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## Policies and public opinion towards immigrants: the Spanish case

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► **To cite this version:**

Ricard Zapata. Policies and public opinion towards immigrants: the Spanish case. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2009, 32 (7), pp.1101-1120. 10.1080/01419870802302280 . hal-00516219

**HAL Id: hal-00516219**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00516219>**

Submitted on 9 Sep 2010

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**Policies and public opinion towards immigrants: the Spanish case**

Journal:	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Manuscript ID:	RERS-2008-0027.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	public opinion, Spain, Governance, ambivalence, policies, negative perception



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3 *Policies and public opinion towards immigration: the Spanish case\**  
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11 **Abstract:**

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13 By tackling negative opinions towards immigration we can create a basis to orientate  
14 policies that seek to reduce them. My purpose is to highlight that the analysis of  
15 immigration in Spain exemplifies a clear link between policies and public opinion. It is  
16 this link that is at the basis of what I will call the ambivalence of Spanish public opinion,  
17 when border and integration issues are compared.  
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24 **Keywords:** Public opinion, Spain, immigration policies, governance, negative  
25 perception, citizen's attitude  
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32 **0. Introduction**

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35 Immigration is a subject that gives rise to controversial debate, generates  
36 administrative ambivalence, fragments and polarises society, and constantly places the  
37 capacity of governance in doubt. We must assume the inevitable existence of negative  
38 attitudes towards immigration as being a semi-permanent fact of the political culture in  
39 host countries. Practically all influential political surveys and reports highlight the  
40 negative perception generated by immigration.<sup>1</sup>  
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49 The purpose of this article is to highlight that the analysis of immigration in  
50 Spain exemplifies there is a clear link between policies and public opinion. It is this  
51 relationship, I will argue, that is at the basis of what I will call the ambivalence of  
52 Spanish public opinion, when border and integration issues are compared.  
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3 When dealing with a reflection on the link between public opinion and  
4 immigration we find ourselves under the premise that it is not so much the facts but the  
5 interpretations thereof that are of interest (Zapata-Barrero 2004a). In hermeneutic terms,  
6 immigration is an interpretable reality where perceptions determine attitudes and  
7 behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

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When considering the evaluations that citizens make on immigration-related matters, we unavoidably divide attitudes into positive/negative.<sup>3</sup> These attitudes have a practical component for those who translate data. It tells them if there is support for specific policies. Hence, attitudes towards immigration should not be interpreted only in the framework of the relationship between the citizen and the immigrant, but in a framework in which it is not so much the phenomenon of immigration that is evaluated but rather the government's policies. It is at this point that the ambivalence of Spanish public opinion towards immigrants becomes evident.

I shall expose this argument in three sections. Firstly, I will briefly review existing literature on negative public opinion, with special emphasis on the perceptions of immigration policies implemented (section 1). Then I will identify the categories that characterise most the negative opinion in Spain taking the government-run CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas) surveys as a main data source (section 2). I will end with a conclusion proposing further research to understand the ambivalence of public opinion through what I will suggest to call as the governance hypothesis (section 3).

## **1. The state of the question: Can public opinion on immigration be predicted?**

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Recent studies show that there are some variables that condition negative perception and highlight their predictive value.<sup>4</sup> A list of these variables and correlations can help us design a profile. However, there is a danger of considering them in an isolated fashion, as irrevocable anticipators of negative attitudes when the reality shows that these variables are activated in certain contexts and situations favouring certain correlations. Four significant categories exist. The category of personal characteristics says that a whole set of variables exists that act as determining factors of anti-immigrant sentiment: age; education; earnings; labour status; ideology (left/right wing) (Citrin *et al.* 1997; Burns and Gimpel 2000; Coenders *et. al.* 2004; Kessler and Freeman 2005).

The instrumental category and that of self-interest which follows a socioeconomic logic expresses the idea that perceptions are based on self-interest calculations (Kessler and Freeman 2005). It highlights the existence of a link between material worries and anti-immigrant opinions (Citrin *et-al.* 1997, pp. 863). At this point, the context of competition is what plays the most determining role in activating a negative attitude (Fetzer 2000). In this framework, the power-threat sentiment plays a role. A group with greater power (for example autochthonous workers) is more susceptible to being hostile if another exogenous group comes close and grows, with the consequent perception of a threat leading to a reduction of economic and social privileges (Oliver and Wong 2003, pp. 568). Along these same lines, but inverting the argument, Lahav (2004b, pp. 1169) also points out that it is not so much unemployment that is significant as the fear of losing one's job in a negative labour market situation. Although low economic level and labour status usually have an explanatory value, correlations exist that help to specify this variable. Especially on the sectorial level, manual and industrial workers tend to show more opposition to immigration (Kessler

