

Spain



Facts & Figures

Population

47.2m

Political system

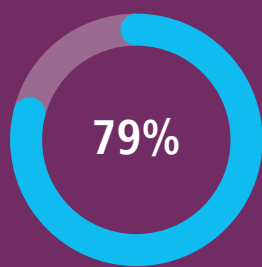
**Unitary
parliamentary
constitutional
monarchy**

Varieties of Democracy
regime type

**Liberal
democracy**

Varieties of Democracy
Liberal Democracy Index
ranking (2021)

18



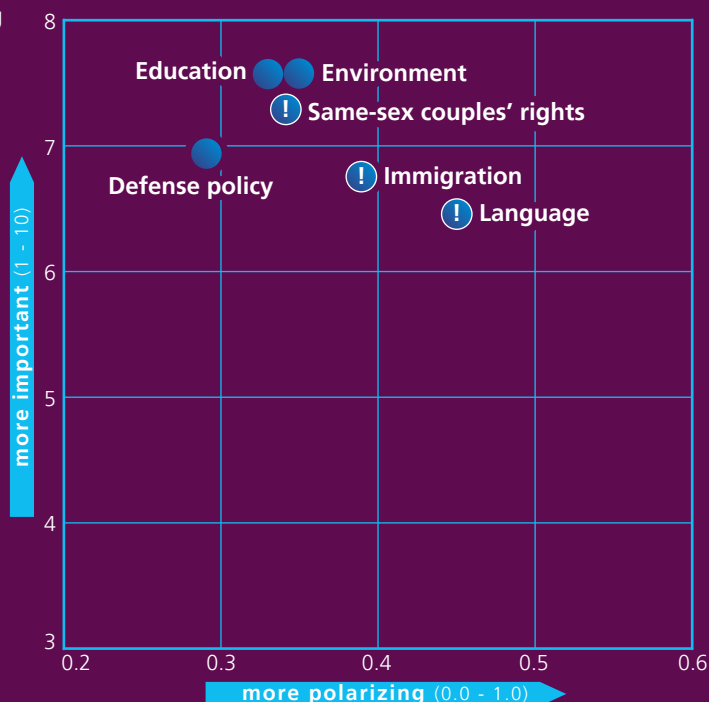
Democratic competence of Spanish respondents

Percentage of respondents who on average rate the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items in our survey

Which issues let politicians get away with undemocratic behavior?

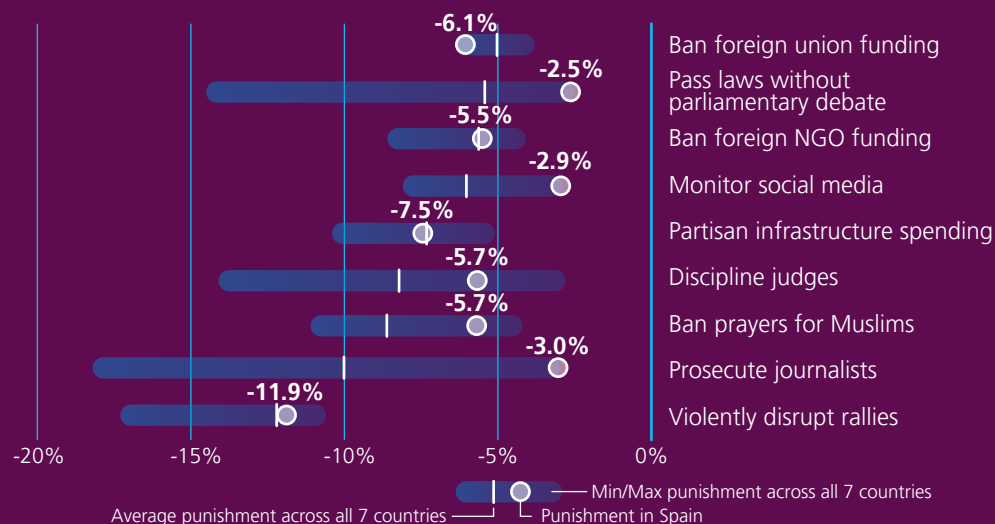
Issues displayed according to their importance to voters and degree of polarization

! Issues for which voters forgive undemocratic behavior



How much are key elements of liberal democracy valued?

