
EXCEPTIONAL IN EUROPE? SPAIN'S EXPERIENCE WITH IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

By Joaquín Arango

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Spain's Experience with Immigration and Integration

Joaquín Arango

Complutense University of Madrid

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
I. Introduction	2
II. The Facts: Spain, a Peculiar Case?	2
A. Before the Crisis	2
B. Under the Spell of the Crisis.....	6
C. The Case of Catalonia	9
III. Searching for an Explanation: Some Possible Clues	9
A. Immigrant Demographics and Labor Force Participation.....	9
B. Political Culture.....	10
C. National Identity	12
IV. Conclusions	12
A. Looking Forward.....	12
B. Recommendations	13
Works Cited	15
About the Author	17



Executive Summary

In just a decade, Spain's foreign-born population increased from less than 4 percent of the total population to almost 14 percent. Fewer than 1.5 million immigrants resided in Spain in 2000, compared to 6.5 million in 2009. But unlike other European countries, Spain has not seen a significant backlash against immigration, even amid an economic crisis that has hit the country hard and led to extremely high levels of unemployment — especially among immigrants.

This enduring openness can be explained by a few key political and structural factors. Most Spaniards still view immigration through the lens of the labor market: since the mid-1980s, immigrants have provided needed labor to sustain economic growth and offered valuable services to families, and they still do so in the present day, with immigrants comprising close to one-fifth of the employed population. Spain's history with immigration remains relatively new, therefore the demographic profile of immigrants is predominantly one of young adults active in the labor force. Here, the second generation of immigrants has yet to fully come of age, as it has in other European countries. Furthermore, Spain's distinct political culture, which emerged following the end of the Franco dictatorship, discourages public statements that could be perceived as undermining the democratic values of equality and liberty. Groups in favor of immigration are large, active, and vocal in their opposition to any sentiments that could be seen as racist, xenophobic, or simply hostile to immigrants. There is a widespread belief that immigrants are entitled to the same rights as other members of society.

In just a decade, Spain's foreign-born population increased from less than 4 percent of the total population to almost 14 percent.

There is evidence, however, that this could be changing. In a May 2011 election, a small party that ran on an openly anti-immigrant platform in the region of Catalonia saw its standing improve, albeit modestly. More significantly, the success of the conservative Popular Party (PP) in the national parliamentary elections in November 2011 could foreshadow a major change in Spain's immigration policy. The party was critical of the immigration policies that the governing Socialist Party implemented in 2004-11, blaming them for the rapid increase in numbers. Two early decisions by the new PP government already point toward a different stance on immigration matters.



I. Introduction

Spain's experience with immigration attracted international attention in recent years, not only for the level of immigration the country sustained over a very short period of time but also for how it dealt with this incoming population. Surprisingly, Spain's wave of immigration has not led to the public and political backlash that has been characteristic of other immigrant-receiving countries in Europe. On a continent that is increasingly becoming known for rising anti-immigrant sentiment and restrictive policies, Spain appears to be an outlier.

Surprisingly, Spain's wave of immigration has not led to the public and political backlash that has been characteristic of other immigrant-receiving countries in Europe.

This report examines why Spain, one of the countries hit hardest by the economic crisis and with some of Europe's highest levels of unemployment, has not seen a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment among either the general populace or the political class. The first section describes how Spain has dealt with the recent rise in immigration, as well as how government and society viewed immigration and immigrant integration before and after the onset of the economic crisis. The second section seeks to explain why Spain has reacted in a way that is so distinct from its European neighbors. Finally, the conclusion discusses prospects for the future, analyzing whether the current stance on immigration will be maintained or whether a change in the government's political orientation, prolonged unemployment, and a shifting demographic profile of immigrants and their children will move attitudes in the direction of the rest of Europe.

II. The Facts: Spain, a Peculiar Case?

A. Before the Crisis

Despite its severity, the current economic crisis has not led to a backlash against immigration in Spain. This is less surprising when taking into account that the phenomenal increase in the size of the immigrant population in the years that preceded the recession was met with a generally calm, quiet reception. Indeed, between 2000 and 2009 Spain's foreign-born population more than quadrupled, rising from under 1.5 million to over 6.5 million.¹ During this period, the immigrant share of the total population grew from just under 4 percent to almost 14 percent, including more than half a million individuals who were naturalized.² The average annual net inflow of foreign-born individuals during this time was close to 500,000 people, making Spain the second-largest recipient of immigrants in absolute terms among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, following the United States.³

