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## **REPCHANCE Spain - Diversity in Spanish Politics. Drivers and Obstacles for the Inclusion of Minorities in Elected Office**

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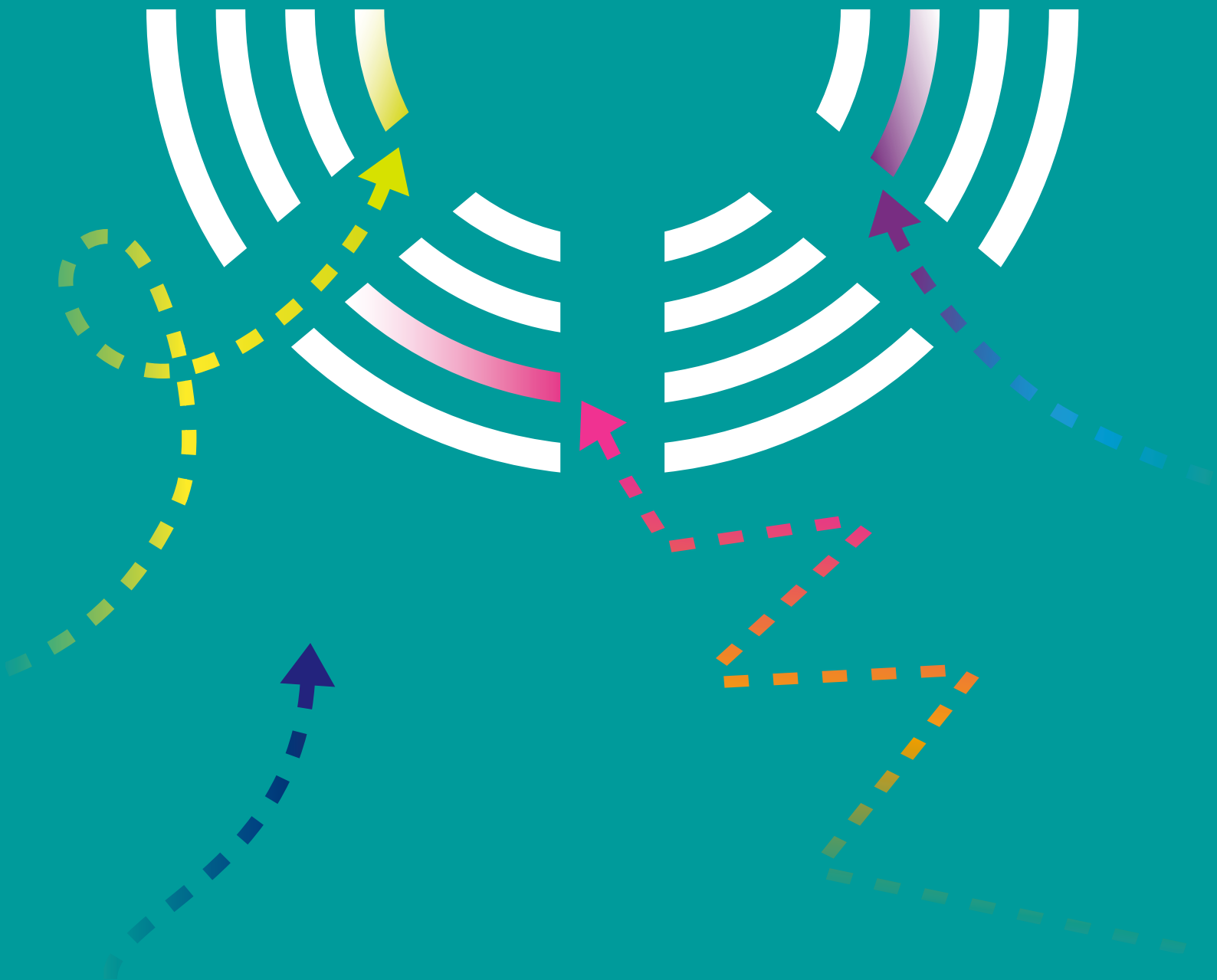
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# REPCANCE SPAIN

Diversity in Spanish Politics. Drivers and Obstacles for the Inclusion of Minorities in Elected Office

*Laura Morales and Carles Pamies*



**Robert Bosch  
Stiftung**

**SciencesPo**  
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES  
AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS



**Laura Morales** is a Research Professor at the Institute for Public Policies and Goods (IPP) of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid and a Full Professor of Political Science at Sciences Po Paris (CEE, CNRS). She is the Principal Investigator of the REPCHANCE Spain and the United Kingdom project.

**Carles Pamies** is a project researcher at the Institute for Public Policies and Goods (IPP) of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) in Madrid. He was a project researcher at Sciences Po (CEE, CNRS) for the REPCHANCE Spain and the United Kingdom project in 2022–2023.

