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Diversity in Spanish Politics? Dynamics of Descriptive Representation of Immigrant-Origin Minorities in Local Elections

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Abstract

Research has identified an alarming gap in migrants’ descriptive representation across Western European countries with long-standing immigration while showing that not all migrant groups are equally (un)successful in gaining elected office. However, little is known about migrants’ political presence in Southern European countries, which have experienced increased immigration in recent decades. We address this research gap for Spain by focusing on the municipal level where minorities’ inclusion remains of utmost importance. Conceptually, the article tackles the question of how the interplay between migrants’ demographic concentration and specific party features shapes the outcomes of minority descriptive representation. Empirically, we bring novel evidence from an original survey with local party organizations across municipalities returning high shares of Romanian, Moroccan, Latin American, and EU14 migrants. We first demonstrate that, despite being particularly sizeable, all groups remain under-represented in Spanish local politics, although with important differences. At comparable levels of demographic concentration, EU14 and Latin American migrants are almost three times more likely than Romanian migrants and up to seven times more likely than Moroccan migrants to be fielded as candidates. EU14 candidates are also more successful in securing office. Second, our findings confirm that party features shape the contours of minority inclusion: Spanish left-wing and new parties present more diverse local candidacies and place minority office-seekers in safer electoral list positions than right-wing and established parties.

Keywords

candidates; councilors; descriptive political representation; immigration; local elections; minority inclusion; Spain

1. Introduction

Drawing on the concept of descriptive political representation (Mansbridge, 1999; Pitkin, 1967), numerous studies have sought to assess if the makeup of representative institutions reflects increased demographic diversity. Their findings document that parliamentary assemblies are far from mirroring the composition of societies (Bird et al., 2011; Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Dancygier et al., 2015). Despite (slow) progress over time, the numbers of migrants standing as candidates are usually below their demographic size, and, from this limited pool of aspiring politicians with an immigrant background, few win elected office, although with variations between groups.

This article seeks to enrich existing knowledge on migrants' presence in European legislatures by bringing novel evidence from Spain, where the topic has been insufficiently explored. It complements other facets of migrants' political engagement discussed in this thematic issue (e.g., Finn & Ramaciotti, 2024; Gherghina & Basarabă, 2024). Conceptually, we contribute to scholarship on migrants' access to elected office by investigating how the interplay between their demographic concentration and specific party features shapes the outcomes of minority descriptive representation. Our theoretical arguments therefore bridge the gap between these two interconnected analytical layers of residential visibility and party characteristics. First, we evaluate the effect of high demographic concentration on the prospects of different migrant communities to enter local politics. We examine municipalities because it is at this level where aspirants start their careers, the contact between residents and politics is closest, immigration has the most visibility, and integration governance becomes the most complex. The article therefore invites further scholarly reflection on whether municipal assemblies actually represent an accessible first arena for the entry of similarly sizeable minority groups into the elected office pipeline. Second, we complement this approach with a party-centric viewpoint, to verify the assumption that specific party features (left/right ideology and being a new/established party) can explain variations in minority inclusion rates on party lists (as candidates) and local councils (as elected officeholders). We further argue that parties' decisions to field minority candidates in specific list positions ultimately shape their election prospects, which testifies to parties' crucial role in balancing the political inclusion outcomes of different groups seeking representation.

Empirically, we test these arguments for the Spanish local context. Although accelerated inflows since the mid-2000s rapidly placed Spain among the European countries hosting the largest migrant populations, research into migrants' presence in Spanish municipal politics remains scarce, mainly due to data limitations. We address this gap by looking at the access to elected office of the four largest migrant groups in Spain: Romanian, Moroccan, Latin American, and EU14 migrants (this category refers to migrants originating from all EU countries before the 2004 enlargement, except for Spain). Our analysis draws on a unique dataset based on a survey conducted with local party organizations across all municipalities in which any of these groups accounted for $\geq 10\%$ of the population (i.e., with a high demographic presence expected to increase their political presence) for the 2011 and 2015 elections. These years were critical in Spain, because whereas the 2011 elections provided new opportunities for migrants' political inclusion following the enfranchisement of several non-EU nationalities, the 2015 elections marked a turning point in Spanish politics, with new parties challenging the traditional two-party system.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines our theoretical framework, while Section 3 presents our expectations based on the contextualization of immigration and party dynamics in Spain. Section 4

explains the research design, while Section 5 highlights our findings. We show that despite demographic visibility, all four migrant groups are still under-represented on party lists and in local councils, although EU14 and Latin American migrants are more successful than Romanians and Moroccans in achieving representation. We further confirm that Spanish parties have differentiated stances towards the political inclusion of similarly-sized migrant groups, with left-wing and new parties being more supportive of minority candidates than right-wing and established parties. We conclude by briefly discussing the broader implications of these findings and their potential for incentivizing future research.

2. Demographic Concentration, Parties, and Migrants' Descriptive Representation: Theoretical Remarks

Migrants' limited presence in legislatures has been documented across several European countries with long-standing immigration, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, among others (Donovan, 2007; Geese & Schacht, 2019; Schönwälder, 2013; Sobolewska, 2013). Recently, this pattern also started to be identified in Southern Europe, which has experienced a different immigration trajectory of rapid inflows since the mid-2000s. Although little is known about the access of distinct migrant communities to Spanish politics in particular, some recent contributions point towards their general under-representation in local councils (Ciornei, 2014; Pamies et al., 2021; Pérez-Nievas et al., 2014), national/regional parliaments (Vintila & Morales, 2018), and parties (Zapata-Barrero & Burchianti, 2014). However, the factors behind the recruitment and election of minority candidates in Spanish municipal assemblies remain understudied.

Undoubtedly, migrants' descriptive representation is a pivotal facet of contemporary democracies, with profound implications for political inclusion and (perceptions of) substantive representation among often disadvantaged communities. The fact that parliamentary assemblies do not adequately mirror demographic diversity raises questions about the quality of representation while testifying to the obstacles that migrants still face to be politically acknowledged in residence countries (Dancygier et al., 2020; Mansbridge, 1999). The lack of diversity in legislative bodies further raises concerns about political trust and the risk of political alienation among migrants who may feel that non-immigrant policymakers do not adequately promote their interests (Bird, 2011; Phillips, 1993; Pitkin, 1967; Ruedin, 2020).