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2  
3 and Freeman 2005, pp. 826-827). This is due especially to the fact that, in situations of  
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5 work sector competition, salaries tend to decrease and the access of immigrants tends to  
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7 increase (Borjas 1999).  
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10 The symbolic and emotive category, following a logic of prejudice and identity,  
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12 usually affects its predictive function in its two dimensions: the rational and the  
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14 affective/emotional. However it is the emotional dimension especially that has greater  
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16 influence in orienting negative attitudes. Perception is based on long-term affective or  
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18 cognitive predispositions. Hostility towards the out-group is linked to the preferences of  
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20 the in-group. Thus, a social logic characteristic of racist discourse (in terms of Van Dijk  
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22 2003a, 2003b) develops, of a negative-others and positive-us. Although some studies  
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24 exist that insist that identity is not as determining as other socioeconomic factors in  
25  
26 predicting negative opinions (Luedtke 2005), what is true is that it is proven, especially  
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28 in comparative studies that take the Eurobarometer as a basis, that national identity is an  
29  
30 important variable in explaining negative opinion (Lahav 2004b; Citrin *et al.* 2001).  
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36 The fourth category is based on the hypothesis of contact between citizens and  
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38 immigrants, mainly referred to on at least four levels: personal contact; contact at work;  
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40 residential; neighbourhood proximity (block of flats, street, district, town); and regional  
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42 location (Mediterranean border, Northern Europe, recent joining the EU accession,  
43  
44 etc.).<sup>5</sup>  
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48 Finally, we reach the category related to the perceptions of immigration policies  
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50 implemented, which will frame our analysis of Spain. Although at the beginning it was  
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52 assumed that a link between attitudes and policies existed (it was assumed that a  
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54 negative perception necessarily generated support for restrictive immigration policies),  
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56 today this relationship is not necessarily as strong. Therefore assumption must be  
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3 questioned. For example, Simon and Lynch (1999) show that the desire to restrict  
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5 immigration is not necessarily consistent with attitudes towards immigrants. Negative  
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7 attitudes towards immigrants are usually also closely related with the cultural distance  
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9 between groups of immigrants and the autochthonous population.  
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13 Within this framework, some studies analyse attitudes towards immigration  
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15 taking into account the policies that are made, based on the premise that the political  
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17 management of these has an effect on negative opinion. Hence we must recognise that  
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19 the anxiety expressed by a significant number of people does correspond to  
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21 governments' ability/capacity to accommodate them (Lahav 2004b, pp. 1170) and to  
22  
23 manage the flows, rather than the current immigrant presence, or the media treatment  
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25 given.  
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29 It is not necessarily true that there is a correlation between immigration policies  
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31 and citizens' attitudes towards immigrants. In some comparative studies the conclusion  
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33 is reached that despite the existence of policy differences, status and practices towards  
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35 immigration, and differences in the number and accepted nationalities of origin, attitudes  
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37 are very similar. The majority is always inclined to think that their country ought to  
38  
39 allow fewer immigrants than the laws permit (Simon and Lynch 1999). But, if the matter  
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41 is approached in terms of the results (*outcomes*) of policies, or in terms of the difference  
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43 between objectives (*inputs*) and results (*outputs*), in order to evaluate what some call the  
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45 *gap* between political demands and the results of the policies,<sup>6</sup> the results between  
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47 countries show greater differences to the extent that one can consider that the entry  
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49 criteria followed by a government influences attitude. The transnational work by Bauer,  
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51 Lofstrom and Zimmermann (2000) follows similar lines. For them a correlation exists  
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53 between the favourable sentiment towards immigration and the knowledge that their  
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3 country selects immigrants according to their training (*skills*) and in accordance with  
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5 labour market needs.  
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8 Taking the EU scope of his research, Lahav (2004a) insists that a correlation  
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10 exists between attitudes towards immigration and the perception of policy results (*policy*  
11  
12 *outcomes*). With this argument, he challenges several assumptions. Firstly, that people  
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14 are more informed on immigration matters than is usually supposed, and that this  
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16 information has several sides to it: the personal, self-interest side, the social, and the  
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18 symbolic. Secondly, that people's public political preferences are more motivated by  
19  
20 social interests than by self-interest. Thirdly, that political cooperation on this matter  
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22 (between States but it could also be regarded between players, etc.) usually reflects the  
23  
24 state of public opinion. This also implies rejecting the hypothesis that the relationship  
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26 between immigrant flows and immigration policies should be looked at and that the  
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28 policies/public opinion relationship should be looked at further.  
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34 Applying these arguments to the Spanish case I will show that the link between  
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36 policies and public opinion not only is confirmed, but can help to understand what I will  
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38 call the *ambivalence of Spanish public opinion*, when border and integration issues are  
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40 compared.  
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## 46 **2. Spanish public opinion towards immigration: distinctive** 47 48 **characteristics** 49 50

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54 Initially it is significant that most Spanish literatures have the same  
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56 methodological reaction: they start their analysis going over the number of immigrants.<sup>7</sup>  
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3 This leads us to think that the relationship between the number of immigrants and public  
4 perception is seen to be very close. We know, however, that this relationship is not so  
5 intuitive.  
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10 There are some supranational studies based on the results of the Eurobarometer  
11 showing that there is no such a link (Lahav 2004b; Citrin *et al.* 2001). What is  
12 significant is not so much the number of immigrants as the speed of migratory flows  
13 (Gimeno 2001). An increase in negative attitude is linked to the increase of 3.50% from  
14 2000 to 2005.<sup>8</sup> The perception of the amount of immigrants must, therefore, be  
15 considered in relation to the frequency/speed of flows. This is a distinctive feature in  
16 Spain compared with other European countries. Another also widespread assumption is  
17 also true: attitudes form part of the study of the effects of immigration. It is these effects  
18 that have been the interest of the first studies on public opinion/immigration in Spain.  
19 We also know that it was under the VIth (1996-2000) and VIIth (2000-2004)  
20 legislatures, with the right wing Partido Popular in government, that negative public  
21 opinion was first linked to migratory flows. Politically it was assumed that “the more  
22 immigration, the higher the percentage of negative opinion”. Studies in Spain have  
23 therefore worked under this conceptual framework generated by government policy  
24 itself.  
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45 If we look for arguments that distinguish Spanish public opinion, in addition to  
46 highlighting its tolerant nature (for example, Cea D’Ancona 2004), the analysis of  
47 responses show that Spanish citizens separate clearly issues relating to migratory flows  
48 and borders, from issues related to immigrant inclusion and integration (level where its  
49 tolerant nature is perceived). We must therefore concentrate on this level.  
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3 Firstly we shall perform transversal analysis from March 1999 to October 2006,  
4 identifying the main peaks and interpreting them contextually. We shall see that  
5 legislative changes and periods of political innovation are the most likely to bring about  
6 higher negative attitudes. Then, in a second section, we shall develop the results of the  
7 fourth peak found (of November 2005), as it was the month that saw the introduction of  
8 immigration related questions into the Spanish Barometer.  
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### 20 **2.1. Development of immigration as a basic concern and relevant contextual** 21 **factors: 2000-2006**

