats. In the 2015 municipal elections, the formation (together with its multiple confluences) entered into Spanish institutional politics (Rodon and José Hierro 2016), achieving, for example, the mayors of Barcelona and Madrid. Later, the party was conceived as an emerging actor by positioning itself as a clear competitor to the mainstream left, being able to attract voters disaffected with the system and the political class (Ramiro and Gomez 2017). The emergence of Podemos was confirmed in the legislative elections of 20 December 2015. It entered the Spanish parliament and become the third political force with 20.68% of the votes and 69 seats.

Many studies have analysed support for Podemos from an individual perspective. They characterise their electorate as young, highly qualified (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016) as well as remarkably interested in politics (Rama, Cordero, and Zagórski 2021). In addition, its voters have mobilised, mainly due to economic grievance (Orriols and Cordero 2016). For these reasons Podemos managed to capture former voters of the mainstream left – *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE or Spanish Socialist Worker's Party) and *Izquierda Unida* (IU or United Left) –, the abstention and new voters (Pavía, Bodoque, and Martín 2016).

Vox

Vox was founded in 2013 as a result of the departure of some members of the PP. Its objective was to compete for the ideological space previously occupied by the traditional right (Negral and Sánchez-García 2022). Vox's first institutional journey took place in December 2018 with its entry into the Andalusian Parliament. Since that moment, Vox was able to take advantage of the discontent over Catalonia's conflict – considered a key factor in its emergence – (Jambrina-Canseco 2023; Ortiz 2019). It also opened a gap within the spectrum of the right. In the legislative elections of April 28, in 2019, Vox consolidated and fractured the ideological space of the right due to its ability to influence the political agenda and the positioning of certain parties, such as the PP and *Ciudadanos* (Citizens). Afterwards, the growth of Vox has been considerable in elections of a different natures (general, European, municipal and regional). For example, Vox has managed to form part of the regional government of Castile and León in coalition with the PP.

The studies that have analysed the profile of Vox's voters have described it as mostly young (Rama et al. 2021), with high levels of education (Ortiz 2019) and interested in politics (Marcos-Marne, Llamazares, and Shikano 2021). From a motivational perspective, despite the fact that Vox has an interest in immigration, the issues related to Catalonia's conflict (Turnbull-Dugarte, Rama, and Santana 2020), corruption (Rama, Cordero, and Zagórski 2021) and mismanagement of the government (Negral and Sánchez-García 2022) are more important.

Appendix B Data information

Table B1. Description of variables included in the study.

Variable	Definition	Source
Degree of urbanisation	Eurostat (2019) classification recoded to: Rural areas (0) and cities and suburbs (1). This categorisation of municipalities is the same for all three years.	Eurostat
Capital to Madrid	Distance of each municipality from Madrid measured in kilometres	Own elaboration with IGN data
Population (Log)	Logarithm of number of people living in each municipality	INE
% 65 y/o or older	Percentage of persons over 65 years of age in the corresponding year out of the total number of inhabitants in the census	INE
Immigrants	Percentage of persons out of the total census population with a place of birth in a foreign country	INE
Previous abstention	Percentage of total voters who did not go to the polls in the previous election (t-1).	Ministry for Home Affairs
Blue-collar worker	Percentage of workers in each municipality engaged in construction and industry	Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda
Unemployed	Proportion of the population that was unemployed	Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda
Income (Log)	Logarithm of average income *per capita* for each municipality (in euros, €)	INE

Table B2. Descriptive statistics of variables included in the study.

Variable	N	Mean	SD (σ)	Min	Max
% Podemos	31,839	12.81	8.27	0.00	88.46
% Vox	31,839	5.97	8.06	0.00	66.67
Distance to Madrid	31,839	293.59	203.55	0.00	1,932.68
Population (Log)	31,839	6.56	1.87	1.79	15.00
Youths	31,839	16.58	4.81	0.00	51.67
Immigrants	31,839	2.63	3.46	0.00	40.74
Previus abstention	31,839	24.64	7.13	0.00	100.00
Blue-collar worker	31,839	22.66	17.30	0.00	100.00
Unemployed	31,839	9.56	5.36	0.00	100.00
Income (Log)	26,588	9.28	0.21	8.10	10.18

Figure B1. Correlation diagram of the variables used.

Appendix C. Complementary materials

Table C1. Summary elections.