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### **CRedit statement**

Laura Morales participated in the conceptualization of the research, the design of the methodology, the investigation, data collection and validation of the data, the formal analysis, data curation, the writing of both the original and final drafts, the supervision of team researchers, project administration and funding acquisition. Carles Pamies participated in the investigation, data collection and validation of the data, the formal analysis, data curation and data visualization.

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**Contact**

Dr. Ferdinand Mirbach  
Senior Expert  
Phone +49 711 46084-480  
ferdinand.mirbach@bosch-stiftung.de

**Design**

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**P**  
**PORTICUS**

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## Executive Summary

The project **REPCHANCE Spain and the United Kingdom** assesses the current state of inclusion in the political sphere of citizens of migrant origin, which includes individuals whose or parents migrated to one of in these two countries, offering a longitudinal perspective of trends over time. Undertaken within the context of the international collaborative project **REPCHANCE Europe**, it allows understanding the similarities and differences in the social and political dynamics that foster the incorporation of people from a diverse range of backgrounds into elected political office.

In the context of these two projects, this report focuses on the Spanish case drawing on a mixed-methods study conducted between 2022 and 2025. The data collected includes quantitative biographical information from public sources on all the members of the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament (*Congreso de los Diputados*) and 30 qualitative biographical interviews with current and former elected officials who either migrated to Spain themselves or are the descendants of parents who migrated to Spain. The report focuses especially on the period between 2011 and 2023, but the biographical interviews often refer to earlier periods in the political trajectories of the individuals interviewed. We were also able to draw on data from other projects conducted by members of the research team.

The study on Spain was conducted by a team of researchers based at the Center for European Studies and Comparative Politics of Sciences Po (Paris, France), led by Laura Morales. The team at Sciences Po collaborated with researchers from the Munich University of Applied Sciences, the University of Neuchâtel and the University of Amsterdam in the context of the project REPCHANCE Europe, funded by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator Schweiz and Porticus.

The main findings of the study on Spain are:

- The **inclusion of people of migrant ancestry in the political sphere and in elected office is still very limited**. Despite having a sizable population of migrant origin that has exceeded 10% since the late 2010s, the Spanish parliament only has a handful of national legislators of migrant ancestry in each legislative period, barely reaching 2% of the lower chamber.

- In the last completed legislature (2019–2023), less than 2% of the national legislators were of migrant ancestry compared to 15% of Spanish residents who are foreign-born. Even if one disregards the size of the population born in Spain to migrant parents, **the migrant-ancestry population is hugely underrepresented in the Spanish parliament.**
- Unlike in other countries included in the REPCHANCE Europe study (Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland), **the share of migrant-ancestry parliamentarians has not significantly increased since the 1990s.** It has barely gone up from around 1% to around 2%.
- Compared to other European countries, **we see no substantial progress** in the incorporation of migrant minorities in politics in Spain.
- There are **no substantial differences in the underrepresentation of diversity between parties of the left and parties of the right.** Citizens of migrant ancestry are considerably underrepresented regardless of the ideological leanings of the party.
- **Demographic concentration** of the migrant population in a given region **is not the most determining factor** driving the share of migrant-ancestry parliamentarians. Regions with lower shares of migrant populations have elected more migrant-ancestry parliamentarians than others with higher shares.
- The **sociodemographic profile** of migrant-ancestry legislators in the Spanish lower chamber of parliament fluctuates due to their small numbers each term, but they tend to be women over 30 years of age with a university degree.
- In terms of their **ancestry**, the descendants of migrants were more numerous in the earlier periods studied. **Since 2016** we see a changing pattern of incorporation into parliament of **first generation migrants**, who are **more visibly of migrant origin** and sometimes are **not native speakers** of Spanish. The latest cohorts of parliamentarians are, thus, a bit more reflective of the diversity of the country than previous ones.

- The **more recently-elected legislators** of migrant ancestry are more often of **Latin American or African descent**, whereas those elected in the 1990s and 2000s tended to be of European descent. Nevertheless, the countries of ancestry of legislators are not always those from which the larger communities of migrants originate.
- The experience of getting **selected and elected into office** varies considerably depending on the visibility of migrant ancestry and the formalisation of candidate selection. People with less visible traits have an easier time of getting selected through multiple channels, whereas those with visible traits are more likely to be recruited primarily through invitation.
- Most politicians of migrant ancestry come from **highly politicized backgrounds**, an underlying experience with politics becomes helpful in a relatively hostile environment where they are a small minority.
- Local or community support, mentorship and role models are not always available for politicians of migrant ancestry, their trajectories can end up being very **solitary**.
- Migrant-ancestry politicians tend to enter elected office with **less prior experience in politics**, which may increase their feelings of being an outsider.
- Their success is also pre-determined by **list position** and they rarely can count on mobilizing an electoral base to improve their chances of getting elected.
- Their **careers** are not shorter than those of the average elected official, but they are less likely to get **committees** or roles of higher acknowledged relevance.
- Migrant-ancestry politicians primarily rely on **family and friends** as support networks and face multiple **barriers** inside and outside political parties.