The higher the vote loss for an undemocratic policy proposed by a political candidate, the more a certain democratic element is valued.



Spanish parties presented in the survey



English name	Spanish Socialist Workers Party	United We Can	People's Party	Vox	Citizens	Republican Left of Catalonia–Catalonia Yes
Spanish name	<i>Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)</i>	<i>Unidas Podemos (UP)</i>	<i>Partido Popular (PP)</i>	Vox	<i>Ciudadanos (CS)</i>	<i>Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya–Catalunya Sí (ERC–CatSí)</i>
European affiliation	S&D	GUE/NGL	EPP	ECR	ALDE	Greens/EFA
Currently governing						

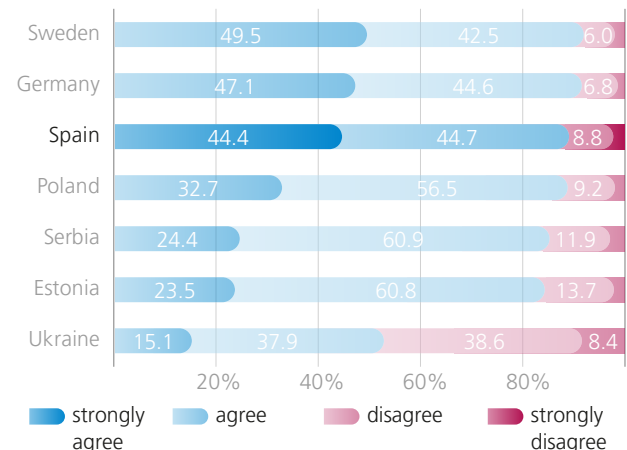
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY

Spanish respondents have a good understanding of what democracy is and what it is not. They are strongly pro-democracy oriented as well, however, slightly less so than the respondents in the two other Western European countries in our survey, Germany and Sweden. Spanish people also notably expect more from democracy than it is currently delivering.

Democratic competence²⁹ of Spanish citizens is at 79%. For the Spaniards, it is important to live in a country that is governed democratically (mean score 8.4) and to have a democratic political system (90% of them find it either “very good” or “fairly good”). Moreover, 89% of them either “strongly agree” or “agree” that democracy is better than any other form of government. In line with these outcomes, the features of an authoritarian system – such as “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections” and “having the army rule” – are unpopular among Spanish respondents. More than three-quarters (76.5%) of them rank the former situation either “very bad” or “fairly bad”, while 83.5% hold the same opinion about the latter. With its past experience with military dictatorship being more recent than in Germany, Spanish people might have more awareness of the danger that it poses to democracy. Thus, the statement “The military removed a corrupt president” receives on average the lowest rating just behind Sweden,³⁰ but still 24.8% of Spaniards find the statement rather or completely democratic.³¹ Spain also stands out for giving the lowest democratic rating of all countries to the possibility that “the high court rules a government’s policy as unconstitutional.” Yet, the Spaniards find it comparatively undemocratic (significantly more so than Germans for instance)³² if the “country’s judiciary were staffed with individuals loyal to

“How strongly do you agree that democracy is better than any other form of government?”

All figures in %



Due to rounding, totals may not correspond with the sum of the separate figures.

the governing party.”

When it comes to their democracy’s performance, however, the expectations of the Spaniards seem not to be fully fulfilled: With comparatively low mean scores for both the assessment of “how democratically the country is being governed” (5.6) and the respondent’s satisfaction with “how democracy works” (4.9), the Spaniards suggest that there is much room for improvement. The dissatisfaction also manifests itself in the fact that two thirds of all Spanish respondents (the highest number after Serbia among all seven countries under investigation) finds it “fairly good” or “very good” if experts, not the government, make decisions for the country.