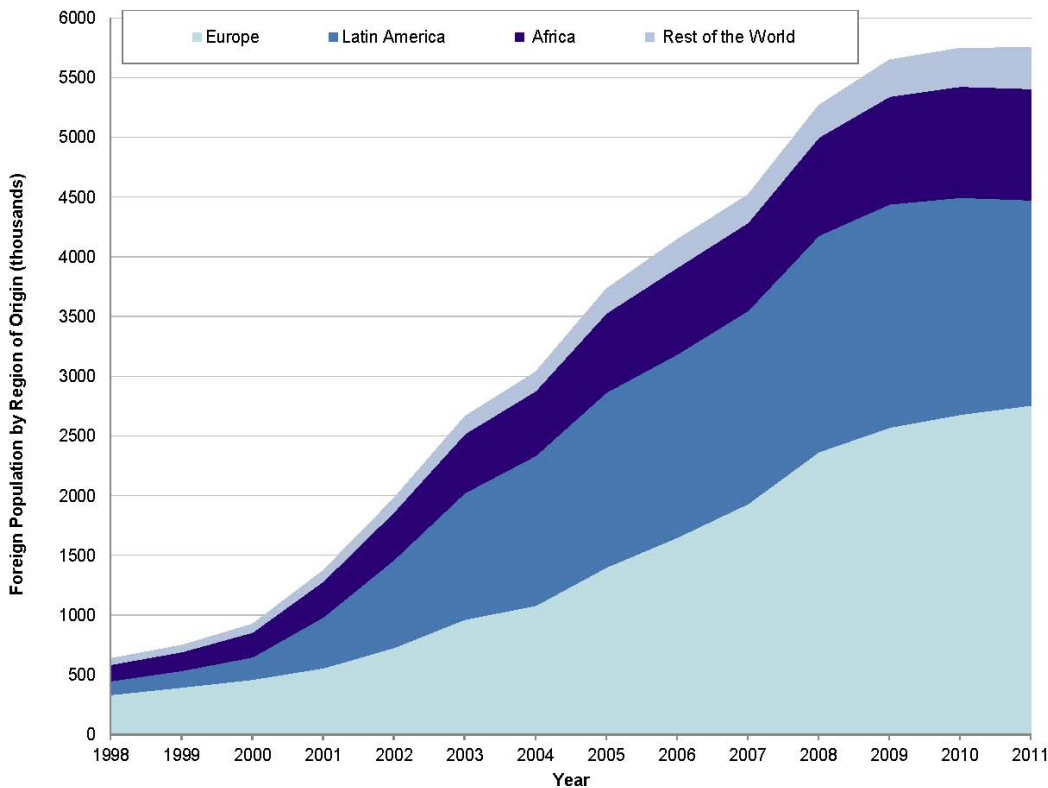
1 See Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *International Migration Outlook 2011*, Country Note: Spain (Paris: OECD, 2011), www.oecd.org/migration/imo.

2 Ibid.

3 For data on migrant inflows, see OECD, "Key Statistics on Migration in OECD Countries: Inflows of Foreign Population 2000-2009," www.oecd.org/document/30/0,3746,en_2649_37415_48326878_1_1_1_37415,00.html; and for information on total populations, OECD, "ALFS Summary Tables: Population," <http://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=254>.



Figure 1. Foreign Population, Municipal Registers, by Region of Origin, 1998-2011⁴



Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, *Population Register* (Madrid: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2012).

Sustained economic growth between the mid-1990s and 2007, at rates generally above the European Union (EU) average, was the main driver behind the dramatic rise in the number of immigrants. As the native population aged, the increasingly shrinking cohort of Spaniards entering the labor market each year filled only half of the several million new jobs created during this period. As a result, there was high demand for foreign labor, largely to fill low- or semi-skilled jobs. A virtuous circle between economic growth and immigration took place: the former induced the arrival of a large number of immigrants, and the latter decidedly contributed to economic growth.

This growth in the immigrant population did not lead to significant anxiety or backlash. Immigration was seen as a requirement of the labor market, an outcome of economic progress, and perhaps even a sign of modernity. Surveys indicated that while some segments of the population were worried about the growing number of immigrants, they accepted that these workers were needed.⁵ Public concerns about immigration rose in 2006 during the “*cayucos crisis*,” the arrival of some 30,000 people from Western African countries to the Canary Islands in small- or medium-sized fishing boats. These clandestine flows, as well as the acute concerns they generated, subsided after 2006, when the Spanish government reached agreements with several governments in West Africa to control the exodus of migrants in exchange for compensation.⁶

4 This figure shows Spain's foreign population, not its foreign-born population. The latter was larger by approximately 1 million people in 2009 and included immigrants to Spain who had naturalized.

5 Ángeles M. Cea d'Ancona and Miguel Valles, *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España [Informe 2010]* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010), www.oberaxe.es/files/datos/4e20230088dc8/INFORME%20RACISMO%202010.pdf.

6 Spain's relative success in stemming clandestine crossings from Morocco across the Strait of Gibraltar, through a combination of high-tech devices and cooperation with the Moroccan government, had caused a shift in departure points, this time towards the Canary Islands, from far-away countries such as Mauritania and Senegal. Spain signed bilateral agreements for cooperation on matters of migration with Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Mali, and Niger, and memoranda of understanding with Senegal, Mauritania, and Nigeria. Spain also opened new embassies in six of these countries. Compensation included work visas, vocational training programs, equipment, and training for the control of migration flows, as well as foreign aid. See Gobierno de España, *Plan Africa 2009-2012* (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, 2009), www.maec.es/es/Home/Documents/PLANAFRICA09_12EN.pdf.



Overall, the immigration boom experienced during the 2000s was not accompanied by a surge in public concern, and the migration issue in Spain has not been politicized to any significant degree. There are no populist, xenophobic, right-wing parties that take anti-immigrant positions at the national or regional level, with the exception of a very small party, *Plataforma per Catalunya* (Platform for Catalonia), that made some strides in a few municipalities in the 2011 local elections in Catalonia.⁷ Overall, pro-immigrant, anti-racist groups have generally been more vocal and influential than xenophobic ones. In policy terms, Spain has remained immune to the restrictive drive that has prevailed in much of Europe in recent years.⁸