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24 In Spain, the main sources of information are the Barometers of the *Centro de*  
25 *Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS).<sup>9</sup> The questions on immigration start to become  
26 regular from 2000.<sup>10</sup> This would mean that it was in this year that immigration entered  
27 the government's agenda.<sup>11</sup>  
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34 In the question about what people consider to be the three most important  
35 problems affecting the country, immigration becomes a permanent category starting  
36 from September 2000. Graph 1 gives an overview of the increasing importance of  
37 immigration as a problem.<sup>12</sup>  
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45 [Graph 1 about here]  
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49 There are several remarks to be made. Firstly, throughout the entire period,  
50 immigration is perceived as one of the most important problems in the country, along  
51 with unemployment, civil insecurity, terrorism, housing, and economic and political  
52 problems. Immigration is one of the nine most important problems mentioned and, on  
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3 average, ranks fourth. Secondly, it is striking that since April 2005 immigration has been  
4 placed on the top three most important problems, reflecting a growing and consolidated  
5 concern about immigration from 2004 onwards. Since October 2005, immigration has  
6 been ranked second after unemployment and before terrorism, and in September 2006 it  
7 reached the first position for the first time. Thirdly, at least five peaks can be observed.<sup>13</sup>  
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9 The argument that is inferred is that border issues have played a significant explanatory  
10 role, and that there are several concrete factors that influence the "problematization" of  
11 immigration: illegal aliens; changes in legislation and the perception of poor  
12 management of immigration (those without papers, flow management, etc.); specific  
13 conflicts related to exclusion that demand social and political positioning beyond the  
14 scope of the local administration where they occur; immigration policies by decree  
15 (especially regularisation/normalisation policies); and the reactive discourse of political  
16 parties (Zapata-Barrero 2007b and 2008b). All are ultimately linked to the legislative  
17 changes and the perception of ineffective management of flows. Following the research  
18 framework of this article, my argument is that it is border management related factors  
19 and its subsequent policies that impact on negative attitudes. Negative attitudes are  
20 orientated towards policies and the government's actions rather than towards immigrants.  
21 It is at this level that we can explain the ambivalence of Spanish public opinion towards  
22 immigrants. Now let us focus on the peaks identified in the graph.  
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48 The first peak in February 2001 can be attributed to several factors. First, there  
49 were important legislative changes, a new immigration law came into force in January  
50 2001 (*Ley de extranjería 8/2000*), overturning the recent liberal Law (4/2000) (E. Aja  
51 2006). The law was mainly aimed at fighting illegal immigration, but it also stripped  
52 immigrant workers of the rights of association, protest and strike. The law was  
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3 accompanied by a Royal Decree establishing the requirements for the regularization of  
4 foreigners able to prove that they were residing in Spain before January 1, 2001. This  
5 legislative change affected negative perceptions. Second, as a consequence there were  
6 several hunger strikes in Barcelona and sit-ins by illegal immigrants in various regions  
7 of the country in order to obtain legal status before the change in law came into effect. A  
8 third reason could be the coach accident in Lorca, where 12 undocumented immigrants  
9 died. This highlighted the precarious employment situation of many immigrants without  
10 residence and work permits. Finally, public figures adopted an alarmist tone on issues  
11 of immigration, which might have raised concerns (Zapata-Barrero 2004b, pp. 109-111  
12 and Zapata-Barrero 2003c, pp. 10, 11).  
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27 The second peak takes place in June 2002. It is in a period of time where  
28 concerns about immigration were high (from May – September 2002 above 20%). In  
29 this period the control of (irregular) immigration was a hot topic on the political agenda.  
30 First of all, irregular immigration was one of the priorities of the Aznar government; this  
31 became evident in the more restrictive 8/2000 law, but also in the signing of new  
32 bilateral agreements with Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Romania to return  
33 illegal immigrants. *SOS Racismo* reported that between May and June there was a  
34 massive expulsion of Nigerian immigrants as a consequence of such bilateral agreements  
35 (SOS Racismo 2002; 116). A key event in the fight against irregular immigration was  
36 the EU Seville Summit under the Spanish Presidency on June 21 and 22, 2002. The  
37 basic agreement was to draft restrictive immigration politics to the point of sanctioning  
38 the sending countries if they did not demonstrate a will to control their population. The  
39 peak of June 2002 can also be understood as growing public concern about immigration,  
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3 in order to put pressure on the Spanish government to place the topic on the European  
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5 agenda.  
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8 In this period, and taking into account multinational character of Spain (Spain  
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10 has three main minority nations: Catalonia, Basque country and Galicia), immigration  
11  
12 also became a contested topic in Catalonia's political agenda, where immigrants were  
13  
14 increasingly seen as a threat to the Catalan identity. First, the growing number of  
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16 Moroccan immigrants settling in Catalonia was interpreted as a national government  
17  
18 policy initiative to weaken the autonomy of the Catalan community. Second, there were  
19  
20 conflicts related with the Islamic community, as manifested in racist protests against the  
21  
22 building of mosques and conflicts over imams. These led the President of the  
23  
24 *Generalitat* (Catalan government) to claim a right to construct a Catalan immigration  
25  
26 policy (Anguera 2002; Pérez 2002).<sup>14</sup>  
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32 After a period of relatively low concern, there was a general increase starting in  
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34 September 2004.<sup>15</sup> The third peak is in April 2005, coinciding with a two-month  
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36 regularization process adopted by the Spanish government (this time called the  
37  
38 "normalization process") to end illegal employment of migrants and attempts to control  
39  
40 the black market. On this occasion a new link arises, not so much between legislative  
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42 change and negative opinion, but among policies regularising by decree. However it is  
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44 important to note that it was not only the normalization policies itself, but also the  
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46 political debate that followed and the reactions it raised in the European Union. Many  
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48 protests and hunger strikes took place in Barcelona by immigrants that could not meet  
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50 the conditions necessary to benefit from the regularization rounds and claimed to be  
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52 driven into the hands of exploitative employers (*La Vanguardia*, 01-05-2005; Safont,  
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54 2005; 48). Another item in the news concerned the growing numbers of undocumented  
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3 Sub-Saharan Africans arriving at the Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla.<sup>16</sup> As reception  
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5 centres could not take care of all arriving immigrants, flights had to be arranged to  
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7 transport them to other parts of Spain (Morcillo 2005; 19).  
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10 The escalation of events in Ceuta and Melilla coincides with the last three  
11 months of 2005, with the highest peak observed in November 2005 (when immigration  
12 accounted for 40% of the responses). As a consequence of the drama at the border, the  
13 issue of illegal immigration became again a major topic in Spain's social and political  
14 agenda. It is also a priority issue discussed at the Euro Mediterranean Partnership  
15 Conference in Barcelona, which took place on the 25th and 26th of November 2005 and  
16 at the European Council Summit in Brussels on December 15th and 16th, 2005. This  
17 resulted in the EU financing the extension of the *Sistema de Vigilancia Exterior (SIVE)*  
18 to cover the entire Mediterranean region, including the Canary Islands (Missé, 2005; 2).  
19 Another reason for this peak were the riots involving immigrant populations in large  
20 cities in France, which received a great deal of attention in the Spanish press, as well as  
21 the controversial cartoons of Mohammed in September 2005 in the Danish newspaper  
22 'Jyllands Postem.'. Finally, the fifth peak appears in September 2006. The dramatic  
23 arrival of undocumented immigrants to the Canary Islands in 2006 made immigration  
24 one of the main preoccupations of the Spanish public and placed immigration at the  
25 forefront of Spanish and European political agendas. Between January and August, the  
26 Islands witnessed a large influx of African immigrants. The arrival of 4,772 immigrants  
27 to the Canary Islands in August 2006 broke all previous records. While the majority of  
28 immigrants, both regular and irregular, enter Spain by airplane or highway, the images  
29 of *cayucos* arriving to the Spanish Islands and the overcrowded reception centres made  
30 immigration the most important problem perceived by the Spanish public in September  
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3 2006 (corresponding to 59.2%). In order to respond to the large influx of African  
4 immigration at the Spanish borderlands and temper public opinion, the Spanish Socialist  
5 government under Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero attempted to arrange Returns  
6 Agreements with sending countries while at the same time pressing the European Union  
7 for help and responsibility to fight illegal immigration. The Spanish governance of EU  
8 borders poses normative questions (Zapata-Barrero and de Witte 2007). Here border  
9 management, lack of control, governance, and public opinion are directly linked.  
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## 22 **2.2. Significant variables of negative attitude towards immigration**