²⁹ If we define a “democratically competent” respondent as someone who, on average, rates the four democratic items as more democratic than the ten undemocratic items present in the survey.

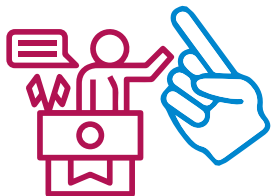
³⁰ On a scale from 1 (not at all democratic) to 10 (completely democratic), the mean score is only 4.4.

³¹ Rating it with an 8, 9 or 10 on a scale from 1 to 10.

³² Spain’s mean score on a 1 – 10 scale is 2.6 as opposed to Germany’s 3.1.

Language

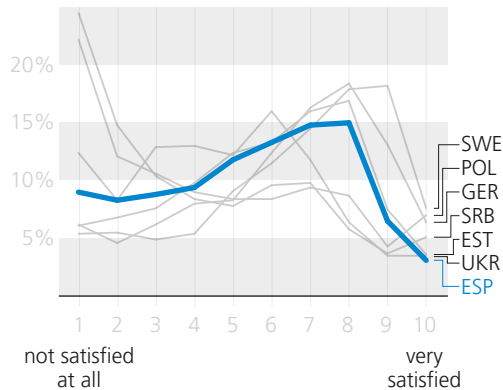
The highest degree of polarization in Spain concerns the right to use the Catalan language when communicating with state offices.



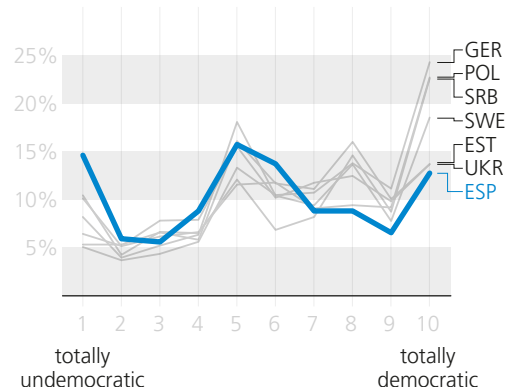
-5.9%
punishment rate

Spanish voters show the least willingness to punish undemocratic behavior of all voters in the countries under investigation.

"How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country?"



"How democratic do you find the practice of the country's high court ruling that a government policy was unconstitutional?"



WHAT KIND OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR DO SPANIARDS PUNISH?

Spanish voters showed the least willingness among the seven countries under investigation to punish undemocratic behavior. The average punishment is a loss of -5.9% of the overall vote share for the candidate who adopts an undemocratic position. The most punishing undemocratic positions are "violently disrupt opponent's rallies" with an -11% vote share loss and 'partisan infrastructure spending' with a -7.4% vote share

loss. On the other hand, Spaniards punish "passing laws without parliamentary debate" and "prosecuting journalists" the least, as the candidates advocating these undemocratic positions lose only -2.4% and -2.9% of the vote share respectively. Hence, in this aspect Spain differs from the remaining countries, as it is the only country in which attacking journalists is one of the least punishable undemocratic behaviors.

PARTY LOYALTY AND POLICY INTERESTS: WHICH ISSUES ARE

MORE IMPORTANT THAN UPHOLDING DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS?

Spanish voters forgive undemocratic behavior of a candidate when they are from their favorite party. They do the same when it comes to identity-based interests, but not for socio-economic interests. The results are particularly significant when it comes to partisan interests: The candidate who advocates undemocratic policies, but is from the respondent's favorite party, is not at all punished, but instead ends up being rewarded with a +21% vote share increase. This is the highest final rewarding rate among all seven countries under investigation. Favorite identity-based policies can compensate for undemocratic behavior as well: An undemocratic candidate who also represents a voter's

favorite policy on same-sex couples' rights, language or immigration can in the end count on a final reward of +8.4%, +5.4% and +3.1% respectively.