Although these representational deficits affect all legislative arenas, they can be even more unsettling at the local level, especially in municipalities with sizeable migrant populations. Local politics should be the access point where ambitious office-seekers (of any origin) start their political careers (Dancygier et al., 2020; Dodeigne & Teuber, 2019; Donovan, 2007; Garbaye, 2005; Schönwälder, 2013; Sipinen, 2021). This is due to the greater ease of recruitment for local than regional/national elections, which also relates to the number of available seats and the prestige associated with these offices. For migrants in particular, their limited presence in local politics questions their chances of accessing the higher echelons of power, especially since experience at the municipal level is often a prerequisite for regional/national office (Dodeigne & Teuber, 2019). The importance of the municipality is further amplified by the fact that it is precisely at this level where immigration is most visible and where its effects are experienced the most. City councils are the primary level of interaction between minorities and political institutions (Buta & Gherghina, 2023; Garbaye, 2005). They are responsible for key policies that directly affect migrants' lives, especially given the so-called "local turn" in migrant integration and the room for manoeuvre that city administrations have for shaping local integration philosophies (Garcés-Mascreñas & Penninx, 2016).

Although representational deficits of any minority pose a challenge to democratic functioning, a closer look at migrants' numerical representation shows that not all groups are equally (un)successful in entering politics (Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Ruedin, 2020). This mixed evidence triggered scholars' interest in different factors related to these groups that could explain their varying presence in legislatures. Given the available data, this article focuses on two of these factors: the degree of migrants' demographic concentration and their electoral potential. First, migrants' residential concentration level has been considered a crucial predictor of inclusion on ballot lists and more favorable seat placement (Dancygier, 2014). Larger minority groups are less likely to run the risk of a supply shortage of minority candidates while being expected to attract more parties' attention by signaling potential voting gains. This is particularly the case when migrants reach a high concentration threshold in districts where their presence simply cannot be (completely) ignored (Dancygier et al., 2015; Farrer & Zingher, 2018; Geese & Schacht, 2019; Sipinen, 2021; Sobolewska, 2013). Second, demographic visibility alone may not guarantee access to politics if it is not accompanied by electoral potential. Parties may have few incentives to reach out to highly concentrated immigrant groups if their members lack electoral rights. Electoral potential is, in turn, conditioned by institutional rules that offer different political opportunities to different groups (Donovan, 2007). Applying selective requirements for different nationalities in the naturalization process or in the recognition of electoral rights may shift parties' attention towards specific groups, especially those highly concentrated in constituencies where they could act as a "voting block."

After having considered these group-related factors, let us now turn to political parties. Inspired by previous studies (Farrer & Zingher, 2018; van der Zwan et al., 2019), we argue that not all parties are expected to be equally attentive to migrants' political inclusion, even in districts where minorities have high demographic visibility and electoral potential. Parties can shape minority representation outcomes by deciding how many migrants (and of which origins) are fielded as candidates and by placing them in more/less secure positions on electoral lists (Mügge, 2016; van der Zwan et al., 2019). Whereas parties' decisions to present diverse candidacy lists remain an important facet affecting migrants' political presence, we argue that the nomination of minority aspirants higher up on electoral lists (with greater chances of getting elected) is an equally decisive aspect that reveals parties' genuine pledges for promoting minority representation (see Dancygier et al., 2020; Dodeigne & Teuber, 2019; Geese & Schacht, 2019). In both candidate nomination and list placement processes, parties may end up favoring certain migrant groups, due to ideological congruences with those communities or strategic plans to tap into migrant voters' support (Ciornei, 2014; Sipinen, 2021).

Reflecting on what drives parties to support migrants' political inclusion, scholars have highlighted that partisan views on immigration and on how "worthy" the promotion of minority representation is remain contingent upon party ideology and internal features, which act as selectivity filters in minority recruitment. Following ideological cleavages, left-wing parties are expected to be more committed than their right-wing counterparts to provide opportunities to migrant office-seekers (Bird et al., 2011; Dancygier et al., 2015; Donovan, 2007; Farrer & Zingher, 2018). Within the left-wing block, new left parties with a left-libertarian agenda are also expected to be more inclusive than established social democratic parties, but also when compared to radical left parties that evolved from communist organizations with more traditional ideological platforms (Ramiro & Gomez, 2017). This assumption is also linked with the "party-movement" organization model employed by some radical left parties, for which the combination of direct participation mechanisms, more horizontal structures, and increased interactions with social movements (Kitschelt, 2006) is expected to support the recruitment of candidates with new profiles.

Beyond ideology, scholars have also argued that newer parties may accommodate minority candidates more easily than established parties, as a strategy to maximize their entry into competitive electoral races (Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Scarrow, 2014). As newer parties have less established hierarchies, their decision to field immigrant candidates comes with a lower risk of potential internal conflicts due to displacement of other candidates than in established parties (Vintila et al., 2016). Moreover, the fact that challenger parties usually expand internal party democracy to adopt more inclusive candidate selection methods is also expected to favor more socially balanced lists (Kakepaki et al., 2018).

Drawing on these considerations, this article seeks to assess how demographic concentration and party features shape migrants' access to Spanish local politics. As further explained in Section 3, we first expect migrants' strong demographic presence to incentivize parties to support minority candidates, especially when the latter originate from communities with such strong electoral potential that simply cannot be ignored in the electoral race. Second, we also expect left-wing and newer parties to be more supportive of minority candidates' recruitment and seat placement than right-wing and established parties, with new radical left parties being expected to have higher inclusion rates than social democratic parties or traditional radical left parties.