Immigration policies have tended to be open, and integration efforts sustained and comprehensive. Policy has been concerned not with the size of flows, but rather with opening or enlarging avenues for legal immigration. High rates of irregularity have been a chronic feature of the immigration landscape in Spain. The number of unauthorized immigrants began increasing rapidly in 2000, and despite efforts to curtail irregular migration, it had reached a sizeable proportion by 2004. The most reliable estimates for that year put the number at around 1 million people.⁹ Until then immigration policies had attempted to address irregular immigration through different admission schemes, several regularization processes, and efforts to improve control of who enters and stays in the country. The 2004-05 immigration policy reform, implemented shortly after a new center-left government took office in 2004 following eight years of center-right PP rule, clearly intended both to curtail irregularity and to make it easier for employers to hire foreign workers. Its cornerstone was a “shortage” list known as the “catalog of hard-to-fill occupations.”¹⁰ Companion reform measures included increased worksite inspections and harsher sanctions on employers for hiring unauthorized workers, the regularization of more than 570,000 unauthorized immigrants in 2005, and a greater emphasis on integration.¹¹ The 2005 regularization was the largest and most efficient of Spain’s previous extraordinary regularization programs (which occurred in 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2000-01).¹² The new policy increased the number of immigrants allowed to enter legally and contributed to lower the proportion of unauthorized immigrants. As of 2009, the unauthorized population had fallen to an estimated 300,000 to 390,000 people.¹³

7 In the local election held in May 2011, *Plataforma per Catalunya* received 65,905 votes (2.3 percent of the total of Catalonia) and obtained 67 council positions.

8 The exception to this is the period of 2000-04, a time when the government was headed by the center-right Partido Popular (PP), whose stance on immigration became more restrictive following its first term from 1996-2000. The nature of PP’s second term will be discussed later in the report.

9 Héctor Cebolla and Amparo González Ferrer, *La inmigración en España (2000-2007): Del control de flujos a la integración de los inmigrantes* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2008).

10 The catalog is a list of occupations for which there are usually few or no native or European Union (EU) workers available. Based on the information provided by the official employment offices, the catalog is published by the government every three months, after negotiation with trade unions and employers’ confederations. Foreign workers can be hired to fill vacant jobs within the listed occupations without going through the so-called labor-market test — that is, without employers needing to obtain certification that shows there are no native or EU candidates to occupy the position.

11 The legal instrument for the reform was a bill, a royal decree, which amended the immigration law known as 4/2000. All the elements of the new policy were contained in the new bill, except the decision to increase the number of worksite inspections, which was announced by the minister of labor.

12 Joaquín Arango and Maia Jachimowicz, “Regularizing Immigrants in Spain: A New Approach,” *Migration Information Source, Special Issue: The Unauthorized*, September 2005, www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=331. This regularization was harshly criticized by a few representatives of other European countries. Northern European countries in particular have tended to judge the Spanish stance toward immigration as too soft and have voiced irritation that Spain’s actions might have consequences for other EU Member States in the long-run in light of EU free-movement provisions.

13 Carmen González-Enríquez, *Update Report Spain: Estimate on Irregular Migration for Spain in 2009* (Hamburg: Hamburg Institute of International Economics, 2009), <http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/>.



The Spanish government has shown a strong commitment to immigrant integration, which has been a central component of immigration policy since the 1990s. A national integration plan was adopted by the central government in 1994, which, alongside a catalog of principles and good intentions, included the establishment in the same year of valuable instruments such as the Permanent Observatory for Immigration and the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants. The forum is a tripartite consultative body made up of representatives of major nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), immigrant associations, employers' federations, and trade unions; regional and municipal governments; and a number of national government ministries. Its voice must be heard before any bill on immigration or integration can be adopted by the government or sent to parliament. Similar bodies have been created in several regions. In 2007 the central government adopted a more ambitious triennial Plan for Citizenship and Integration (PECI), now in its second term. Integration plans also exist in regions and some cities. In addition, a national fund to support municipal integration efforts and foster coordination across all levels of government was established by the central government in 2007.

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Spanish integration policies have ranked high in all three editions of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX). Unlike other European states, Spain's integration policies have not been characterized by requirements to pass tests on language or civic knowledge. Since 2008, the conservative government in the Valencia region has promoted the idea that immigrants should be required to sign an integration contract, but this has not been implemented as it lacks the necessary legal basis.

In 2003 a bill by the then-conservative majority in parliament authorized the police to use information contained in the municipal registers to detect unauthorized immigrants, but this was met with widespread protest and there is no evidence that the plan was ever implemented. Indeed, appeals from authorities to identify and bring unauthorized immigrants to the police, common in other countries, would be unacceptable in Spain.

Furthermore, a legal reform passed in 2000 extended welfare benefits — health and education, and sometimes other social benefits, such as basic income for needy families — to unauthorized immigrants. The only requirement is that they be registered in the municipal population register, or *padrón municipal*. Registration, or *empadronamiento*, is mandatory for all residents in the municipality, regardless of their legal status. By registering, all immigrants receive a health card that entitles them to full health coverage and access to education for their children. Even unregistered immigrants who do not have a health card are treated in hospitals without being reported to the police. This exceptional feature of the Spanish system was seldom questioned. Only a few municipalities with conservative governments attempted to do so in 2008, but they soon withdrew their claims when the central government made clear that such exclusion was against the law.

Yet, this peculiar feature, seen by many as a cornerstone of the Spanish integration model, will soon disappear. A legislative decree adopted by the PP government in April 2012 amended the law, making the health card contingent as of September 2012 upon legal residence and affiliation in the social security program, thus limiting health care for irregular immigrants to minors below 18, pregnant women, or people in emergency situations. This announcement has sparked intense debate. Opponents claim that the decision is contrary to human rights, inefficient in terms of cost savings, dangerous on public health grounds, and possibly unconstitutional. The regional governments of Catalonia, Navarre, Andalusia, and the Basque Country announced their refusal to comply, as did a number of medical associations.