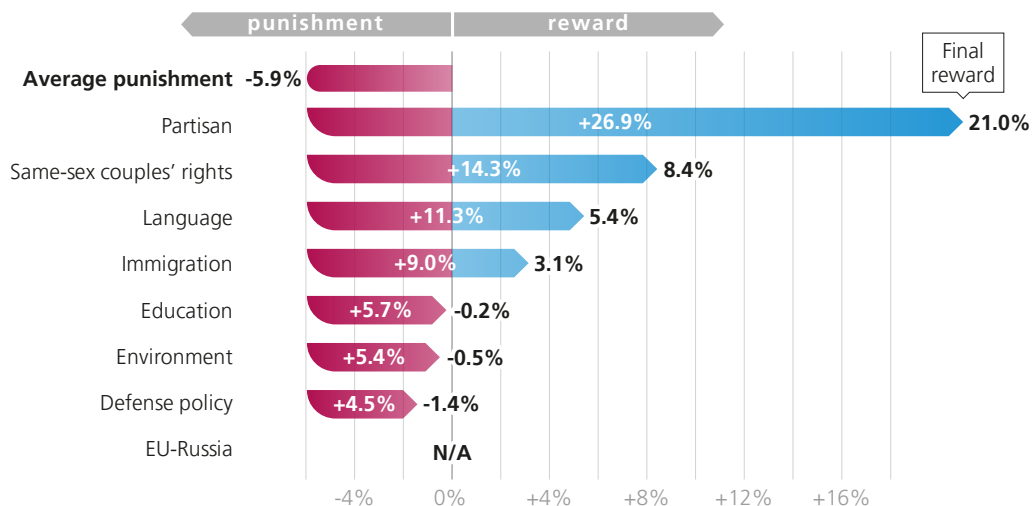
Contrary to partisan and identity-based interests, advocating for favorite socio-economic and defense policies does not bring a final electoral reward. In other words, an undemocratic candidate ends up being punished despite advocating for not only a favorite policy regarding education (-0.2% vote share loss) and the environment (-0.5% vote share loss), but a favorite defense policy as well (-1.4% vote share loss).

ARE SUPPORTERS OF A CERTAIN POLICY INTEREST³³ MORE FORGIVING OF UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THAN OTHERS?

If we divide respondents along a left-leaning/right-leaning axis, we can identify more nuanced findings about the willingness to punish undemocratic behavior. Concretely, when it comes to same-sex couples' rights, voters with a more progressive view show less attachment to democratic principles. Indeed, only those who would deny same-sex couples the right to marry and adopt children would not forgive a candidate their undemocratic behavior. They would in the end still punish that candidate with a -2.2% vote share loss, whereas left-leaning voters would forgive undemocratic behavior for their favorite policy on this issue, with a remarkable final +10% vote share increase. When it comes to immigration, we can see that centrist voters value democracy more than voters on the fringes. Although center-left and center-right voters still forgive undemocratic behavior for their favorite immigration policy, the final rewarding rates – +0.2% and +0.4% vote share increase respectively – are not

significant. Contrary to this, right-wing voters (+3.9% final vote share increase) and particularly left-wing voters (+6% final vote share increase) show a clear willingness to disregard democratic principles for their immigration-related interests. A stronger willingness of the left-leaning voters to forgive undemocratic conduct can also be observed with respect to a candidate's position on the language issue. Voters of candidates who advocate for the use of the Catalan language when communicating with state offices forgive undemocratic behavior for it. Such an undemocratic candidate ends up with a +13.2% vote share increase, which is 11.8% more than in the case of a candidate who advocates for the use of the Spanish language only.

Existence of trade-offs/compensation for undermining democracy



WHAT ROLE DOES POLARIZATION PLAY?