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24 If we focus on the fourth peak above, the one of November 2005, it also  
25 coincides with one of the last special issue survey available concerning immigration.<sup>17</sup>  
26  
27 Immigration is considered to be the second concern (40%), below unemployment (54%)  
28 and far above ETA terrorism (25.2%) (question 5). 59.6% considers that there are too  
29 many immigrants (question 6), and the vast majority supports a restrictive policy (84.7%  
30 are of the opinion that the most suitable policy is that which allows entry only to those  
31 with a work contract, question 7). Continuing with the subjects of borders and the  
32 perception of how to regulate flows, when asked the question of who one prefers should  
33 enter, a majority prefer an immigrant with a work qualification needed in Spain (an  
34 average of 6.4/10), a good level of education (an average of 5.6/10) and ability to speak  
35 Spanish (or the official language of one of the Autonomous Communities) (an average  
36 of 5.2/10). The fact that only just under a 30% also considers being of Christian faith to  
37 be a criterion and that an average of only 1.7/10 requires that they should be white  
38 shows that they are not racist. This demonstration of tolerance (non-racism) is not just  
39 seen in all of the questions related to identity and emotional matters. Tolerance is also  
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3 related with inclusion policies (equal rights), since 78.9% express that they “greatly  
4 agree” or “agree” that people who have come should have the same rights as the rest  
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6 (question 9), or, also, people believe that things such as access to education (92.5%),  
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8 health care (81.3%) should be simplified for immigrants (question 12) and that they  
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10 should even practise their religion if they so wish (81.2%). This tolerance to inclusion  
11  
12 policies is even expressed with the support of the right to vote on the local (60.8%) and  
13  
14 in the general (53.4%) elections (question 13). With regard to acceptance in different  
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16 spheres of their day-to-day lives (children’s education, work, etc.) responses are also  
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18 positive (Questions 14-17), even reaching 71.7% who agree that immigrants should  
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20 maintain their language and culture (question 20).  
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27 We can therefore see that tolerance is expressed at different levels (school, work,  
28  
29 etc.), but always related to inclusion and not to issues of frontiers and the management  
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31 of flows. However this data should be treated with caution given that some studies have  
32  
33 shown that this apparent positive tolerance changes in real situations of competition.  
34  
35 Thus, it is shown that the socioeconomic logic is also significant. For example, the  
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37 interesting study by Gimeno (2001, chaps. 5 and pp. 79) concentrates on citizens’  
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39 perception of competition for access to and the distribution of scarce resources, proving  
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41 that, if the population had to choose between egalitarian practices towards immigration  
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43 or access to scarce resources over immigrants, they choose the latter (Gimeno 2001, pp.  
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45 879). This shows how negative public attitude usually hierarchizes the distribution of  
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47 goods and places emphasis on belonging to an identity group.  
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53 An initial conclusion is that despite having negative attitudes towards the *How*  
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55 *many* enter (subject of frontiers and migratory flows), survey respondents display a  
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57 pragmatic attitude to *Who* enters (personal characteristics of the immigrant, not  
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3 mentioning their nationality and provenance) and a tolerant attitude with regard to equal  
4 rights. However all of these opinions are also related with the fact that the perception of  
5 the number of immigrants most of the interviewees have is not real (i.e. the “perceived  
6 quantity” and the “real quantity” of immigrants is quite different). This is fundamental  
7 and confirms the argument that the negative opinion of immigration held on the access  
8 level and in relation to how many enters is not so much a real as a perceived issue.  
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11 This “perceived reality” is the framework within which we must interpret the  
12 other results. In fact, according to table 1 below, 52.4% of the population has an  
13 exaggerated image of the number of immigrants, with 6.6% of the population believing  
14 that over 50% of the population is immigrant (that half the inhabitants of Spain are  
15 immigrants!). On average the responses indicates that, in general, the “perceived  
16 amount” is 20.4%, whereas according to Ministerial data in 2005 the “real reality” was  
17 6.2% or 8.5% if we take into account the municipal census data or *Padrón municipal* (1-  
18 1-2005). This case demonstrates that the “perceived amount” is far greater than the “real  
19 amount”.<sup>18</sup>  
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[Table1 about here]