While we focus on testing how migrants' demographic visibility and parties' responses to it shape descriptive representation outcomes, we acknowledge that minority recruitment may depend on other factors, including the supply of minority candidates or the anticipation of electoral loss due to voter prejudice. Although studies show that an insufficient supply of minority aspirants is less likely among sizeable migrant groups and does not necessarily translate into limited descriptive representation if parties have a strong will to diversify their ranks (Dancygier, 2014; Dancygier et al., 2020; Vintila et al., 2016), migrants' interest and willingness to enter politics, their familiarity with the residence country's political environment, or the socio-political capital they can mobilize electorally may still restrict the pool of viable minority aspirants that parties may approach (Ciornei, 2014; Dodeigne & Teuber, 2019; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Schönwälder, 2013). Moreover, the anticipation of electoral stereotyping might prevent parties from supporting minority candidates (Bloemraad & Schönwälder, 2013; Buta & Gherghina, 2023; Dancygier et al., 2015; Fieldhouse & Sobolewska, 2013). While we are aware that these factors help to understand the multi-faceted barriers behind migrants' entry into politics, the data at hand only allows us to assess the outcomes of minority representation. We compare these outcomes among different migrant groups and parties with different characteristics while encouraging further research into the practical constraints that parties may face in fielding minority candidates.

3. The Spanish Context: Increased Immigration, Varying Political Opportunities, and Shifting Party Dynamics

3.1. Contextualizing Immigration in Spain

Several reasons justify why Spain is a particularly relevant case study for analyzing migrants' political representation. To begin with, Spain can be considered typical among South European countries in its historical trajectory and key features of recent immigration. Like Italy, Portugal, and Greece (and in contrast with other Western European countries), Spain shifted from an emigration to an immigration model (Peixoto et al., 2012). This migratory turnaround began in the 1990s when Southern European countries started

receiving immigration inflows, and it intensified during the mid-2000s, with economic migrants joining sectors with a high demand for low-skilled labor (King & DeBono, 2013). Consequently, the immigrant population in Spain, Italy, and Greece multiplied over fivefold in just two decades (Vintila et al., 2016). In Spain, the share of foreign-born residents sharply increased from 3% of the population in the late 1990s to 14% in 2023, with over 6.7 million foreign-born currently residing in the country (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023). This rapid demographic diversification became particularly visible locally, with migrants being highly concentrated in many municipalities.

Another feature of the so-called “Southern European migration model” is the diversity by origins of migrant populations (Peixoto et al., 2012). Since the 2000s, economic immigration from Africa (mostly Morocco) to Spain has intensified, whereas linguistic and postcolonial ties incentivized the arrival of Latin American workers (especially Ecuadorians, Colombians, Argentinians, Peruvians, and Bolivians). Intra-European mobility also increased rapidly, with two different profiles: inflows from EU14 countries (particularly lifestyle/retirement migration from Germany, the UK, and France) and Eastern Europe (especially labor migration from Romania).

Figure 1 shows the most sizeable foreign-born groups in 2011 and 2015 (i.e., the electoral years analyzed). By 2015, Latin Americans accounted for almost a third of all foreign-born in Spain, while EU14 migrants totaled 17% of the foreign-born population. Moroccans (13%) and Romanians (11%) were the most sizeable national groups in 2015. Given their distinctive residential character, EU14 migrants are usually highly concentrated in the smaller coastal towns of Andalusia, Valencia, and the Balearic or Canary Islands, in many of which they exceed 30–40% of the population. By contrast, settlements in large cities mostly respond to economic migration from Latin America, Romania, and Morocco.

However, these groups have unequal opportunities in accessing Spanish politics. EU citizenship status strongly favors EU migrants by granting them the right to vote and stand as candidates in Spanish local elections without the need to acquire Spanish citizenship (Vintila, 2015). In turn, non-EU migrants’ electoral rights remain restricted, although with important variations between groups. Only nationals of non-EU countries that concluded reciprocity agreements with Spain can vote in Spanish local elections. Such agreements were signed with several Latin American countries (Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Chile, and Paraguay), whose citizens were enfranchised for the first time in the 2011 elections. However, unlike EU nationals, their voting rights are restricted to five years of residence and they can stand as candidates only after having acquired Spanish citizenship.

Naturalization rules are also uneven for different groups. Although 10 years of residence are usually required for Spanish citizenship, migrants sharing colonial ties with Spain benefit from fast-track access after two years. This clearly benefits Latin Americans: 73% of the 1,291,379 migrants who naturalized in Spain between 1996 and 2015 were Latin Americans, followed by Moroccans (15%), whereas less than 2% of all naturalized migrants originated from the EU14 or Romania (Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración, 1996–2015). Given this differentiated access to electoral rights and Spanish nationality, a rough estimate of the number of migrants with voting rights in Spain—based on naturalization stocks and voter registration numbers from Instituto Nacional de Estadística (1996–2015) and Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración (1996–2015)—indicate that around 88,000 Moroccan, 108,000 Romanian, 303,000 EU14, and 617,000 Latin American migrants were entitled to vote in the 2011 local elections. Their electoral potential