#	Date	% Turnout	% Podemos	Podemos PMs	% Vox	Vox PMs
1	20 December 2015	73.2	24.33	71	0.23	0
2	26 June 2016 *	69.84	21.1	71	0.2	0
3	28 April 2019	75.75	14.31	42	10.26	24
4	10 November 2019 *	66.23	12.97	35	15.21	52

Repeat elections as a result of the impossibility of forming a government.

Table C2. OLS regression models for Podemos and Vox votes share (2015–2019).

	Podemos		Vox	
	M1	M2	M1	M2
Cities and Suburbs	2.66*	1.53*	0.28*	0.26*
	[2.38; 2.94]	[1.24; 1.82]	[0.10; 0.47]	[0.07; 0.45]
Distance to Madrid	0.01*	0.00*	−0.01*	−0.01*
	[0.00; 0.01]	[0.00; 0.00]	[−0.01; −0.00]	[−0.01; −0.01]
Population (Log)	0.50*	0.82*	0.12*	0.04
	[0.42; 0.58]	[0.73; 0.90]	[0.06; 0.18]	[−0.02; 0.10]
Youths	0.11*	0.14*	0.08*	0.08*
	[0.09; 0.14]	[0.12; 0.17]	[0.07; 0.10]	[0.06; 0.10]
Immigrants	−0.15*	−0.12*	0.04*	0.06*
	[−0.17; −0.12]	[−0.15; −0.10]	[0.01; 0.06]	[0.03; 0.08]
Previous abstention	0.03*	0.06*	0.07*	0.10*
	[0.02; 0.04]	[0.04; 0.07]	[0.06; 0.08]	[0.09; 0.11]
Blue-collar worker	0.01*	0.01*	−0.00	0.00
	[0.01; 0.02]	[0.00; 0.01]	[−0.00; 0.00]	[−0.00; 0.00]
Unemployed	0.05*	0.12*	−0.02*	−0.01
	[0.03; 0.07]	[0.10; 0.15]	[−0.03; −0.01]	[−0.02; 0.00]
Income (Log)		5.59*		1.81*
		[4.93; 6.24]		[1.39; 2.22]
Region fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Election fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R²	0.39	0.45	0.68	0.72
Adj. R²	0.39	0.45	0.68	0.72
Num. obs.	31839	26588	31839	26588
RMSE	6.45	5.88	4.57	4.16

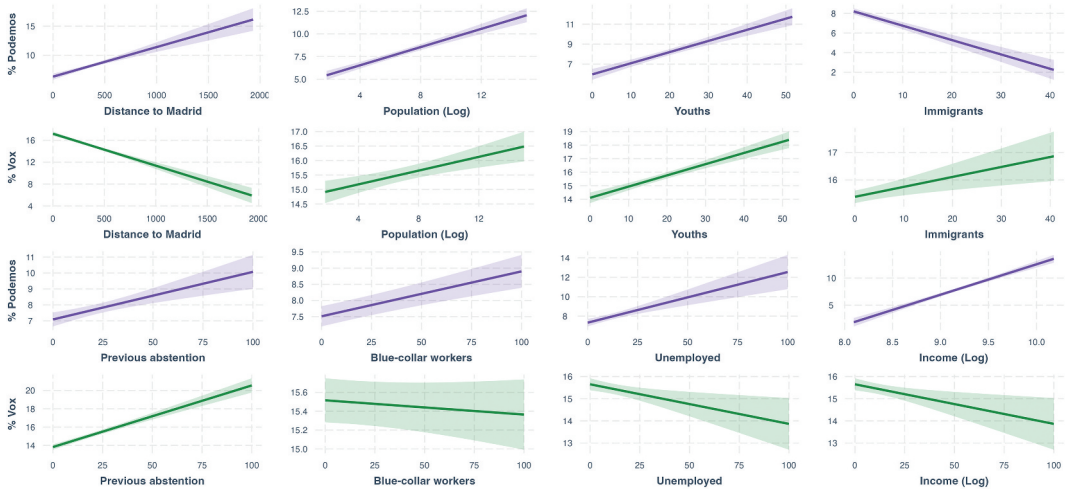* Null hypothesis value outside the confidence interval (p-value < 0.5).

Figure C1. Predicted effects of the independent variables on the vote for Podemos and Vox.