Civil society also plays a critical role in immigrant integration, and many civil-society organizations (CSOs) work in close partnership with local and regional governments (as well as the central government) to assist public powers in the integration process. The regions (*comunidades autónomas*) and municipalities assume the lion's share of responsibility for immigrant integration in Spain's semi-federal state — including health, education, housing, social services, and the promotion of cultural activities. The partnerships between subnational governments and NGOs constitute a very valuable asset in Spain's integration strategy.

B. Under the Spell of the Crisis

It was widely believed that Spain's general acceptance of immigrants would change when the long period of sustained economic growth finally came to an end, as happened in the summer of 2007. The construction sector was the first and hardest hit by the crisis, as Spain's building boom had been larger than those of Germany, France, and Italy combined. The burst of the construction bubble severely affected banks, which had borrowed heavily from abroad. A credit crunch followed, and with it came stagnation. Government spending to create jobs and foster activity increased the public debt; then budget cuts were implemented to keep the deficit from spiraling out of control. As the crisis deepened, many worried about the potential rise of xenophobic impulses and aggravated social tensions.

Circumstances for immigrants have indeed been dire, not due to social tensions but because of the way the crisis has impacted the job market and the construction sector in particular. In 2005, just before the peak of Spain's economic boom, about 36 percent of male immigrants were employed in the construction sector.¹⁴ These men, and some in manufacturing, were far more likely to have lost their job during the crisis than their female counterparts, predominantly employed in the services sector. Not that this industry has been spared: as a result of the credit crunch and the contraction of household consumption and public spending, the services industry — a sector that employed close to 60 percent of Spain's foreign-born population in 2005, and nearly 90 percent of female immigrants — has also shrunk.¹⁵ As a result of these changes, there has been an astronomical increase in immigrant unemployment, which averaged over 36 percent during the first quarter of 2012.¹⁶ Because it took time for the severity of the crisis to fully manifest itself, substantial immigrant flows persisted until the last part of 2008, thus aggravating unemployment. In 2009 a deceleration of incoming immigrant flows was clearly under way, pointing toward the stabilization of the size of the immigrant population that was noted in 2010. While more than the usual proportion of immigrants have returned home in the face of such high unemployment, there is no doubt that the majority have decided to stay.¹⁷

Interestingly, the crisis has not significantly altered social attitudes toward immigration, and immigration and integration policies have remained basically unchanged until now. This is all the more remarkable given that unemployment, while especially high among immigrants, has deeply affected native workers as well. As of June 2012, overall unemployment in Spain stood at 24.8 percent.¹⁸

14 See European Working Conditions Observatory, "Employment and Working Conditions of Migrant Workers — Spain," www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0701038s/es0701039q.htm.

15 Ibid.

16 Instituto Nacional de Estadística, "Encuesta de Población Activa, primer trimestre 2012" (notas de prensa, April 27, 2012), www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco4211/epa0112.pdf.

17 See Instituto Nacional de Estadística, "Padrón Continuo" and "Estimaciones de la población actual" for data for various years before and during the crisis. Since 2009 around 30,000 migrants have participated in the three programs for voluntary assisted return put forth by the Spanish government, www.ine.es/.

18 US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), *International Unemployment Rates and Employment Indexes, Seasonally Adjusted, 2008-2012*, Table 2 (Washington, DC: BLS, Division of International Labor Comparisons, 2012), www.bls.gov/fls/intl_unemployment_rates_monthly.pdf.



Five years after the start of the crisis, the rather liberal admission policies adopted at the end of 2004 remain in force. The marked decline in the number of immigrants admitted yearly for employment purposes since 2009 is not explained by more restrictive admission criteria but rather by the self-adjusting nature of admission mechanisms in a context of shrinking demand. The plan for voluntary return put in place by the government in 2008 (*Plan de retorno voluntario*) was criticized by observers who interpreted it as a sign of change in policy, but it could also be seen as a step forward in the portability of social rights, as it offered unemployed immigrants the possibility of receiving 40 percent of their accumulated unemployment benefits when leaving Spain and the remaining 60 percent within a month of their return home. More significantly, the immigration bill passed by Congress in 2009 at the government's behest did not imply any significant change in the orientation of immigration policy. Its main aim was to bring immigration legislation in line with some rulings by the Constitutional Court and to introduce recent EU directives.¹⁹

Furthermore, the crisis has not eroded the strong commitment to integration that prevails in Spanish society. The strategic PECEI adopted in 2007 ran its course without setbacks, and its successor, PECEI II, approved in 2011, maintained its spirit and goals. Central government funding to support municipal and regional integration programs has not been immune to the drastic budget cuts required by fiscal consolidation, but survived at a reduced level until 2011. The budget for the General Directorate for the Integration of Immigrants totaled more than 300 million euros in 2009, of which 200 million euros was allocated to support municipal and regional programs. For 2011 the directorate's budget was 140 million euros, of which 70 million went toward municipal and regional programs.²⁰ No allocation for such support appears in the 2012 budget.²¹

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In addition to providing integration funding, in recent years the Spanish government has made efforts to extend voting rights to immigrants from countries outside the European Union. To make this possible, Spain had to appeal to foreign governments to sign bilateral diplomatic agreements, as a provision of the Spanish Constitution states that voting rights may be extended to non-EU foreign citizens only on the basis of reciprocity. At Spain's initiative, a number of such agreements were signed before local elections in May 2011, and others are being negotiated.