In Spain, the highest degree of polarization concerns the issue of language. As we have seen above, this is also an issue for which voters disregard undemocratic behavior. Hence, we can observe a correlation between an increased polarization and the willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior. The same holds true for the issue of immigration.

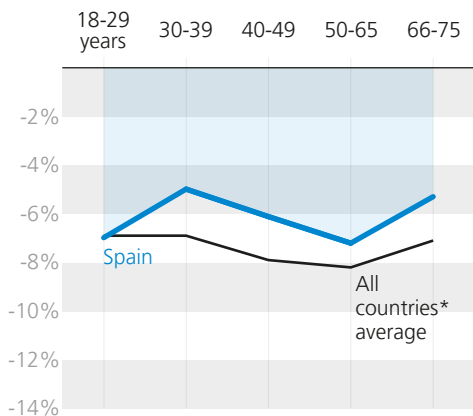
Contrary to these findings, the issue of same-sex couples' rights appears not to be a polarizing one, yet the Spaniards still tolerate undemocratic behavior for it.

³³ Please find an overview of all tested policy positions on pg. 13.

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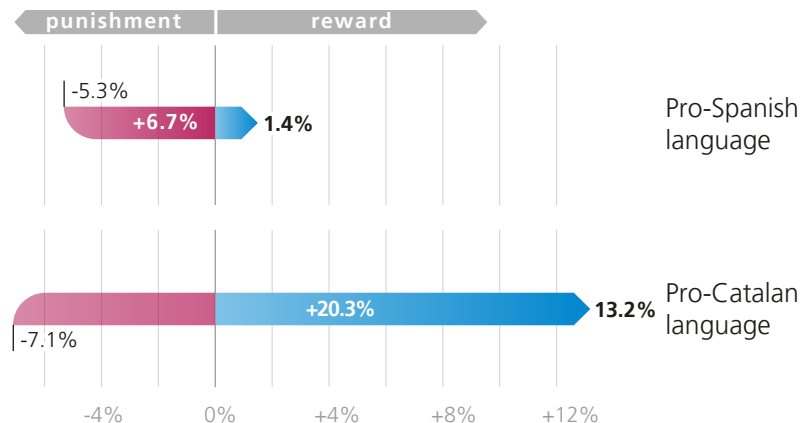
Two-thirds of all Spaniards find it 'fairly good' or 'very good' if 'experts, not the government, make decisions for the country.'

Average electoral punishment by respondents' age groups



*No data was collected for age group 66-75 in Serbia and Ukraine.

Language: shift in punishment when presented with favored policy



WHO ARE THE MAIN 'DEFENDERS OF DEMOCRACY'

IN SPAIN?

As in most of the other countries under investigation, women punish undemocratic behavior more than men. The same holds true for those who showed more interest in politics, those who are democratically competent, those who are less religious, those who are more trusting of other people and those who lack an authoritarian personality.

The youngest voter group (18-29 years of age) in Spain punishes undemocratic behavior slightly more than the country sample's average of the same age group. Spain's 50 to 65-year-olds punish about as much as the young and are almost on par with the average. All other age groups punish politicians who violate

democratic principles distinctly less than the sample's average.

When it comes to education, the more educated punish slightly more, but just like in Germany and Sweden, the level of education does not have a great effect on the degree of punishing undemocratic behavior, especially not when comparing the results for voters with a medium and high level of education. Looking at the occupation of voters, Spain stands out as all of the following groups punish undemocratic behavior equally: people working full-time or part-time, the retired, the unemployed and people taking care of their family. Only students punish distinctly more.

WHICH PARTY'S VOTERS PUNISH

UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR THE MOST?