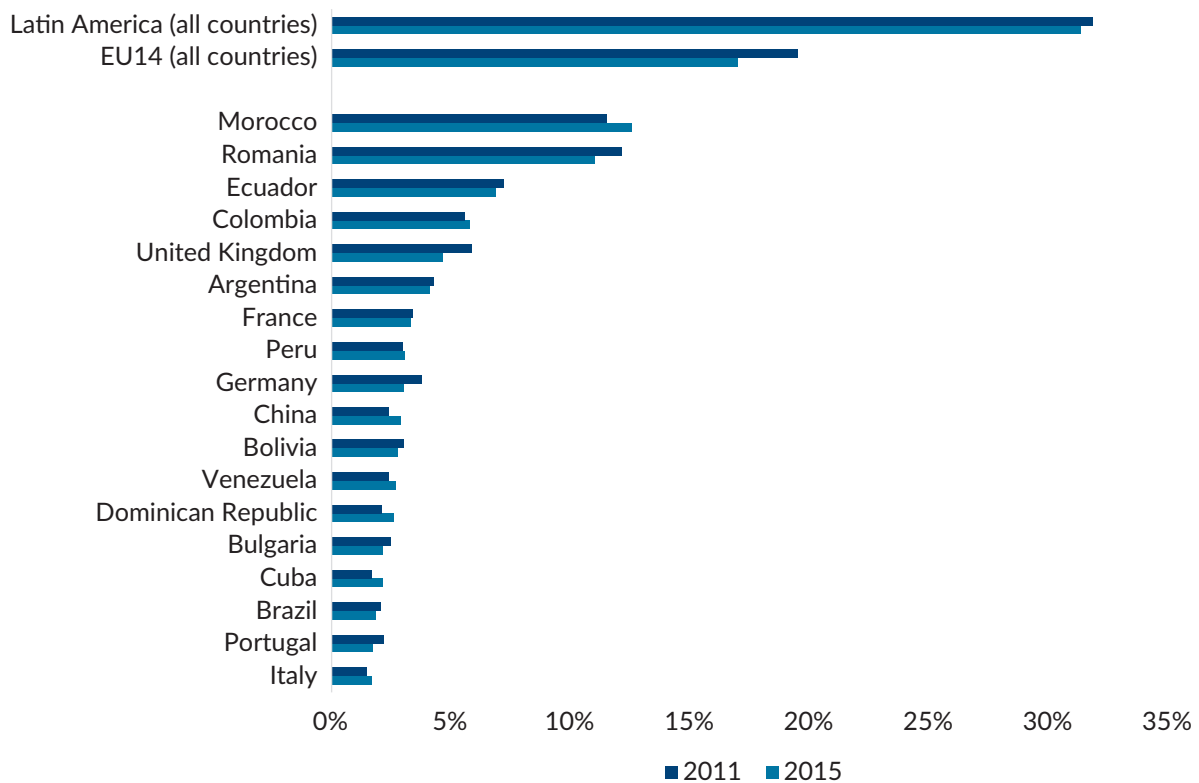


Figure 1. Most sizeable migrant groups in 2011 and 2015 (% of all foreign-born). Source: Authors' work based on data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2023).

increased by 2015, when around 190,000 Moroccan, 119,000 Romanian, 313,000 EU14, and 960,000 Latin American migrants were estimated as eligible to vote.

This combination of factors suggests that, although migrants' strong demographic presence should a priori incentivize their presence in elected institutions, some groups are still more (dis)advantaged in the electoral race. The legislation clearly favors EU migrants by granting them local electoral rights even without Spanish nationality. Within this group, EU14 migrants seem particularly favored (when compared to Romanians) by their peculiar residential patterns in municipalities where their electoral potential may be too strong to be completely ignored by parties. As for non-EU migrants, Latin Americans are clearly better placed than Moroccans to enter Spanish politics, since they benefit from fast-track access to Spanish citizenship and many Latin American nationalities enjoy local voting rights through bilateral agreements. We hence expect this constellation of factors to favor the political inclusion of EU14 and Latin American migrants, while being more restrictive for Romanians and, especially so, for Moroccans.

3.2. Contextualizing Spanish Local Politics

The Spanish local context reveals interesting electoral and partisan dynamics that contribute to establishing parameters for minority inclusion. Local elections follow a proportional representation system based on closed-party lists, with electoral arrangements being the same across all municipalities. Each party list includes a number of candidates equal to the number of seats (which depends on municipalities' population size). Seats are assigned following the D'Hondt formula and elected officeholders are taken from party lists

in the order in which they were fielded. In the absence of preferential voting, voters can only elect candidates that parties (pre)select (see also Buta & Gherghina, 2023). As parties determine candidates' list positions and, implicitly, their election prospects, the system reinforces their role as gatekeepers to the elected office (Dancygier et al., 2020; Geese & Schacht, 2019; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

Regarding party dynamics, the main Spanish parties competing in national elections are also key players locally, with national-level partisan competition being mirrored in municipal party systems. Until 2015, the Spanish political scene was characterized by stability and increased bipartisan competition between the Socialist Party (PSOE)—the traditional left-wing party—and the People's Party (PP)—the traditional right-wing party—(Rodon & Hierro, 2016). The United Left (IU)—the traditional party to the left of the PSOE, within the radical left space—and, for a short time, the Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD)—the new center-right party—also acted as minor state-wide parties by securing more limited parliamentary representation at all levels. These dynamics changed with the 2015 elections, which marked a turning point in Spanish politics due to the electoral boost given to two new challenger parties: the center-right Ciudadanos (Citizens) and the left-populist and anti-establishment party Podemos (We Can). Ciudadanos and Podemos increased the fragmentation of the traditional two-party system, challenged the traditional left and right in Spain, and became new leading actors in many local and regional governments. Despite ideological differences, both parties followed a regeneration rhetoric by featuring young party leaders and more democratic candidate selection processes than the PSOE and PP (Rodon & Hierro, 2016). From an organizational standpoint, it should be clarified that Podemos did not run its own candidates for the 2015 local elections, but instead promoted the convergence of its local branches into left-wing coalitions that forged locally with other groups and social movements. These coalitions also resembled most of the “party–movement” organizational model, which used open primaries for selecting all municipal list positions.

In sum, these electoral and partisan features observed in local politics indicate that Spanish parties play a crucial role in controlling migrants' political representation prospects. Left-wing and newer parties are expected to be more supportive of minority candidates than right-wing and established parties. Within the leftist space, we also expect the left-wing coalitions supported by Podemos to be more inclusive not only than the social democratic party, the PSOE, but also when compared to the radical left with a more traditional ideology, represented by the United Left (IU).

4. Research Design

Studying migrants' access to local politics is challenging due to the paucity of ready-to-use data when compared to national politics (Dancygier, 2014). To identify immigrant-origin candidates, we conducted an original survey with local party organizations across all Spanish municipalities of more than 1,000 inhabitants in which foreign-born from any of the four groups—Romanian, Moroccan, Latin American, and EU14 migrants—represented $\geq 10\%$ of the population. The survey was conducted in the framework of the project *Plural Councils? The Political Representation of Migrants in Spain (APREPINM)*. We merged different EU14 and Latin American nationalities into larger transnational groups for several reasons. First, municipalities with high concentrations of EU14 citizens are mainly located in coastal towns in which these nationalities share a similar profile (lifestyle residents of 55+ years old, homeowners with medium-high educational and income levels), are often perceived as a single group, and collaborate for collective action (Janoschka & Durán, 2014). Second, Latin Americans mostly concentrate in medium-large cities where no

nationality is predominant. Spaniards also tend to perceive them as a Latin American group based on shared traits (cultural/linguistic proximity and colonial ties) rather than by specific national origins (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2016).