No major social disruptions have been reported since the onset of the crisis, and politicization of immigration has not significantly increased. According to surveys regularly conducted by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), public worry about immigration has remained roughly the same, while concern about unemployment and the economy has soared.²² In the years since the onset of the fiscal crisis, both tolerant and adverse attitudes toward immigrants have increased slightly, while ambivalent ones have tended to decline.²³ More significant changes took place between the mid-1990s and 2002, when a proportion of ambivalent attitudes turned adverse.

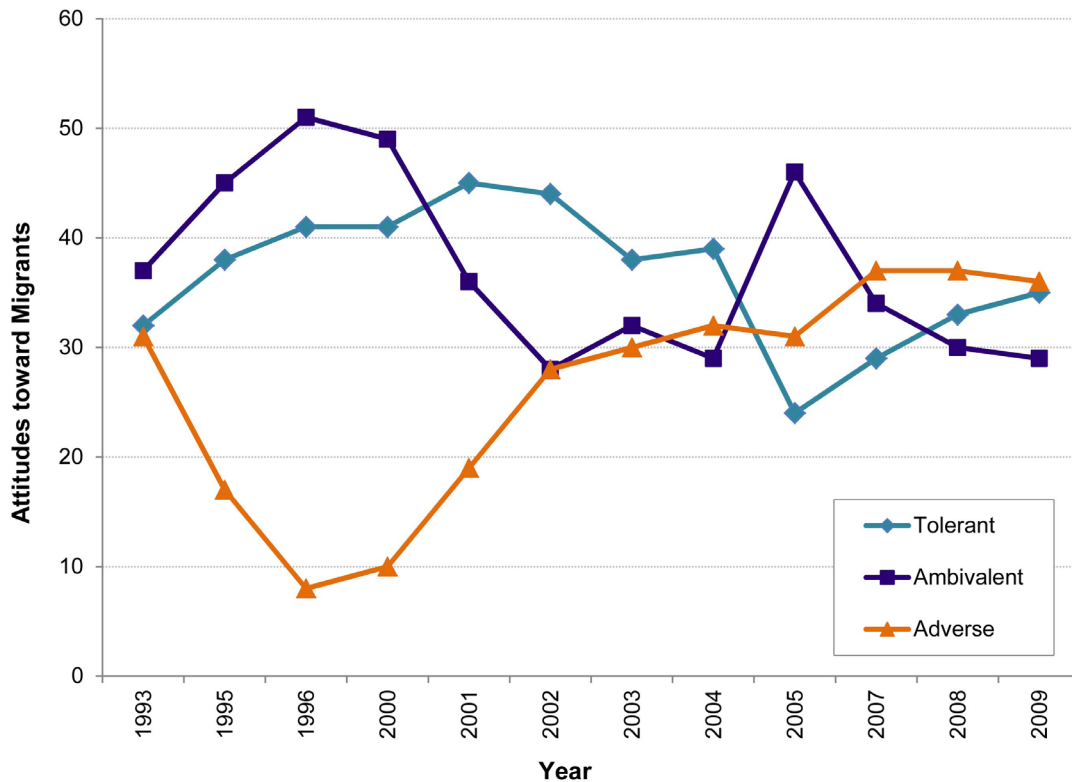
19 Directives 2001/51/EC of June 28, 2001; 2001/40/EC of May 28, 2001; and 2002/90/EC of November 28, 2002. See *Ley Orgánica 2/2009*, *Boletín Oficial del Estado* núm 299, December 12, 2009, www.boe.es/boe/dias/2009/12/12/index.php.

20 Ministry of Labor and Immigration, *General Budget 2011* (Madrid: Ministry of Labor and Integration, 2010).

21 Ministry of Employment and Social Security, *General Budget 2012* (Madrid: Ministry of Employment and Social Security, 2012).

22 The monthly public opinion surveys of the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) include a question about the three major problems facing Spain as perceived by respondents. In December 2011 immigration ranked fifth in popularity, with slightly over 7 percent of respondents mentioning it. The monthly average for 2011 was 10.8 percent, well below the averages in the years preceding the economic crisis. On a number of occasions immigration had ranked third, as during the 2006 *cayucos* crisis, when there was a surge in irregular migrants from sub-Saharan attempting to reach the Canary Islands by boat.

23 Cea d'Ancona and Valles, *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España*.

Figure 2. Attitudes Toward Migrants in Spain, 1993-2009

Source: Ángeles M. Cea d'Ancona and Miguel Valles, *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España [Informe 2010]* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010), www.oberaxe.es/files/datos/4e20230088dc8/INFORME%20RACISMO%202010.pdf.

On the other hand, qualitative surveys suggest that the reason cited by many citizens to justify immigration — that the labor market needs immigrant workers — may be losing ground due to the high levels of joblessness.²⁴ This may explain the decline in the proportion of citizens harboring ambivalent attitudes toward immigration and suggest why some of them may have turned adverse.

²⁴ See Sebastian Rinken, "La evolución de las actitudes ante la inmigración en tiempos de crisis económica: un análisis cualitativo," in *Inmigración y crisis económica: Impactos actuales y perspectivas de futuro*, eds. Eliseo Aja, Joaquín Arango, and Josep Oliver Alonso (Barcelona: Cidob Edicions, 2010).



C. The Case of Catalonia

While there has not been significant backlash at the national level, the regional story is a bit different. Catalonia's populist, openly xenophobic party, *Plataforma per Catalunya*, has had only meager electoral success, but support for it is increasing. It received more than 75,000 votes in the 2010 Catalan regional elections, or about 2.4 percent of all votes cast — not enough to enter the regional parliament.²⁵ Concern about immigration has also fueled the success of a conservative PP candidate who ran for mayor in 2011 on an anti-immigrant, xenophobic platform in Badalona, a sizeable city near Barcelona. In May 2012, a tough immigration platform authored by this same mayor was approved by overwhelming majority at the regional conference of the Catalan branch of the Popular Party.