## Resumen ejecutivo

El proyecto **REPCHANCE – España y Reino Unido** evalúa el estado actual de la inclusión en la esfera política de los ciudadanos de origen inmigrante y de los descendientes de inmigrantes en estos dos países, desde una perspectiva longitudinal. El estudio se enmarca en el proyecto colaborativo internacional **REPCHANCE Europa**, y permite comprender las similitudes y diferencias en las dinámicas sociales y políticas que favorecen la incorporación de personas de orígenes diversos en cargos públicos.

En el marco de estos dos proyectos, este informe se centra en el caso español, basándose en un estudio que utiliza métodos mixtos realizado entre los años 2022 y 2025. Los datos recopilados incluyen información biográfica cuantitativa procedente de fuentes públicas sobre todos los miembros del Congreso de los Diputados y 30 entrevistas biográficas cualitativas con personas que ostentan o han ostentado cargos públicos y que se han establecido en España o son descendientes de personas que han migrado a España. El informe se centra, en particular, en el período comprendido entre 2011 y 2023, pero las entrevistas biográficas a menudo se refieren a períodos anteriores de la trayectoria política de las personas entrevistadas y también recurrimos a datos de otros proyectos realizados por miembros del equipo de investigación.

El estudio sobre España ha sido realizado por un equipo de investigadores del Centro de Estudios Europeos y Política Comparada de Sciences Po (París, Francia), dirigido por Laura Morales. El equipo de Sciences Po ha colaborado con investigadores de la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas de Múnich, la Universidad de Neuchâtel y la Universidad de Ámsterdam en el marco del proyecto REPCHANCE Europa, financiado por la Robert Bosch Stiftung, la Stiftung Mercator Schweiz y Porticus.

Las principales conclusiones del estudio sobre España son las siguientes:

- **La inclusión de personas de origen inmigrante en la esfera política y en cargos electos sigue siendo muy reducida en España.** A pesar de contar con una población de origen inmigrante considerable, que ha superado el 10% desde finales de la década de 2010, el Congreso de los Diputados solo cuenta con un

puñado de diputados y diputadas de origen inmigrante en cada legislatura, lo que apenas supone un 2 % de la cámara.

- En la última legislatura terminada (2019–2023), menos del 2 % de los diputados y las diputadas nacionales eran de origen inmigrante, frente a un 15 % de residentes españoles nacidos en el extranjero. Incluso si se descarta la población nacida en España de padres inmigrantes, **la población de origen inmigrante está enormemente infrarrepresentada en el Congreso de los Diputados.**
- A diferencia de otros países incluidos en el estudio REPCHANCE Europa (Alemania, Países Bajos, Reino Unido y Suiza), **la proporción de diputados y diputadas de origen inmigrante no ha aumentado significativamente desde la década de los noventa.** Apenas ha pasado de alrededor del 1 % al 2 %.
- En comparación con otros países europeos, **no observamos avances sustanciales** en la incorporación de las minorías de origen inmigrante a la política en España.
- **No existen diferencias sustanciales en la infrarrepresentación de la diversidad entre los partidos de izquierda y los de derecha**, los ciudadanos de origen inmigrante están considerablemente infrarrepresentados independientemente de la ideología del partido.
- **La concentración demográfica** de la población inmigrante en una región concreta **no es el factor más determinante** que influye en la proporción de diputados y diputadas nacionales de origen inmigrante, ya que regiones con menor proporción de población inmigrante han elegido a más diputados y diputadas de origen inmigrante que otras con mayor proporción.
- El **perfil sociodemográfico** de los diputados y diputadas de origen inmigrante en el Congreso de los Diputados fluctúa debido a su escaso número en cada legislatura, pero tienden a ser mujeres, mayores de 30 años y con titulación universitaria.
- En cuanto a su **ascendencia**, los descendientes de inmigrantes eran más numerosos en los primeros periodos estudiados y, **desde 2016**, se observa un patrón cambiante de incorporación al Congreso de los Diputados de **inmigrantes de primera gene-**

**ración**, que son **más visibles por su origen migrante** y que, en algunas ocasiones, **no son castellanoparlantes nativos**. Las últimas cohortes de diputados y diputadas reflejan, por lo tanto, un poco más la diversidad del país que las anteriores.

