



## Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself? Spanish Case Study

- New research from Real Instituto Elcano (Spain), as part of a Demos (UK) cross-European project, reveals how and why Spain stands as an outlier in its positive attitudes towards the EU, globalisation and diversity, relative to other European nations
- Despite recent economic difficulties and emergent concerns about immigration levels, right-wing populist parties have been unable to harness nationalistic images to achieve the electoral success they have experienced in other parts of Europe
- The study shows that a complex mix of cultural, historical, economic and social characteristics have so far failed to give rise to widespread authoritarian support
- However, it does show that concerns about immigration are increasing, with 77% of citizens believing migration levels to Spain are too high, and 41% saying they would be likely to vote for a party standing on an anti-immigration platform

New research conducted by Real Instituto Elcano (Spain) for a cross-European project on fear and populism in Europe led by Demos (UK), shows a remarkably open and positive view amongst Spanish citizens towards the European Union and increased global interconnectedness.

Despite economic difficulties, including recent economic crisis, high levels of inequality and a dramatic rise in unemployment, the study reveals only 10% Spanish citizens want to leave the European Union, and a significant minority (35%) would like to see greater European integration.

In contrast to the other countries studied, where older demographics tend to express greater Euroscepticism, in Spain positive views towards the EU are particularly strong among the oldest generation, of whom 41% want to see an increase in the EU's powers or the formation of a single European state.

The research indicates this distinction may be rooted in Spain's unique past experience with nationalism under the Franco regime, whose use of national symbols and strong references to national identity are more likely to be recalled by the older generations. In the author's words: "An authoritarian, rightist and nationalist recent past acts as a vaccination against extreme right parties in the present. Spain and Portugal shared a similar experience of four decades of nationalist, Catholic, and corporatist authoritarianism, and both countries have until now been immune to this wave of right-wing populist parties, despite the grave economic and political crisis they have suffered"

Spain also demonstrates an overwhelmingly positive view of globalisation, with a significant majority feeling a more interconnected world has had a positive effect on Europe (75%), Spain as a whole (63%), their local area (60%), and their personal situation (64%).

Despite these pro-European and global attitudes, the study does emphasise that the country is experiencing a hardening of attitudes towards immigration - which have stayed relatively positive throughout years of economic decline. It shows that 74% of citizens now believe that current levels of

migration into Spain are too high, and 77% believe that Spanish workers should be privileged in the labour market - suggesting there is a market-based dimension to emergent fears about immigration.

Furthermore, while no right-wing populist party standing on an anti-immigration platform has received electoral success in recent decades, this original research suggests there would potentially be an appetite for such a party in Spain - with 41% of citizens indicating they would vote for this manifesto themselves, and 61% believing they would perform well in an election.

Nonetheless, the authors of the study reinforce that citizens' concerns about immigration are significantly higher when prompted than when asked to list the most pressing concerns the country faces as an open question. Rather, it appears that political dissatisfaction, concerns about the economy and state corruption are greater overall priorities for Spaniards - who have channelled their dissatisfaction and distrust of the political system through Left-wing populism, such as the Podemos Party, and have dismissed the right-wing anti-immigration parties.

As the report's author highlights "In a climate of widespread distrust of traditional political parties, any new party could benefit from anti-establishment sentiments. But a single-issue party devoted to reducing immigration would almost inevitably have to appeal to nationalist feelings, as the refusal to accept immigrants can only be argued on the basis of their 'otherness'. Such a discourse would face widespread mistrust because Spanish nationalism has not recovered from being overused during Francoism, while centrifugal territorial tensions have furthered eroded it"

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#### **Notes to Editors**

Demos is Britain's leading cross-party think tank: an independent, educational charity, which produces original and innovative research. Visit: [demos.co.uk](http://demos.co.uk)

The Real Instituto Elcano is a think tank of international and strategic studies, analysing the world from a Spanish, European and global perspective. Visit: [realinstitutoelcano.org](http://realinstitutoelcano.org)

This project was supported by the Open Societies Foundation.

The full research, methodology and an executive summary are available to download [here](#).

This study was part of a major pan-European research project from the UK-based think tank, Demos, which sought to capture how an emerging culture and politics of fear is gripping the European Union as a whole, and its unique manifestations within member states. The project addressed five levels of impacts: party politics, public policy, social cohesion and integration, media rhetoric, citizens and identity.

Demos undertook extensive pan-European research, as well as conducting specific analysis on the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union, and commissioned exclusive new academic research within five other member states to provide a snapshot of the 'flash-points of fear' on the ground in Germany, France, Spain, Poland and Sweden.

The project was supported by two high-level workshops in Brussels, bringing together thought leaders from across the European Union, to map local level impacts and devise solutions at EU, national and grassroots levels.