In the case of Catalonia, the crisis may have exacerbated anti-immigrant sentiments that were previously latent. Immigrants and natives have always competed for scarce social resources in disadvantaged neighborhoods, but the economic crisis has led to greater grievances. Beyond the emergence of the *Plataforma per Catalunya*, the Catalan branch of the *Partido Popular* has been more daring in its critique of immigration. At the same time, a number of local governments, with the cooperation of NGOs, have launched initiatives to improve public perception of immigrants, including a program in Barcelona to counter popular rumors that may tarnish the image of immigrants or generate negative attitudes toward them.

While there has not been significant backlash at the national level, the regional story is a bit different.

III. Searching for an Explanation: Some Possible Clues

What explains the overall lack of negative reaction to immigration in Spain? Why have policies tended to favor immigration more than those in most surrounding countries? Why has there not been a strong rejection of diversity or multiculturalism? What factors have made Spain different from most of the rest of Europe in this regard? Answers to these questions do not come easily and cannot be found in the existing literature. Spain's exceptionalism is probably not the result of a single factor but rather of a handful of contextual dynamics, from the recent legacy of immigration to Spanish political history and culture.

A. Immigrant Demographics and Labor Force Participation

Demographics are central to understanding Spain's stance toward immigration. Contemporary immigrant flows to Spain date back to around 1980 and did not reach sizeable proportions until the turn of the century; the majority of immigrants arrived in recent years. As a result, young adults of prime working age are preponderant. At the beginning of 2012, 55.9 percent of immigrants were in the 20-44 age group compared with 34.7 percent of the general population. As a result, the labor-force participation rates of immigrants are higher than those of the rest of the population.²⁶ Compared to natives, these young

²⁵ For election results, see Generalitat de Catalunya, "Resultats Definitius," 2010, www.gencat.cat/governacio/elections/elections2010/resultats2010/09AU/DAU09999CM_L2.htm.

²⁶ Immigrant labor force participation rates in the third quarter of 2010 were approximately 8 percent higher than those among natives, for both men and women (87.7 percent for male immigrants compared to 79.5 percent for native men, and 77.8 percent compared to 69.6 percent for women). In the years before the crisis the differences were larger. See OECD, "Key

working immigrants also have more geographic mobility, consume fewer public services (especially in the areas of health, pensions, and welfare benefits), and contribute significantly to the growth of gross domestic product (GDP). A second generation is in the making, but it is not yet as large as in more mature receiving countries.²⁷ It remains to be seen how the Spanish populace will respond as immigrants fall into more established patterns of settlement and achieve more social visibility.

Immigration to Spain is, above all, for the sake of jobs. Most immigrants have come in search of employment or to accompany relatives who are migrant workers; and filling vacancies in the labor market has been the government's foremost justification for admitting immigrants. Asylum seekers and refugees have represented a very minor percentage of immigrant flows.²⁸ This implies that most immigrants are economically active, and are therefore perceived as necessary, productive, even beneficial. The belief that immigrants in Spain have made a highly positive contribution to economic growth has been supported by a number of studies and has been held by the majority of the Spanish populace, at least until the start of the recession.²⁹ Since then, high unemployment rates may be reducing immigrants' positive contributions in aggregate terms, and are certainly eroding, though not erasing, the belief that the labor market needs immigrants and that they take jobs that Spaniards disdain.³⁰

B. Political Culture

Turning to the social and political context, a decisive factor behind the calm reception of large-scale immigration to Spain has been the predominantly pro-immigrant orientation of public powers and political actors across all levels of government and society (with some differences among them). Beyond economics and the obvious, mutual influence of social perceptions and institutional attitudes, why are Spain's public powers generally pro-immigrant? The answer lies in the elusive territory of culture, and more precisely of political culture. The contemporary political culture of Spain was refashioned in the transition years between the end of the Franco dictatorship and the full recovery of democracy in the 1970s. During this climactic time, as they became more attuned than before to political developments, the majority of Spanish citizens underwent a process of political resocialization that left an enduring mark upon the political culture. The values associated with democracy were idealized, while those associated with dictatorship fell into disrepute. As a result, democratic, egalitarian, and universalistic values became the paradigm of social desirability.

The core of this revitalized political culture formed the basis for attitudes toward immigration — a social phenomenon that came about just as the elevation of democratic values was predominant. Indeed it can be reckoned that, by its very nature, immigration provides a privileged field for the expression and exercise of equality, solidarity, and cosmopolitanism. The fact that for years the number of immigrants remained small — not surpassing the 1 million mark until the end of the 1990s — and that their impacts were perceived as positive facilitated the favorable attitudes observed into the 21st century. The passage of time and a changing reality have somehow weakened popular support for immigration, but the thrust of the political culture still remains strong at a normative level.

Statistics on Migration in OECD Countries: Labor Market Outcomes of Immigrants 2008-2010.”

27 Youth under 20 years of age in 2010 represented 19.9 percent of the foreign population, a proportion similar to the rate for the total population of Spain (19.6 percent), a rapidly aging population in which the weight of the youngest age groups has been shrinking since the 1980s. While 19 percent of Spain's general population is 65 or older, the corresponding proportion among immigrants is only 12.2 percent. One of five births in Spain is to mothers of foreign nationality.

28 In 2010 the number of asylum requests amounted only to 2,744. In the preceding decade that number oscillated between 3,000 and 9,000 per year; OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2011*.