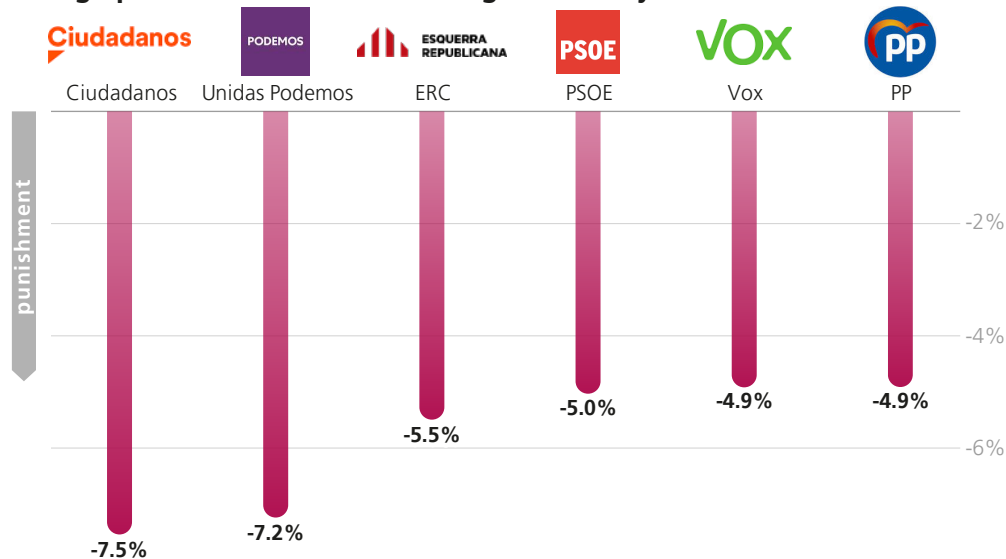
When it comes to party affiliation, voters of all Spanish parties showed a general willingness to punish undemocratic politicians. While one can observe variations, they can hardly be described as significant: The voters of

the conservative PP and the far-right Vox punish undemocratic behavior the least, as the average punishment rate among them is only -4.9% (vote share loss). An almost identical punishment rate also characterizes the

voters of the ruling social-democratic PSOE (-5%) and voters of Catalan ERC (-5.5%). Although they punish on average, the PSOE voters actually reward violations of some democratic principles such as prosecuting journalists with +10.7% and disciplining judges with a +11.2% vote share increase. Voters of the far-left Unidas Podemos and the liberal Ciudadanos show more willingness to punish undemocratic behavior as the vote

share loss is -7.2% and -7.5% respectively. However, the voters of Podemos also reward one violation of democratic principles – passing laws without parliamentary debate – with a +9.3% vote share increase. Interestingly, respondents who do not vote for either of these six parties punish the most, with an -8.6% punishment rate.

Average punishment for undermining democracy



Summary for Spain

A large majority of Spanish respondents value the various facets of democracy. However, they are quite critical of the democratic system, and especially of the way democracy functions in their own country. Compared with other countries, they regard protecting democracy from a strong leader and governing influence of the military as highly important. Even though Spaniards express their high regard for democratic standards and the rule of law in their responses to the direct questions, in our experiment, they show a lower willingness than respondents in all other countries to actually punish undemocratic behavior at the ballot box. They are most likely to defend electoral fairness.

As in all other countries under investigation, party loyalty is the most important determinant of voting behavior. Spaniards completely forgive a candidate their undemocratic behavior if they are from their favorite party. Moreover, party loyalty is strongest in Spain when contrasting it to all other countries under investigation. Group loyalty and identity issues play the second most important role when it comes to voting decisions in Spain. These include issues such as rights for same-sex couples, language, as well as immigration, which are prioritized at the ballot box over rejecting undemocratic positions.

Polarization plays a role as well, as the willingness to forgive undemocratic behavior for particular interests mostly, but not always, correlates with the degree of polarization for these issues. Albeit not being a polarizing issue, the fact that the Spaniards rate an extension of rights for same-sex couples as very important could be one of the reasons for a high tolerance of undemocratic behavior in relation to this issue.