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47 If we leave to one side the issues related with inclusion and focus on the  
48 significant correlations regarding issues related to migratory flows (those that give  
49 expression to negative attitudes), we may observe that trends are similar to results  
50 highlighted in other transnational studies. Nevertheless, Spain also presents some  
51 relevant distinctions, taking into account the literature reviewed in section 1. Let us look  
52 at the most significant by concentrating on two points: question 6, which focuses its  
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3 attention on the perception of the number of immigrants there are (we collected the  
4 percentage of those who said that “there are too many”), and question 10 (above) which  
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8 deals with the “perceived quantity” (we took the average percentage of the amount of  
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11 immigrants thought to exist in Spain, and the percentage of those who say they know  
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13 nothing).<sup>19</sup>

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17 [Table 2 about here]  
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21 Several conclusions may be drawn:

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24 1. With regard to the question as to whether they consider there are too many, the  
25  
26 conclusions from other studies are confirmed, that variables of age, status, education,  
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28 ideological scale, condition (especially farmers and pensioners/retired people) are  
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30 significant, with the exception of sex, although women are usually more negative.  
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32 These variables are also confirmed in other influential surveys such as the annual  
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34 Gallup poll of February 2004.<sup>20</sup>  
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38 2. In almost all variables there is a lack of proportion between the “real amount” and  
39  
40 the “perceived amount”. At least two points stand out. First the high percentage of  
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42 those who confess that they “do not know”, which is contradicted by the negative  
43  
44 opinions they have. This would corroborate the argument that the negative opinion  
45  
46 held of immigration at the access level and with respect to the question of How  
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48 Many enter, is not so much a real but a perceived reality. Secondly, the disproportion  
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50 between the real percentage of immigrants (between 6.2 and 8.5% in 2005,  
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52 according to sources) and the perceived percentage (the average oscillating between  
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54 14.8% and 25.3%) affects practically all variables without distinction.  
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3. There is no exact correlation between the disproportion of the perceived amount of immigrants and the fact that it is perceived that “there are too many”. For example, if we take the right-wing ideological variable, there is no such link. They are the ones who perceive a lower number average of immigrants (14.81%), but are of the opinion that “there are too many” (83.8%). At the other extreme, this can also be seen if we consider age. Young people aged 18-24 believe there to be, on average, 25.35% of immigrants, but only 54.4% say that “there are too many”.
4. Likewise, the age variable is also significant in the correlation between those who admit they know nothing, and those who are convinced that there are too many of them. 72.1% of immigrants. 72.1% of 65 year-olds and above think that “there are too many”, but over half say that that they do not know when quizzed on how many they think there are.
5. A correlation between the perception of the number (“there are too many”) and the defence of more restrictive policies (only allowing entry to those with a work permit) does not necessarily exist, as already pointed out, among others, by Alvira and García (2002, pp. 191). The November 2005 data show that although the trend is being maintained, it is less intense than other years. 84.7% were of the opinion that one should “only allow entry to those who have an employment contract” (question 7) and 59.6% says “there are too many”. This means that public opinion does not necessarily link its negative perception (“there are too many”) with its defence of a policy “with conditions”, which is linked the labour market.
6. Finally, we should not overlook an important point, the high percentage of people who claim they “don’t know” when asked about the number of immigrants they think exist. Though the average is 31%, some variables exceed 50% (age,