29 See Fundación Ideas, *La contribución de la inmigración a la economía española. Evidencias y perspectivas de futuro* (Madrid: Fundación Ideas, 2011), www.fundacionideas.es/sites/default/files/pdf/1-La_contribucion_de_la_inmigracion-Ec_0.pdf; Mario Izquierdo, Juan F. Jimeno, and Juan A. Rojas, “On the Aggregate Effects of Immigration in Spain” (Documentos de Trabajo 0714, Banco de España, 2007), www.bde.es/webbde/SES/Secciones/Publicaciones/PublicacionesSeriasadas/DocumentosTrabajo/07/Fic/dt0714e.pdf.

30 Rinken, “La evolución de las actitudes ante la inmigración en tiempos de crisis económica.”



Needless to say, all of this does not imply that immigration has no opposition. As anywhere else, immigrants have friends and foes. Indeed, according to several surveys, a slim majority of the populace now perceives too many immigrants on Spanish soil.³¹ That said, opposition toward immigration is more understated in Spain than perhaps anywhere else on the continent. This is due to three factors: (1) the expression and manifestation of anti-immigrant attitudes are restrained by cultural norms; (2) groups favorable to immigration are large and active, and vocal against any statement or practice that can be seen as racist or xenophobic or simply hostile to immigrants; and (3) there is a widespread consensus that immigrants are entitled to the same endowment of rights as the other members of society.

The wide acceptance of the extension of *empadronamiento* to “illegal” immigrants — an adjective often contested in Spain, where the alternative *irregular* is preferred — and its implications in terms of rights is one example of the ongoing influence of egalitarian values. In fact, as a recent analysis of surveys puts it, Spaniards tend to favor expanding the rights and benefits granted to immigrants: “[T]he majority of respondents support offering the maximum number of welfare benefits (health and education) and social and political rights (e.g., voting in elections, right to practice their religion, etc.) to immigrants.”³² Obviously, the decision by the PP government in April 2012 to withdraw health care benefits for most irregular immigrants marks a departure from the consensus that existed until then.

The reaction to the Madrid terrorist bombings of March 2004, which left nearly 200 dead and almost 2,000 injured, is a striking example of how predominantly favorable attitudes toward immigration have been maintained. The fact that such a tragedy, carried out by mostly Moroccan Islamist militants, did not result in a drive toward the securitization of immigration policy, as seen in the United States and at the EU level, attests to the influence of the political culture. Polls conducted in the aftermath suggest that the majority of Spaniards did not blame immigrants for the terrorist act. Fewer than one in four expressed “little sympathy” for Moroccan immigrants — a figure similar to that for Romanians, another group that scores relatively low on the sympathy scale but that had nothing to do with the attack.³³

Although the political culture described above influences all political actors, differences among these actors are far from negligible. Especially relevant are the differences in orientation between the two major political parties, the center-left PSOE (Socialist Party) and the center-right PP. The former has been responsible for the openly pro-immigrant stance that has characterized Spanish immigration and integration policies, especially during the party’s years in government (1982-96 and 2004-11). The PP was in government between 1996 and 2004, and started a new four-year term at the end of 2011. During its first four-year term, its policies followed along the same lines as the PSOE administration before it. However, the PP turned toward more restrictive policies during its second term from 2000-04, when the number of immigrants, including those in irregular condition, started to increase rapidly. Admission channels for labor migration were made narrower, despite increased demand from employers, and the “fight against illegal migration” became the foremost policy priority. Since 2004, the PP has criticized the immigration policies of the PSOE government, above all by blaming the rapid increase in the number of immigrants on the 2005 regularization, despite the fact that the PP government had legalized some 468,000 unauthorized immigrants in three regularization processes carried out in 2000-01. In the 2008 general election, the PP announced that it would require immigrants to sign an integration contract very similar to the one advocated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. A similar integration contract was proposed by the PP to the Parliament of Catalonia in the lead-up to the November 2011 general election. The approval of such a contract on the regional or national level — neither of which seemed likely at the time — would have implied that immigrants would be contracted to learn the official language (two, in the case of Catalonia), respect Spain’s customs and habits, and return home if they are unemployed for a long period. No similar proposal had been put forth by the new Spanish government as of May 2012.

31 See Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), *Barómetros de Opinión* (various dates), www.cis.es/cis/openm/ES/11_barometros/index.jsp.

32 Ferran Martínez i Coma and Robert Duval-Hernández, “Hostility toward Immigration in Spain” (discussion paper No. 4109, IZA, April 2009): 29, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp4109.pdf>.

33 Ibid, 20.

C. *National Identity*

Finally, concerns over national identity seem less relevant for attitudes towards immigration in Spain than in other countries, at least until now. With the partial exception of Catalonia, where prominent political leaders have sometimes voiced such concern, immigration is not perceived as a threat to national identity. Identifying the underlying reasons is, again, far from easy. It is likely that immigrants' relatively recent arrival and lack of visibility play a role.

It could also be surmised that Spanish nationalism is, in itself, under question. Spain's recent history — from the loss of the empire to the restoration of democracy — is judged by many as far from brilliant, both in economic and political terms. Meanwhile, the Spanish state faces vigorous calls for a higher degree of self-government — even independence — from nationalist movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country. The widespread perception in the final years of the Franco dictatorship that these claims had been forcibly repressed lent mass support to demands for devolution, decentralization, and their practical implementation in Spain as a whole. All of this may have prevented the rise of a militant national identity that could otherwise feel threatened by immigration. In recent years, however, the support for decentralization and regional self-government has cooled as conservative segments of the polity react against the claims of Basque and, especially, Catalan nationalists.