- Las **diputadas y diputados de origen inmigrante elegidos más recientemente** son con mayor frecuencia de **ascendencia latinoamericana o africana**, mientras que aquellos elegidos en las décadas de 1990 y 2000 tendían a ser de ascendencia europea. No obstante, los países de ascendencia de los diputados y diputadas no siempre son aquellos de donde proceden las comunidades inmigrantes más numerosas.
- La experiencia de ser **seleccionada y elegida para un cargo electo** varía considerablemente en función de la visibilidad del origen inmigrante y del grado de formalización del proceso de selección de candidatas y candidatos. Las personas con rasgos menos visibles son seleccionadas con más frecuencia a través de múltiples canales de selección, mientras que las que tienen rasgos visibles son con más frecuencia reclutadas principalmente a través de invitaciones personales.
- La mayoría de las personas de origen inmigrante que llegan a puestos de representación provienen de **entornos altamente politizados**, y tener alguna experiencia previa en política resulta útil en un entorno relativamente hostil en el que son una pequeña minoría.
- Las personas de origen inmigrante que aspiran a puestos de representación política no siempre cuentan con apoyo local o de alguna comunidad de origen, ni con mentores o referentes a seguir, por lo que sus trayectorias pueden acabar siendo muy **solitarias**.
- Los cargos públicos de origen inmigrante tienden a acceder a dichos puestos con **menos experiencia previa en política**, lo que a menudo propicia que se sientan intrusos o *outsiders*.
- Su éxito también está en gran medida predeterminado por su **posición en las listas electorales** y rara vez pueden contar con la movilización de una base electoral para mejorar sus posibilidades de ser elegidos o elegidas.

- Sus **carreras** no son más cortas que la media de los cargos electos, pero sí tienen menos probabilidades de formar parte de **comisiones** o de ostentar puestos parlamentarios o en el consistorio percibidos como de mayor relevancia.
- Las personas de origen inmigrante que se dedican a la política cuentan principalmente con **la familia y los amigos** como redes de apoyo y se enfrentan a múltiples barreras dentro y fuera de los partidos políticos.

# *1. INTRODUCTION*

Spain has experienced a radical social and demographic change in a relatively short span of time. Starting in the 1990s, migrants from all over the world – but especially from Africa, Europe and Latin America – have arrived in the country to make it their home. Migration flows followed similar patterns to those found in other Mediterranean countries in Europe, with a particular mix of migrants moving from other EU countries – notably, economic migrants from Poland and Romania and ‘lifestyle’ migrants from Scandinavian countries, Germany, Ireland and the United Kingdom – as well as traditional economic migrants from Latin America, Morocco and Sub-Saharan Africa. Spanish statistics do not capture the entirety of the migrant-ancestry population living in the country, as it does not record the Spanish-born descendants of migrants. The statistics on the foreign-born population allows gauging the nature of the demographic change. From barely 1% of foreign-born residents in the early 1990s, migration flows in the last 35 years have transformed Spanish society to a share of around 18% of the population in 2024.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 9 million people are foreign-born in a population of around 49 million. If the Spanish-born immediate descendants of the migrant population were computed in the official statistics, the percentage is likely to exceed 25% of the population. Moreover, contrary to a common perception, the migrant population is not nearly all from Latin America. Though Latin American migrants constitute around 40% of the migrant population in Spain, the other 60% approximately are evenly distributed between European migrants (30%) and migrants from Africa and Asia (the remaining 30%).

In this context of rapid demographic transformation, how has Spain politically incorporated this increased diversity of its population? Previous studies have shown a limited inclusion of migrants and their descendants in Spanish politics.<sup>2</sup> The REPCHANCE study provides novel data that allows to assess diversity among elected officials in Spain over time and in comparative perspective. Drawing on a mixed-methods research, our analysis examines the presence and socio-economic characteristics of national parliamentarians of migrant ancestry in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament (*Congreso de los Diputados*) and the motivations, opportunities and barriers that current and former elected officials of migrant ancestry have experienced as they embarked in political careers at the local, regional, national and European level.

We collected new data from public sources on all the legislators in the lower chamber of the national parliament since 2016 and, combined with previous data collection from other projects, we were able to analyse data for nearly 4,000 parliamentarians since the early 1990s. We also conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with politicians that had been

<sup>1</sup> Source: Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), 2024. <https://www.ine.es/dyngs/Prensa/es/CENSO2024.htm#:text=Poblaci%C3%B3n%20por%20lugar%20de%20nacimiento,6%2C8%25%20en%20Venezuela>.

<sup>2</sup> Pérez-Nievas et al. (2014), Vintila and Morales (2018) and Vintila et al. (2024).

elected for office at local, regional or national level, focusing on their overall biographical trajectories from the moment they became actively involved in politics to their experiences as elected representatives. With this vast information at hand, the main aim of this report is to provide a first succinct but comprehensive overview of the factors that foster and hinder inclusion in politics, with a view to providing policy-actionable recommendations to a range of stakeholders: civil society organisations, political parties, public institutions and the media.

<sup>3</sup> See Bergmann et al. (2025).