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3 education). This would corroborate the argument that the negative opinion held of  
4 immigration is based on a “perceived reality” rather than a “real reality”. There are at  
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8 least two lines of thought that can be explored. The first is that citizens react to  
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10 phenomenon of immigration with a lack of information. Their response is thus  
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12 emotional rather than reasoned, and one that leads to many negative attitudes. We  
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14 should also consider the other extreme, that citizens have a consolidated opinion on  
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16 certain aspects of immigration, but avoid pronouncing replies that might be  
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18 interpreted as being “racist” or “politically incorrect”.  
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### 24 **3. Conclusions: the ambivalence of Spanish public opinion and the** 25 26 **governance hypothesis** 27 28

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30 One of the first conclusions is the *apparent ambivalence* in Spanish public  
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32 opinion, which shows a negative attitude in relation to levels of flows and frontier  
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34 related matters, and a positive, tolerant opinion on matters related to inclusion and equal  
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36 rights. This shows that there is a link between negative attitude and immigration  
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38 policies, which basically focus on border management. Thus a connection must exist  
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40 between the political agenda and the issues that are most rebuffed by citizens.  
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44 We can argue that the specific factors that influence in the “problematism” of  
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46 immigration are ultimately linked to the legislative changes and the perception of  
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48 ineffective management of flows. It is here where the *ambivalence of Spanish public*  
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50 *opinion* can be understood. Within this interpretative framework, three relevant  
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52 distinctive arguments exist.  
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3 Firstly, perhaps Spain offers a new variable for consideration. It is not so much  
4 the actual volume of migratory flow itself that influences promotion of negative attitude,  
5 but rather its growth rate:<sup>21</sup> from 2000 to 2005 there was an increase of 3.5%. Secondly,  
6 the tolerant attitude shown with regards to inclusion is a symptom that we are at the start  
7 of the process where citizens' opinion is shaped more by border matters than  
8 coexistence. At this level, we could say that a link exists between policies focusing on  
9 borders and the orientation of the citizens' negative perception. This means that, if  
10 policies begin to focus on coexistence, equal rights and inclusion, then supposedly the  
11 focus of public opinion will divert, and this would start to generate, we propose as a  
12 hypothesis, a negative attitude. To this end, the apparent "tolerant attitude" that all  
13 studies highlight and is also expressed in the November 2005 Barometer, reflects an  
14 unfounded public opinion since there is no political management reference point on  
15 these issues in which to base their opinion. In other words, as the government does not  
16 have any explicit policies of inclusion (or at least does not reveal them to the citizen)  
17 whereas it does have them for border management, public opinion has no empirical  
18 reference point on which to base its attitude. Along this line of reflection, we uphold that  
19 in Spain attitudes towards immigration should not only be interpreted in a framework in  
20 which the immigration phenomenon is assessed, but also on the implementation of  
21 policies and the government's capacity to respond to citizens' uncertainties.  
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48 However all of these opinions must also be related with the fact that most of  
49 those interviewed have an unreal perception of the number of immigrants that actually  
50 exist in Spain with the perceived quantity and the real quantity of immigrants being  
51 quite different. What makes the Spanish case so interesting is that it highlights not only  
52 ambivalences in public opinions, showing how "what the government does" and "what  
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3 the citizen perceive” are linked, but also that issues related to immigration are more a  
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5 matter of interpretation than a matter of fact. It is at this point that maybe we can  
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7 formulate the *governance hypothesis*:: *the negative attitude of citizens is not so much directed*  
8  
9 *at immigration, but at the Government (and policies) and its (in)capacity to govern issues*  
10  
11 *related to immigration and to respond to citizens’ expectations.* This *governance hypothesis*  
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13 allows us to understand the ambivalence there is in Spain when border and integration issues are  
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15 compared. But this can be the second step of this line of research.  
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**Notes**

\* Some parts of this chapter have been presented in epsNet Annual Conference (Ljubljana, 22-23 June 2007), Centre de Recherche sur les Identités Nationales et l'Interculturalité (CRINI) (Université de Nantes, France, 19 may 2007) and the Institut Nationale d'Etudes Demographiques (INED) (Paris, 15 january 2007). I would like to thanks all who have contributed by their comments to the final draft.

<sup>1</sup> Studies on opinions in Europe usually use the Eurobarometer surveys ([ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/standard\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm)) both in general and those that were carried out specifically on immigration in 1988, 1993, 1997 and 2000, and the European Social Survey: <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/index.jsp>). Notable recent influential reports are: International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2004); Global Commission on International Migrations (CGMI) (2005), Report by the Secretary General of the United Nations (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius and Rosenblum, for example, follow this line of argument. For them: "Evidence suggests that "real or perceived" is an important distinction, as public attitudes about immigration reflect substantial misconceptions, though at least some of these apparent misconceptions actually reflect citizens' tendency to respond to migration on emotional (or affective) levels rather than on the basis of objective self-interest or personal experience" (2004, pp. 102-103)

<sup>3</sup> Either "indifferent", or "does not know, does not respond". What is significant is that in some questions "Does not know" exceeds 50%, as we shall see later. To explain this is beyond the reach of this article but this requires surely the consideration of at least