We deliberately chose a non-random sample design. We examine if representation levels follow demographic patterns by using the strategy proposed in past studies (Maxwell, 2013; Sobolewska, 2013) of testing descriptive representation only in municipalities where immigrants form a sufficiently high population share to become very visible locally (which should increase their chances of entering politics). The resulting sample includes 572 municipalities (see Supplementary Material), of which 265 were selected for their high concentration of EU14 migrants, 145 for their high presence of Romanians, 98 for that of Latin Americans, and 64 for that of Moroccans. While this sample design prioritizes our results' internal validity for highly diverse municipalities over their external validity for all Spanish municipalities, it remains particularly relevant for the Spanish context, as it ensures sufficient variation by municipality size and distribution across different Spanish regions and provinces.

In each municipality, we contacted the local organizations of all parties that had gained at least one seat in the previous national or regional elections. Following the strategy proposed in other studies (see Buta & Gherghina, 2023), we included all nationwide mainstream parties across the ideological spectrum: PSOE, PP, IU, Ciudadanos, UPyD, and the left-wing coalitions running in 2015, supported by Podemos. We also included all regionalist parties with representation at the regional level. Overall, we contacted 1,811 local party organizations, out of which 25% belonged to the PSOE, 24% to the PP, 10% to IU, 9% to Ciudadanos, and 7% to the left-wing coalitions supported by Podemos.

The survey included individualized questionnaires with each party's lists (including candidates' names) for 2011 and 2015 (the results below refer to both electoral years, due to a methodological decision to increase the number of observations). Local organizations were asked to identify their candidates' origins (standardized questions). The respondents were party officers (usually presidents, vice presidents, and secretaries) with extensive knowledge of local organizations, which testifies to the reliability of the information obtained. When asked about candidates' origins, respondents also had the possibility of selecting the response category "Do not know," although very few made use of this option, since local candidates are usually known by municipal party officials. This identification strategy is also more reliable than the alternative one based on names, which would have been problematic for Latin American candidates in Spain. Drawing on categorizations used in previous studies (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2014), we identified as immigrant candidates/councilors those (a) born abroad of foreign parents (first generation) or (b) born in Spain of at least one foreign parent (descendants). The survey was conducted between March 2018 and February 2019. Up to three rounds of reminders were sent to local party organizations to ensure sufficient response. The overall response rate was 33%. By main parties, the response rate was 42% for the PSOE, 30% for the PP, 28% for IU, 40% for Ciudadanos, and 40% for the left-wing coalitions supported by Podemos. Overall, the use of this survey method for identifying minority candidates comes with the significant benefit of collecting original, rich, and reliable data that is not available elsewhere nor easily captured through other methods. However, it also comes with the limitation that the information gathered varies across municipalities and parties, which may or may not be related to how many migrant candidates were fielded (see Dancygier, 2014).

5. Results

As said, our first expectation is that all four migrant groups would have a presence in local politics given their high demographic concentration, with some inter-group differences. Figure 2 displays survey results regarding these groups' relative success (or failure) in achieving representation. The first two bars indicate each group's inclusion rates in party lists in relation to their demographic weight in municipalities where the group accounted for $\geq 10\%$ of the population; whereas the third bar shows the shares of candidates from each group elected as councilors.

Our findings first corroborate the results of past studies that being a sizeable group does not guarantee political presence for any of the minorities considered, with few candidates fielded from each group. Second, they confirm our expectation of differences between groups in securing presence on ballot lists and in office. While EU14 migrants represented, on average, 19% of the population in the municipalities selected for their significant presence, the fact that only 3.7% of all candidates in these municipalities were from this group leads to a representation ratio of 0.19. This ratio is similar for Latin Americans (0.2), which represented 12% of the population in selected municipalities but only 2.4% of all candidates fielded there. However, the representation gap is much larger for Romanians (0.08 representation ratio) and especially for Moroccans (0.03 representation ratio). Therefore, although all four groups are severely underrepresented on local lists, our initial expectation that EU14 and Latin American migrants would be favored in the electoral race is confirmed: candidates from these groups were almost three times more likely than Romanians and almost