Although this report focuses on the Spanish case, the study is framed within the larger comparative study REPCHANCE Europe and the report published on the five countries studied<sup>3</sup>. This comparative perspective will also set the tone to a better understanding of the areas where the situation of inclusion in Spain can improve further.

The report starts with a detailed examination of the paths and attributes that lead to accessing political leadership positions in Spain. We focus on how many parliamentarians of migrant ancestry were present in the Spanish *Congreso* since the early 1990s, which parties got them elected, in which regions of the country, who they are and what their socio-demographic characteristics are. The next section analyses what their careers look like: how long do they stay in elected office and why do they leave it, as well as the paths to a successful career in politics. We then focus on the springboards and barriers that elected politicians of migrant ancestry experience throughout their trajectory, what has helped them along their way and what obstacles they have experienced. The final section looks into the future and discusses what can be done to improve inclusion and diversity in Spanish politics. Through an analysis of the recommendations that the participants in the interviews provided and our own evaluation of the current situation, we offer policy-actionable recommendations that a range of stakeholders can take on board to make Spanish politics more accessible to all and more reflective of the social diversity in the country.

*2. ACCESS TO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP  
POSITIONS IN SPAIN*

## 2.1 Introduction

In this study, we examine access to political leadership at all levels of representative office in Spain: national, regional and local. Although the quantitative biographical data shown in this report focuses on the national level, previous research has demonstrated that diversity and inclusion at the regional and local levels are not significantly better than at the national level.<sup>4</sup>

The Spanish state is structured along a quasi-federal territorial and political organization that devolves considerable powers to both regional and local authorities. Its 17 regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*) and two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla have legislative and, albeit limited, fiscal capacity and are responsible for a wide range of policy areas, such as education, health, housing, transportation, and most social and welfare services. Local authorities are, relatively speaking, less powerful and autonomous than the regions but are the primary service providers for many of the social and public services that affect the daily lives of citizens in Spain. As such, the multi-level nature of the organization of the state in Spain is quite similar to those of Germany or Switzerland, although there are critical constitutional differences that prevent scholars from classifying Spain as a federal country.

The Spanish parliament is bicameral. The lower chamber (*Congreso de los Diputados*) is formed by 350 legislators directly elected by citizens through blocked and closed party lists at the provincial level (50 provinces and the two autonomous cities). It retains greater powers than the upper chamber (*Senado*), which is formed by a portion of senators directly elected by voters through open lists and another portion appointed by the regional parliamentary assemblies. The study only focuses on the lower chamber because it is the most powerful of the two, the only one fully directly elected by voters and the one with the greater visibility for citizens, given media coverage of its debates and decisions. The electoral system is proportional but can considerably favour the larger or highly-territorially concentrated political parties because a substantial number of the provincial districts elect a relatively small number of legislators (from one in Ceuta and Melilla to 5–7 in many provinces). Only seven provinces elected 10 parliamentary seats or more, with the provinces of Madrid and Barcelona electing the most (37 and 32 respectively).

The regional heterogeneity and varied national identities in Spain, as well as the proportional electoral system has produced a relatively fragmented party system that tended to have bipartisan tendencies around the centre-right People's Party (*Partido Popular*, PP) and the centre-left Socialist Party

<sup>4</sup> See Pérez-Nievas et al. (2014) for the local level, Vintila and Morales (2018) for the national and regional levels and Vintila et al. (2024) for the local level.

(*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE). In the mid-2010s, the party system was significantly transformed in the aftermath of the Great Recession with the eruption of new political parties, notably the radical-left Podemos, the centre-right *Ciudadanos* and the radical-right Vox. What had been relatively stable and primarily single-party majority and minority government periods were transformed into relatively unstable single-party and coalition minority governments. Moreover, the fragmentation and polarization of the party system led to the first-ever successful removal of a prime minister and government through a vote of no confidence and two failed attempts at government formation and repeated elections after those of December 2015 and April 2019.

Although we provide an initial historical overview of diversity in the national parliament in Spain since the early 1990s, the analyses zoom in to the period since 2011. During this period, there were five different legislative terms: 2011–2015 (X<sup>th</sup> term), 2016–2016 (XI<sup>th</sup>), 2016–2019 (XII<sup>th</sup>), 2019–2019 (XIII<sup>th</sup>), and 2019–2023 (XIV<sup>th</sup>). The high rates of legislator turnover mean that, even after short legislatures in 2016 and 2019, between 40 and 50% of the parliamentarians were new entrants to the chamber. This means that new cohorts of elected representatives were being selected by political parties and elected into office by voters. This provides rich data despite the focus on a single decade.

The qualitative biographical interviews were conducted with local, regional, and national elected officials who had held a seat also at some point during the period between 2011 and 2023. Some of them (the fewer) had started their political trajectories well before then, but most of them started in politics in the late 2000s or early 2010s. The composition of these interviews (19 women and 11 men) is well balanced across levels of representation: 13 were conducted with local-level politicians, 9 with regional-level officials, and 8 with national-level officials. They are also relatively balanced by ideological leanings of the party: 11 politicians elected with centre-right and right-wing parties, 19 elected with centre-left and left-wing parties.