IV. *Conclusions*

A. *Looking Forward*

Is Spain's relative egalitarianism likely to persist into the foreseeable future, or will attitudes and policies toward immigration and integration increasingly mirror those that prevail across much of Europe? While arguments can be found for both, the second option appears most likely.

Is Spain's relative egalitarianism likely to persist into the foreseeable future, or will attitudes and policies toward immigration and integration increasingly mirror those that prevail across much of Europe?

To start, the job market looks to be getting worse. Signs indicate that the prolonged economic crisis and high unemployment rates will extend for years. Meanwhile, immigrants' visibility will increase with time, as a large second generation comes of age and the population becomes multigenerational. This evolution is bound to result in a different perception and a less-favorable evaluation of the impacts of immigration.

As for the likely influence of political and cultural factors, the picture is less clear. The political orientation of the central government shifted in 2011. With the popularity of the incumbent PSOE government eroded by both the social impacts of the economic crisis and the fiscal austerity measures used to contain them, the conservative PP won a majority of regional and municipal elections in May. Then, in the general election on November 20, 2011, the PP won a landslide victory at the central level.



Although the PP's electoral platform did not say much about immigration, significant changes can be expected. Party members have called for tests of "Spanishness" to acquire citizenship, and have promoted the idea of "circular migration," meaning that immigrants are welcome when the economy requires their labor but should leave when this need is absent. Other legal changes have been announced, including the suppression of the figure of *arraigo* or *rootedness*, i.e. the possibility of applying for individual legalization after three years of irregular stay in the country provided that certain conditions are met. As of May 2012, no policy changes had taken place, with the exception of the announced withdrawal of health care rights to the majority of irregular migrants. This, together with the fact that the new government has downgraded the institutional locus of immigration within the government structure, may point towards a different orientation and a new, less prominent stance for immigration and integration. The rank of the highest officer responsible for immigration and integration has ceased to be that of a junior minister, devolving instead to general secretary, and the three general directorates that were responsible for managing immigration and integration have been reduced to just one. The former Ministry of Labor and Immigration has seen its name changed to the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. Beyond the symbolic message these changes convey, there are implications for intragovernmental cooperation on the topic of immigration, especially as far as the usually delicate balance with the Interior Ministry is concerned. It also implies that the only Spanish voice in the EU councils on immigration will be that of the Interior Ministry, whose focus is more on national security and policing than integration. All in all, it can be expected that with the PP at the helm, Spain's immigration policies will fall more in line with the dominant paradigm in Europe.

Yet if restrictionist policies come to the fore, it is likely they will meet resistance from both political opposition parties and civil-society groups.

Yet if restrictionist policies come to the fore, it is likely they will meet resistance from both political opposition parties and civil-society groups. This resistance is likely to limit the policy changes that a conservative government might want to promote. A certain balance between the new spirit and the preceding orientation might be the end result. But all this is, of course, sheer speculation.

B. Recommendations

Economic growth is expected to be sluggish, a fact that will not facilitate the re-absorption of the large numbers of immigrants left jobless by the economic crisis. The likely persistence of high unemployment overall will impair the job opportunities of immigrant youth, especially the less skilled. Meanwhile, financial cuts to lower the fiscal deficit are bound to seriously curtail social benefits and welfare provisions. This in turn may intensify the competition between immigrants and disfavored segments of the receiving society for scarce social resources, aggravating animosity and grievances.

In such a context, government action at the federal, regional, and local levels, in close cooperation with CSOs, will be necessary to maintain immigrant integration efforts and prevent the deterioration of general attitudes toward immigrants. If anything, the decided commitment that a host of institutions has shown to maintain integration efforts — from the federal to the local level — must be maintained or reinforced. The maintenance of the plethora of programs and policies that currently exist will aid in preventing and managing social tensions and conflicts that may occur. Unfortunately, fiscal austerity will not allow for the desirable expansion of public expenditure in important areas such as vocational training and proactive job training programs to aid immigrant access to employment. Ideally, and despite



the hardships imposed by the adverse economic environment, these areas should be made a high priority, or at least protected from financial cuts.

The tremendous difficulties that public administrations are likely to face in funding integration programs and policies might be balanced by renewed focus on those policies and programs that do not require heavy expenditure. This includes programs that foster social communication, the acceptance of diversity in the receiving society, civic participation, and the interaction of people of different origins. In the same vein, the new government should push the parliamentary approval of anti-discrimination legislation providing for equality of treatment and opposition to all forms of discrimination that the preceding government was about to send to parliament in late 2011. Given the influence that politicians tend to have on the formation of societal attitudes, it would be highly desirable that the new government be perceived as no less favorable to immigrant integration than the previous administration was.



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About the Author



Joaquín Arango is Professor of Sociology at the Complutense University of Madrid and Director of the Center for the Study of Migration and Citizenship at the Ortega y Gasset Research Institute. Until May 2012, he was President of Spain's National Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants.

He is Co-Editor of the *Spanish Immigration and Immigration Policies Yearbook* and serves on the editorial boards of several scientific journals and a number of advisory committees. He is presently involved in European research projects dealing with irregular migration, the impact of admission policies on immigrant integration, attitudes towards immigration and diversity, and domestic migrant workers. He has worked as an expert for the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labor Organization, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Eurostat, and other international institutions.

Trained as a demographer and economic historian at the University of California, Berkeley, and as a sociologist at the Complutense University, his scientific interests also include migration theories, migration systems and migration regimes, immigration and integration policies, labor migration, and the impacts of the economic crisis.

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1400 16th Street NW
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Tel: 001 202-266-1940
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