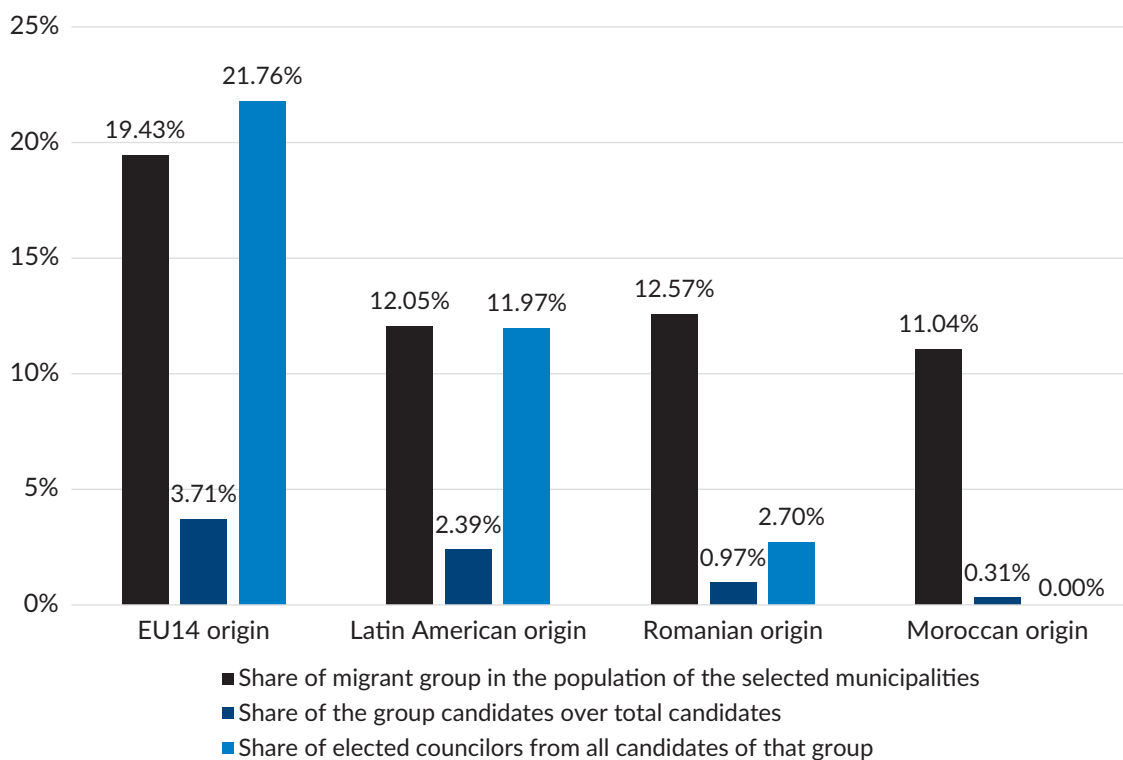


Figure 2. Share of the migrant group in the population, share of migrant group candidates over total candidates, and share of elected councilors from migrant group candidates in municipalities where each group represents $\geq 10\%$ of the population. Source: Authors' work based on APREPINM data (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2024).

seven times more likely than Moroccans to be nominated in municipalities where they exceed 10% of the population. Third, although EU14 and Latin American migrants return similar list inclusion ratios, the former group clearly stands out over the latter when it comes to being elected (22% versus 12% respectively, for all group candidates). Such varying success rates in obtaining seats are explained by the safer list positions in which parties placed EU14 candidates, an aspect developed below. Moreover, both EU14 and Latin American aspirants had considerably higher chances of being elected than Romanian candidates (less than 3% elected) or Moroccans (no candidate elected).

Figure 3 complements these findings by illustrating the so-called “mirror effect” between minorities’ residential concentration and their representation levels. It compares the demographic share of each group in municipalities where they counted for $\geq 10\%$ of the population (horizontal axis) with the share of group candidates on party lists in those municipalities (vertical axis). The solid diagonal line represents perfect representation (the prescriptive idea of descriptive representation in which the share of a group on party lists should match its demographic weight in the population), whereas the dash line captures Pearson’s correlation. The fact that most observations fall below the solid diagonal line visually highlights the clear under-representation of all groups, with very few instances of perfect/over-representation. The figure further pinpoints other aspects of how different concentration patterns of each group affect their presence on party lists. Starting with the EU14 migrants, given their distinctive residential concentration, they are the only group that exceeds 30% of the population in several municipalities along the Spanish coast, while even constituting a majority in a few of them. Although their electoral nomination does not follow perfect representation criteria, a majority of the lists presented in these municipalities do include at least one candidate from EU14 countries. This confirms the argument that when migrant communities pass a

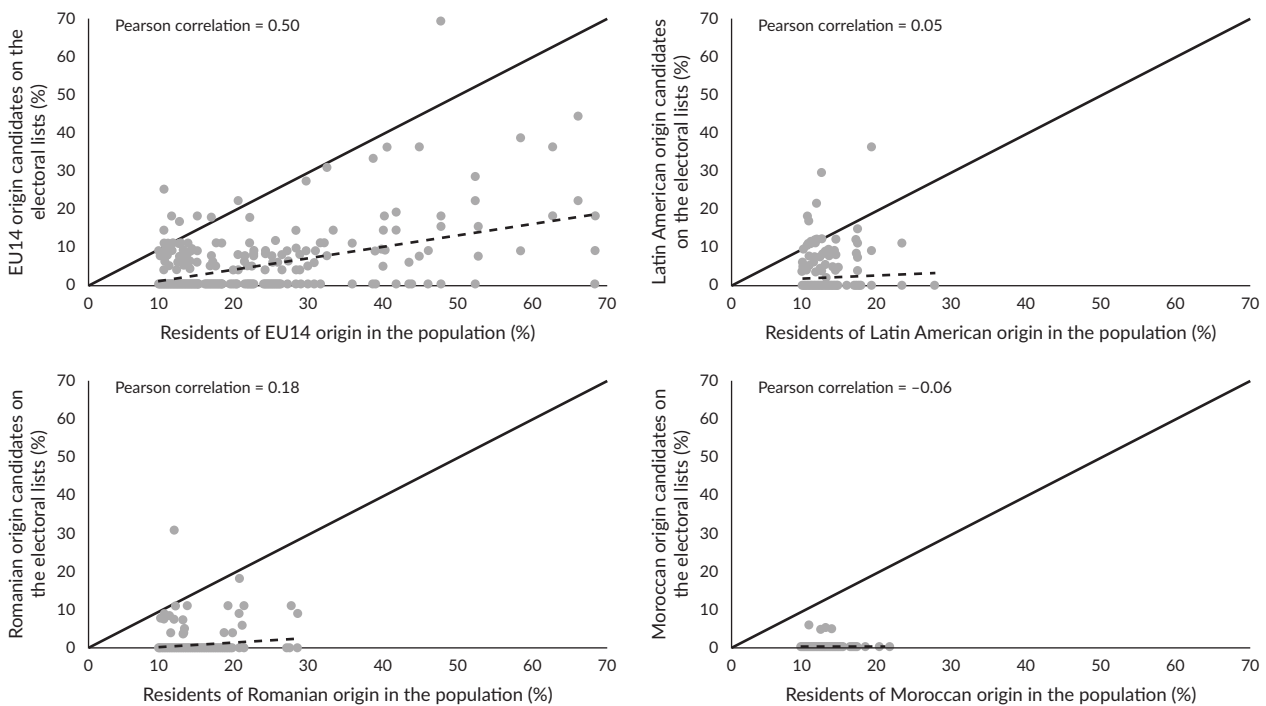


Figure 3. The mirror effect: Share of migrant group candidates on party lists (vertical axis) compared to the share of the migrant group in the municipal population (horizontal axis). Source: Authors’ work based on APREPINM data (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2024).

threshold of very high demographic concentration and electoral potential in specific districts, they simply cannot be ignored in parties' recruitment decisions. The EU14 group also returns the highest correlation between its degree of demographic concentration and the nomination of group candidates (Pearson correlation of 0.5). The other three groups have more similar concentration patterns, with few municipalities where they represent between 20 and 30% of the population. While there is some correlation between demographic concentration and list inclusion for Romanians (Pearson index close to 0.2), this association is not apparent for non-EU migrants. The inclusion of Moroccan candidates is the most clearly dissociated from the group's concentration pattern (negative Pearson correlation).