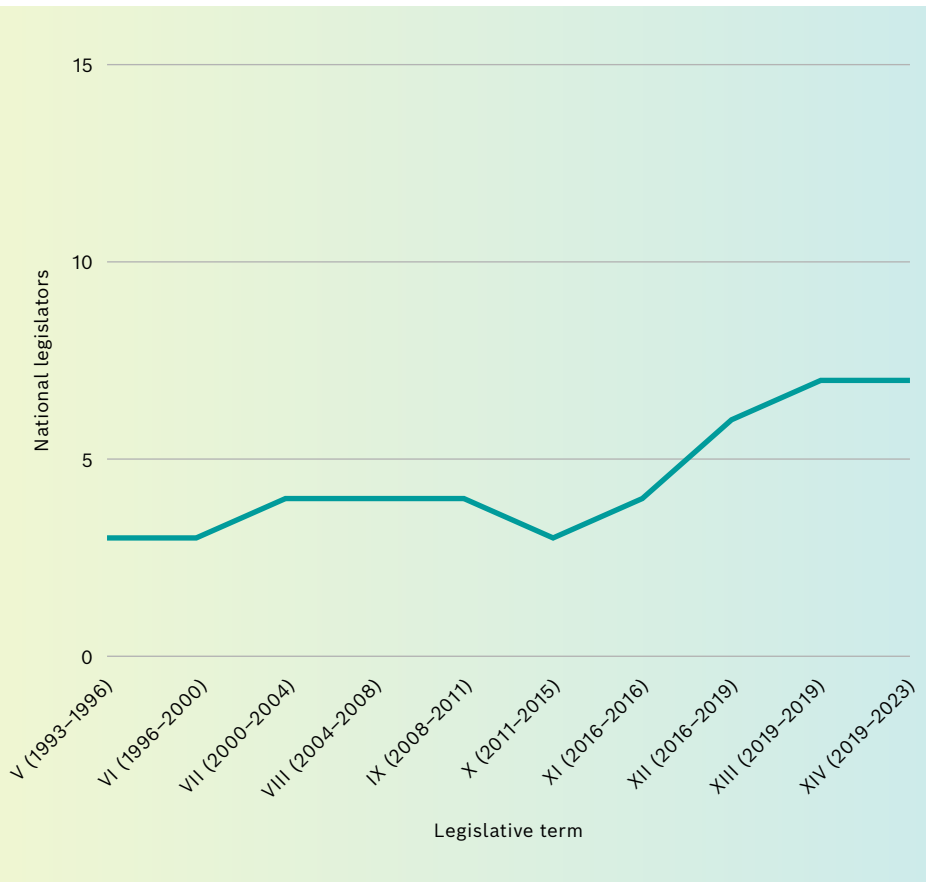
## 2.2 Getting to elected office: the underrepresentation of people of migrant ancestry

Figure 1 shows the evolution of the total number of legislators of migrant ancestry in the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* between 1993 and 2023. In a chamber that has 350 seats and many more parliamentarians on any

given legislature due to early resignations and replacements – often close to 400 different individuals get a seat at some point during a legislative term – there have only been between 3 and 7 lawmakers of migrant ancestry; that is, who were born abroad as foreign nationals or who are the immediate descendants of at least one parent born abroad as a foreign national. Although their number has slightly increased in the 30 years studied, it has done so only marginally, and in three decades only a total of 17 different parliamentarians of migrant ancestry have held a seat in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament.

As Table 1 depicts, while the small presence of parliamentarians of migrant ancestry matched the share of the foreign-born population in Spain in the early 1990s, the less than 2% present in the 2019–2023 term is woefully underrepresenting a migrant population that exceeds 15% if we only count the foreign-born residents. The gap in representation is a lot larger if statistics on the descendants of migrants who were already born in Spain existed.

**Figure 1:** The total number of migrant-ancestry legislators in the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* (1993–2023)



**Figure 1** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Table 1:** The presence of members of parliament (MPs) of migrant ancestry compared to the foreign-born population