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4 two lines of thought: a lack of information or constrains by social desirability (avoiding  
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7 openly pronouncing responses which could either be interpreted as being “racist” or  
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9 “politically incorrect”). We should also consider the influence of ambivalence (see, for  
10  
11 instance, the work of Berinsky 2005).  
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14 <sup>4</sup> I am basing myself on the results of territorially and temporally localised studies, as  
15  
16 well as transnational and temporal regressive comparative analysis. Among others,  
17  
18 Simon and Lynch (1999), Fetzer (2000), Burns and Gimpel (2000), McLaren (2001), M.  
19  
20 Coenders (2001), Beck and Camarota (2002), Saggar (2003), Lahav (2004a, 2004b);  
21  
22 Coenders *et. al.* (2004) Kessler and Freeman (2005), Luedtke (2005).  
23

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25 <sup>5</sup> For further discussion, see Oliver and Wong (2003), Burns and Gimpel (2000), the  
26  
27 transversal analysis of the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey of Coenders  
28  
29 *et. al.* (2004), and Kessler and Freeman (2005).  
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33 <sup>6</sup> What it is known as the *gap hypothesis*, first stated by W. A. Cornelius *et al.* (2004)  
34  
35 and then, also applied by Lahav and Guiraudon (2006).  
36

37  
38 <sup>7</sup> See, among others, Valles, Cea and Izquierdo (1999), Pérez Díaz *et al.* (2002), Alvira  
39  
40 Martín and García López (2003), Campo Ladero (2004), Colectivo IOE (2005), Díez  
41  
42 Nicolas (2006).  
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45 <sup>8</sup> According to data from the Annual statistics on Foreigners 1996-2004 (December 31)  
46  
47 and the Statistical Report dated 31-12-2005, by the Ministry of Labour and Social  
48  
49 Affairs and the National Statistics Institute, municipal Census 1995-2005, in 2000, the  
50  
51 immigrant population was 895,720 and in 2005 it was 2,738,932. This is a 3,5%  
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53 increase in five years.  
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<sup>9</sup> The CIS ([www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es)) is an independent entity established to study Spanish society, mainly through public opinion polls. It is assigned by the Ministerio de la Presidencia (Ministry of the Presidency). The monthly held “barometers” by the CIS measure public opinion in Spain in relation to the political and economic situation of the country. For more detailed information see <http://www.cis.es>

<sup>10</sup> We begin to have a very extensive record of surveys over time. The first surveys, which exclusively deal with attitudes towards immigration, date from 1990, in March by the CIRES (Centro de Estudios sobre la Realidad Social or Centre for Research on Social Reality) and in September by the CIS. For a list of the surveys carried out in Spain, please see Cea D’Ancona (2004, pp.1-9)

<sup>11</sup> This is the reading followed by Zapata-Barrero (2003b, pp. 10 and 2004b, pp.108-116).

<sup>12</sup> The *ranking* of “immigration” in relation to the frequency it is chosen over other answers defined in advance can be found between brackets on the x-axis.

<sup>13</sup> The relatively low numbers (below 10%) in November/ December 2001 and March/ April 2003 are mainly a result of concerns about ETA terrorism and in March 2004 due to the terrorist attacks in Madrid.

<sup>14</sup> See the first reflections in Zapata-Barrero (2007a) , and key comparisons in Zapata-Barrero (2008a)

<sup>15</sup> We can mention the events in Elche, a traditionally shoe-making town in the coastal province of Alicante, where Spanish workers set fire to two Chinese shoe warehouses during an (unauthorized) demonstration against Chinese shoemakers involving nearly half a thousand people. The demonstrators protested against the presence of Asian



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4 businessmen. Spaniards felt their age-old social customs, employment norms, and labor  
5 relations were threatened by the new competitors with racism as an effect (see also L.  
6 Cachón-Rodríguez 2005).  
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11 <sup>16</sup> Spain also has land borders with Morocco in the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, on the  
12 North African coast. Some 25 km from continental Europe across the Strait of Gibraltar  
13 lies the ancient port and fortified town of Ceuta,. Some 250 km to the east, stands the  
14 town of Melilla. Increased border controls and improved diplomatic relations between  
15 the Zapatero administration and Morocco have resulted in the development of a new  
16 immigration route since January 2006 between the African West Coast and the Canary  
17 Islands (see Zapata-Barrero and deWitte 2007).  
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28 <sup>17</sup> Sample data are 2500 interviews (2485 effectively realised) at national level and  
29 throughout all the Spanish territory. For more technical details, see [www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es)  
30 (barometer 2625).  
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35 <sup>18</sup> It should also be stressed that 31% prefer not to comment, expressing a doubt as to the  
36 number of immigrants that exists.  
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40 <sup>19</sup> In table 2 below, I have included the significant variables. For a complete list please  
41 see [www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es).  
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45 <sup>20</sup> <http://www.gallup.es/notasp/nota48.asp>  
46