Finally, Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of immigrant-origin candidates by parties. Whereas EU14 candidates were more frequently nominated by the two main traditional parties (40% by the left-wing PSOE and 31% by the right-wing PP), Latin American candidates and the few Moroccan candidates identified were more frequently fielded by left-wing (both established and newer) parties. In contrast, Romanian candidates were more frequently fielded on PP lists (43%) than in any other party.

The uneven distribution of the four minorities across parties underlines the important role that parties play both in the recruitment phase and in placing migrant candidates in secure list positions. The results shown in Table 1 and Figure 5 allow for a joint assessment of the parties' roles in both processes. Summing up our discussions from previous sections, we expect left-wing parties to be more inclusive of minority candidates, while newer parties are also expected to more easily accommodate minority candidates than traditional parties. Within the left-wing space, we also expect the left-wing coalitions supported by Podemos to be more inclusive not only than the social democratic party PSOE but also when compared to the more traditional radical left, represented by IU.

Table 1 examines our findings from the parties' perspective. Although minority candidates from all four groups represent a small share of all candidates fielded by these parties, taken together, left-wing parties did present more diverse candidacies than their right-wing counterparts. As observed, minority candidates accounted for 10.7% of all candidates fielded by the left-wing coalitions, 3.7% for PSOE, and 2.9% for IU, respectively. This returns an average share of minority inclusion in all these left-wing parties of 5.8%. In turn,

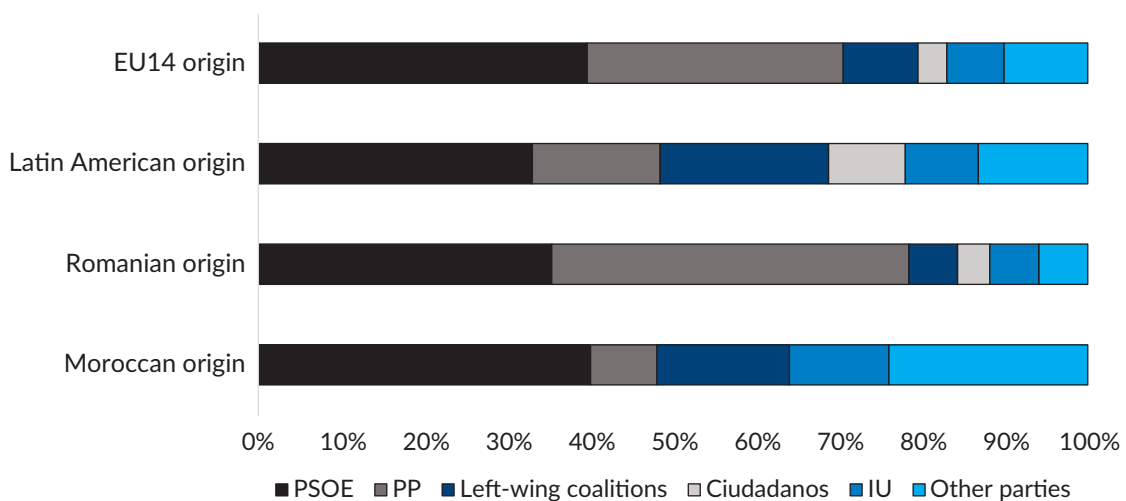


Figure 4. Distribution of candidates by migrant groups and parties. Source: Authors' work based on APREPINM data (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2024).

Table 1. Share of group candidates from all candidates fielded by each party.

	PSOE	PP	IU	Left-wing coalitions	Ciudadanos
All four migrant groups	3.7	3.6	2.9	10.7	3.2
EU14 origin	2.1	2.2	1.4	4.0	1.1
Latin American origin	1.1	0.7	1.1	5.6	1.9
Romanian origin	0.3	0.6	0.2	0.5	0.2
Moroccan origin	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.0

Source: Authors' work based on APREPINM data (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2024).

the average inclusion rate among right-wing parties was only 3.4%, with 3.6% of all PP candidates and 3.2% of all Ciudadanos's candidates having an immigrant background. What also becomes clear from these findings is that the left-right divide is conditioning minority recruitment much more among newer parties than among established ones. The electoral lists of the left-wing coalitions supported by the new left party Podemos were much more diverse than those presented by the new center-right party, Ciudadanos. Among established parties, the PSOE and PP returned similar inclusion rates, whereas the traditional radical left party IU returned a share of minority candidates even lower than the PP. Overall, it is the new Spanish radical left that clearly outperforms all other parties in minority recruitment: As expected, the inclusion ratio of the left-wing coalitions supported by Podemos was much higher than that of the established socio-democratic party, PSOE, and of the traditional radical left, IU.

Beyond candidacy, migrants' chances of getting elected are contingent on parties' decision on who is placed in "more winnable" electoral list positions. Figure 5 shows the average mean gap in safe positions of minority candidates in relation to the average safe position of all candidates (with or without a migrant background). The formula used for calculating the "safe positions" comprehensively accounts for different key elements highlighted in past studies (Geese & Schacht, 2019; Hennl & Kaiser, 2008; Mügge, 2016; Pérez-Nievas et al., 2014), including the total number of seats in the city council and a party's electoral results in the previous election and in the election analyzed. As such, we consider that a candidate's position on a given party list is safe when it is equal to or higher than the average number of seats won by that party in the current and previous elections. To maximize observations, candidates were grouped by the different types of parties (left/right and old/new) that fielded them. The graph does not include bars for Romanian candidates in new parties nor for Moroccans in new and right-wing parties, as these categories did not reach a minimum of 15 observations to make meaningful comparisons. Nonetheless, the graph is sufficiently illustrative of the differences between groups and parties.