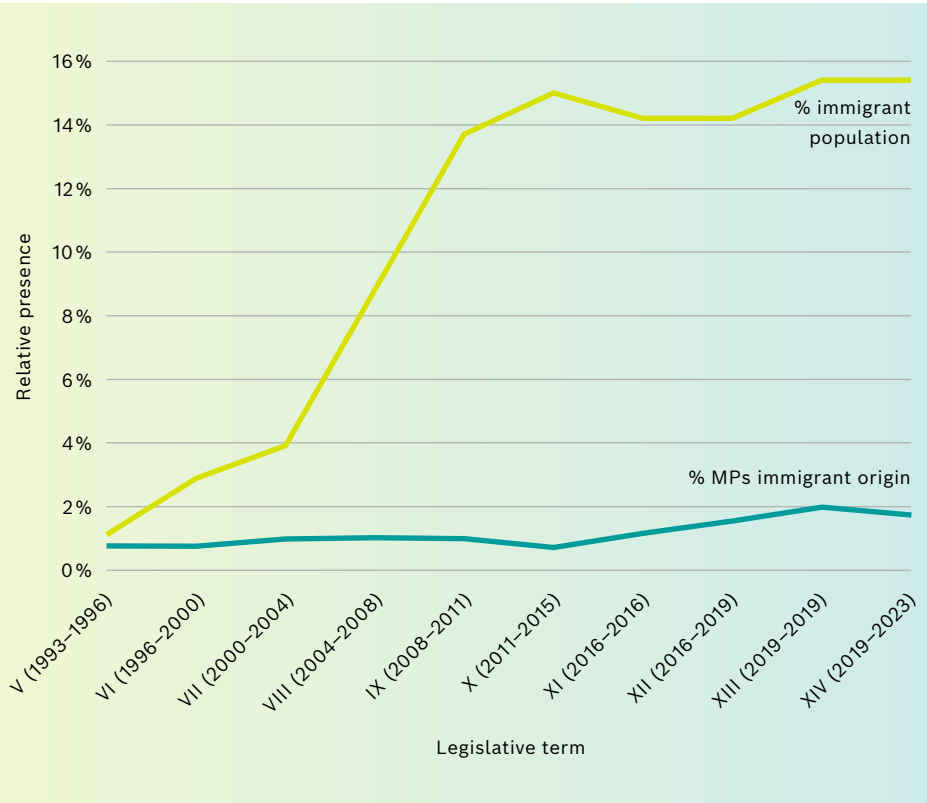
Legislative term	Total number of MPs	Migrant Ancestry	MPs of migrant ancestry	Foreign-born population at start of term in Spain
V (1993–1996)	407	3	0.7%	1.1%
VI (1996–2000)	409	3	0.7%	2.7%
VII (2000–2004)	416	4	1%	3.9%
VIII (2004–2008)	399	4	1%	8.8%
IX (2008–2011)	413	4	1%	13.7%
X (2011–2015)	437	3	0.7%	15%
XI (2016–2016)	351	4	1.1%	14.2%
XII (2016–2019)	393	6	1.5%	14.2%
XIII (2019–2019)	355	7	2%	15.4%
XIV (2019–2023)	407	7	1.7%	15.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3987</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>

**Table 1** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project. Population statistics are extracted from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE).

Note: The total does not reflect “unique” individuals, as some MPs were present in several terms and are counted several times. Only 17 different individuals have migrant ancestry for the whole period.

The constant increase in the gap is vividly illustrated by Figure 2, where we can appreciate how the rapid demographic change since the early 2000s leaves parliamentary representation far behind. It also reflects how there is no meaningful uptick in the inclusion of parliamentarians of migrant ancestry in the last 10 years either.

**Figure 2:** The share of migrant-ancestry MPs in Spain compared to the migrant population

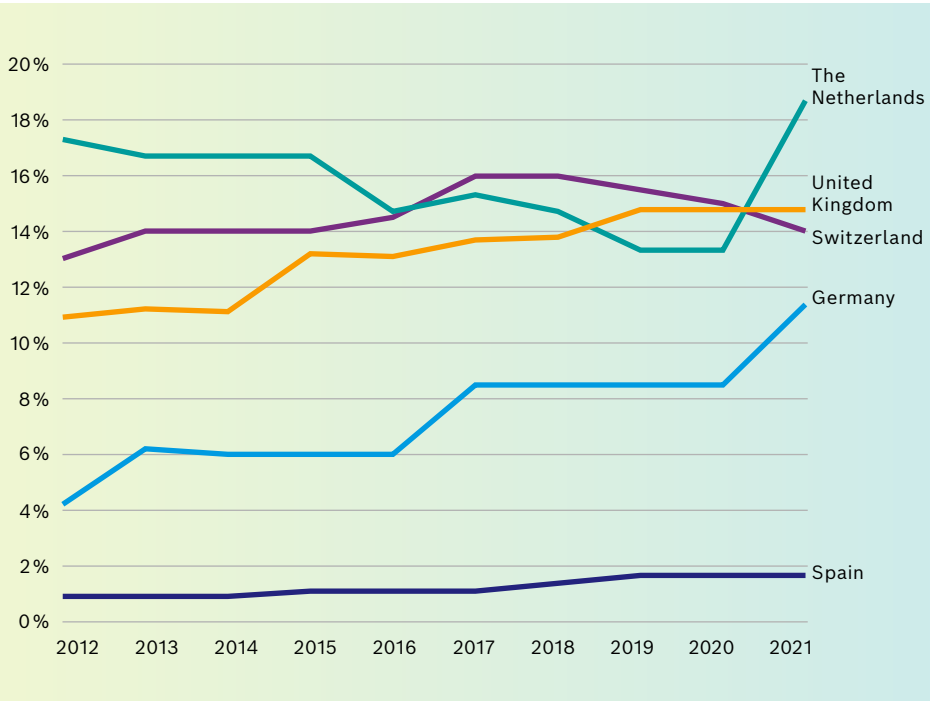


**Figure 2** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCHANCE project. Population statistics are extracted from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE).