47 <sup>21</sup> This is also the argument about Hispanic immigration to the USA of Huntington's  
48 (2004) controversial and very high-profile book. A good part of his argument exactly  
49 deals with issue of the pace and combined with the number of immigrants. For him, the  
50 persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the USA into two peoples,  
51 two cultures, and two languages, and is challenging directly "American identity".  
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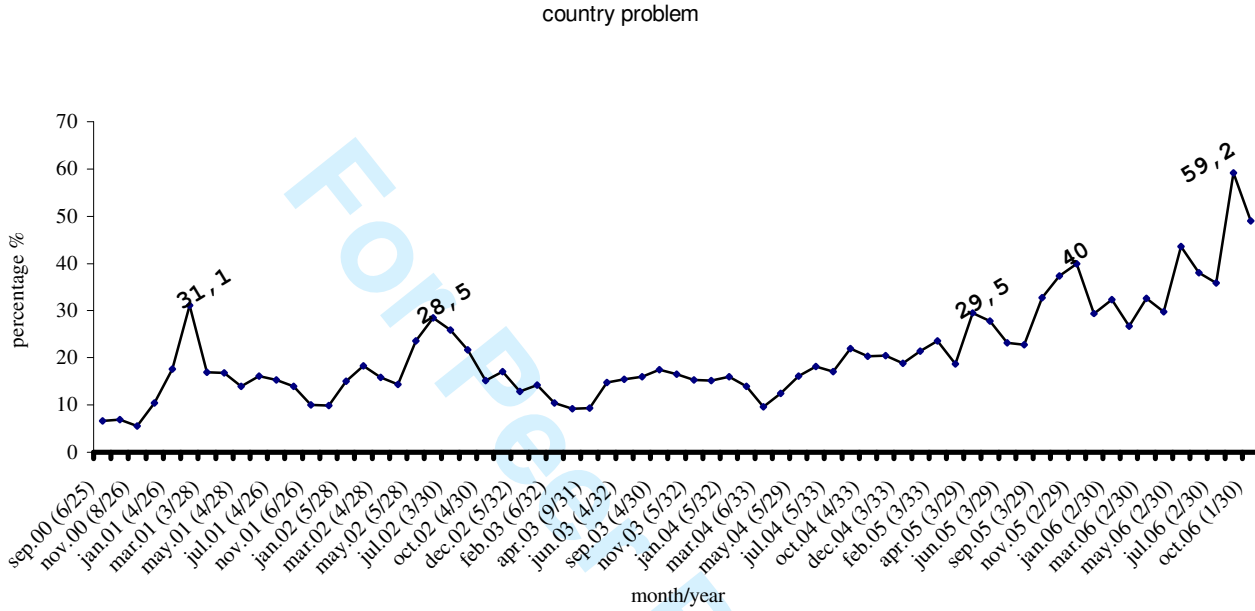
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Graph 1. Trends in Spanish concerns about immigration. Answers to the question: According to you, what is the most important problem facing our country today?



Source: Barómetros del Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), September 2000 – October 2006 (estudios 2398 – 2657). Note: Barometers are not held in the month of August. October 2001 is missing because this questionnaire was dedicated to the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11. The ranking of “immigration” and the total number of frequent given answers defined in advance can be found in brackets on the X-axis

Table 1: Question 10: Of every 100 people living in Spain, how many do you think were born outside the country?

	%
<b>Less than 10 people</b>	15.9
<b>10-19</b>	20.5
<b>20-29</b>	13.1
<b>30-39</b>	8.0
<b>40-49</b>	4.2
<b>50 or more people</b>	6.6
<b>Don't know</b>	31.0
<b>No reply</b>	0.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	100.0

Table 2: Significant variables with regard to negative attitudes (“there are too many” and averages for “perceived amount” of immigration.

		Question 6 % who reply “there are too many”	Question 10 mean % of immigrants believed to exist in Spain, and % of replies saying they Don’t know
Self-perceived ideology	Right (9-10)	83.8	14.81 and 43.2% “Don’t know”
	(7-8)	71.5	20.10 and 29.4% “Don’t know”
	(5-6)	58.2	18.89 and 27.5% “Don’t know”
	(3-4)	52.0	18.70 and 25.8% “Don’t know”
	Left (1-2)	43.2	19.81 and 21.9% “Don’t know”
Socio-economic status	Unskilled workers	67.6	23.38 and 38% “Don’t know”
	Skilled workers	65.5	21.90 and 33.4% “Don’t know”
	Classic middle classes	67.2	18.24 and 37.7% “Don’t know”
	New middle classes	55.6	22.25 and 24.1% “Don’t know”
	Upper/upper-middle classes	42.7	15.97 and 23.5% “Don’t know”
Education	Unqualified	73.8	19.87 and 65.6% “Don’t know”
	Primary	67.9	22.93 and 35.9% “Don’t know”
	Secondary	54.6	19.47 and 20.3% “Don’t know”
	Vocational Training	57.9	21.72 and 22.7% “Don’t know”
	University diploma	39.2	15.34 and 17.1% “Don’t know”
	Higher	32.9	15.35 and 14.8% “Don’t know”
Sex	Female	62.6	23.65 and 36.8% “Don’t know”
	Male	56.5	17.58 and 25% “Don’t know”
Age	From 18 to 24	54.4	25.35 and 21.3% “Don’t know”
	From 25 to 34	54	21.96 and 19.3% “Don’t know”
	From 35 to 44	56.5	19.14 and 24.8% “Don’t know”
	From 45 to 54	56.6	18.53 and 28.2% “Don’t know”
	From 55 to 64	61.9	17.06 and 31.9% “Don’t know”
	From 65 and over	72.1	19.92 and 55.6% “Don’t know”
Socio-economic condition	Managers and professionals	48	16.61 and 16.7% “Don’t know”
	Technicians and middle management	39.6	16.63 and 18.9% “Don’t know”
	Small businesspeople	57.8	17.03 and 25.6% “Don’t know”
	Farmers	72.4	18.22 and 34.5 “Don’t know”
	Office and service employees	51.3	22.62 and 19.2% “Don’t know”
	Skilled workers	61.6	19.53 and 25.1% “Don’t know”
	Unskilled workers	62.7	23.92 and 23% “Don’t know”
	Retired and pensioners	71.2	19.84 and 47.3 “Don’t know”
	Unemployed	59.7	22.56 and 24.2 “Don’t know”
	Students	35.5	20.14 and 15.1 “Don’t know”
Unpaid work in the home	67.1	22.16 and 47.2 “Don’t know”	