The formula used in Figure 5 was:

$$\frac{\left(\left[\frac{N \text{ party councillors in previous} + \text{analysed election}}{2} - \text{Candidate position in analysed election} \right] \times 100 \right)}{\text{Total number of seats in the local council}}$$

The results show that migrant candidates were indeed disadvantaged when compared to non-migrant candidates (which represent an overwhelming majority of the "all candidates" benchmark category) in the "safeness" of list positions. This explains why few got elected, thus confirming the observations made in past studies that placement in electable list positions remains the crucial hurdle for migrants' descriptive

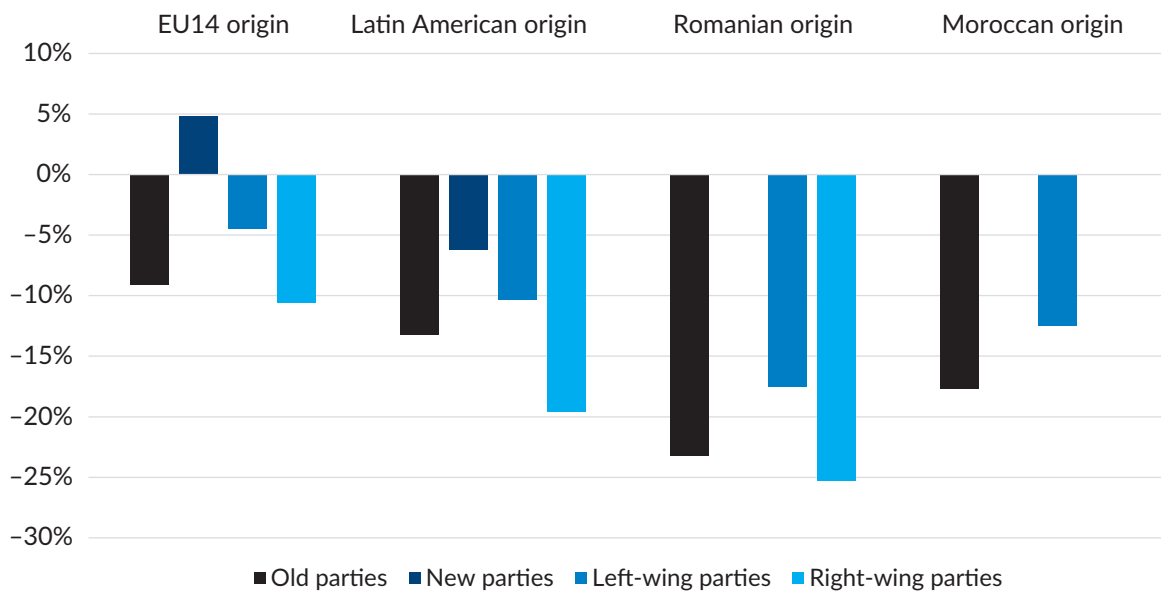


Figure 5. Mean gap in safe positions between EU14, Latin American, Romanian, and Moroccan origin candidates in relation to all candidates, by old/new parties and left/right parties. Note: Closer to zero indicates a smaller gap with the average safe position of all candidates. Source: Authors' work based on APREPINM data (Pérez-Nievas et al., 2024).

representation (Dancygier et al., 2020). Although minority candidates were consistently fielded by Spanish parties in less winnable positions than their non-immigrant counterparts, it is also true that left-wing and newer parties placed immigrant candidates in less “unsafe” positions than right-wing and established parties did, which further reiterates the differences between these blocks of parties in terms of support for minority political inclusion. Finally, Figure 5 also reproduces the previously discussed differentiation in minority groups’ inclusion rates, with Romanian and Moroccan candidates being placed in more insecure positions than Latin Americans and, especially so, than EU14 migrants, which explains their varying success levels in entering city councils.

6. Discussion

This article aimed to contribute to the literature on migrants’ descriptive political representation by providing new evidence on how the interplay between minorities’ demographic concentration and specific party features shape migrants’ inclusion on local party lists (as candidates) and municipal councils (as elected officeholders). This evidence is much needed since the topic of migrants’ access to elected institutions in Spain—as in other Southern European countries with recent immigration—has been long neglected in existing research on diversity in European legislatures. Although our results are limited to specific groups, municipalities, parties, and time periods, they are nevertheless valuable for inspiring future research on this topic in Spain and beyond.

First, our findings indicate that the hurdles for migrants’ descriptive representation begin at the political level that is closest to them and where their presence is more demographically visible. Our results question the frequent assumption that municipal politics represent a more accessible political arena for migrants’ entry into the pipeline for elected office while calling for further research on the reasons behind (and

consequences of) the limited presence of minorities in local politics in Spain and elsewhere. We, therefore, encourage scholars to pay closer attention to representation dynamics in municipal arenas, across three interrelated facets: (a) supply factors related to migrants' ambitions and motivations to run for local office and their perceptions vis-à-vis inclusion/marginalization in city politics; (b) local party selectors' demands for minority representation and their views on when, why, and which minority candidates should be supported in candidate selection processes and in electable positions; and (c) how the political careers of migrant office-holders develop from municipal level to the higher echelons of power and which factors affect their promotion to regional or national legislatures.

Second, our findings regarding the varying representation levels of similarly sized groups raise questions on which types of specific profiles of local minority aspirants are considered suitable for recruitment and why. While investigating this aspect is beyond the scope of this article, we encourage future research to scrutinize how the personal attributes of minority candidates from different migrant communities, the social and political capital they can mobilize electorally, and the existence of partisan or voter biases (especially against racialized minorities) may interact to account for differences in the recruitment and representation outcomes of different migrant communities.

Third, it is important to acknowledge that our findings cannot be generalized to all Spanish municipalities and that they reflect a specific period characterized by particular partisan dynamics. Further research is needed to test the validity of these results across a larger sample of municipalities from different regions and provinces. Similarly, although the overall presence of migrants in Spanish politics does not seem to have substantially improved in recent times, it would still be worth exploring if, how, and where changes in the Spanish political landscape—especially Podemos's failure to maintain its initial impetus and the rise of the populist radical right party VOX—may have altered the outcomes of descriptive and substantive representation of migrant populations. Finally, one cannot but wonder if the minority representation patterns observed in Spain also hold for other Southern European countries with similar immigration patterns. Comparative research might shed light on this aspect and the extent to which different parties operating in the context of the so-called "Southern European immigration model" respond to the challenge of diversifying their ranks to better reflect growing societal diversity.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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