This lack of significant progress in the inclusion of politicians of a diverse background in Spain contrasts starkly with the evolution of the presence of parliamentarians of migrant ancestry in the other four European countries studied in the REPCHANCE Europe project (Figure 3). The shares of immigrant-origin legislators have been steadily increasing in Germany and the United Kingdom in the last decade and, while not constantly upwards, they have also grown beyond 14% in the Netherlands and Switzerland. By contrast, in Spain we see stagnation.

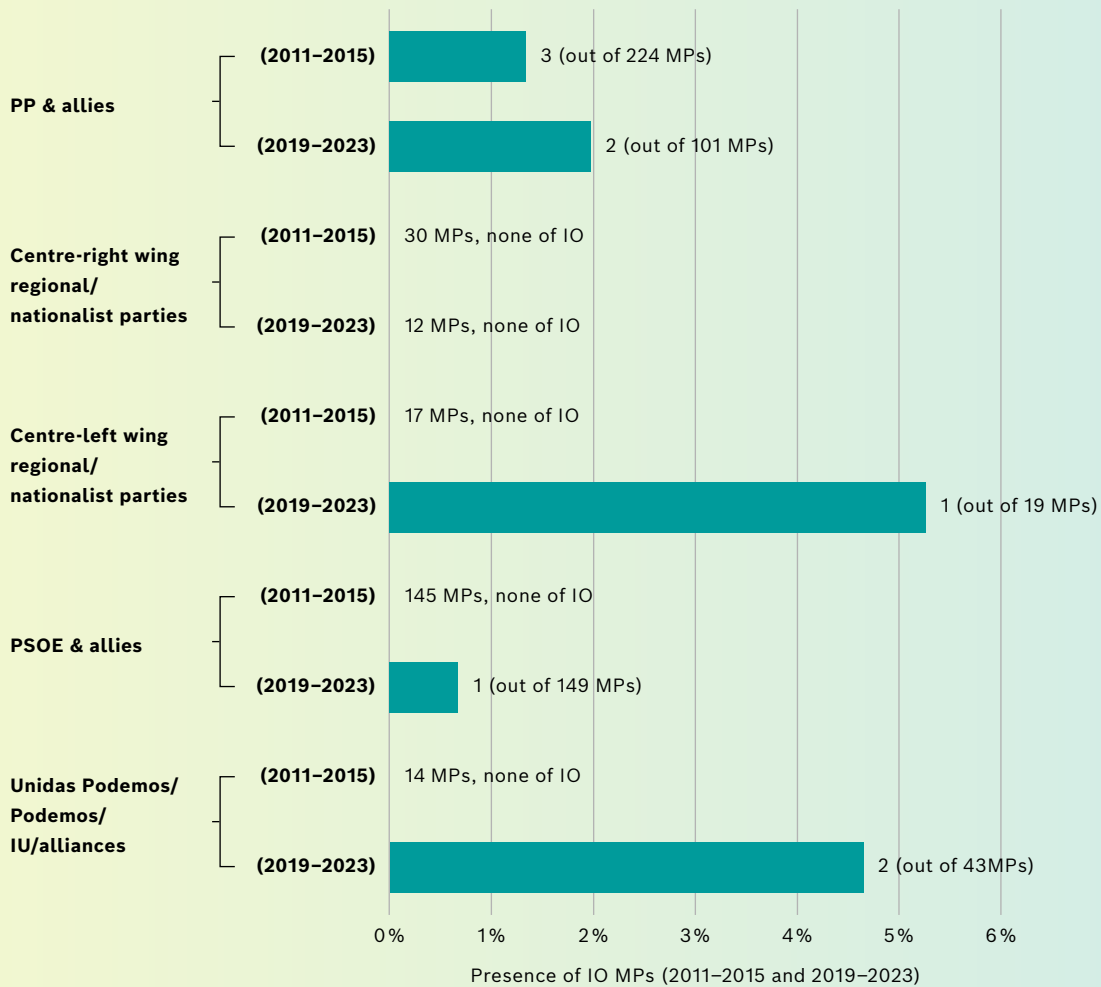
**Figure 3:** Shares of immigrant-origin MPs in five European national parliaments (2012–2021)

**Figure 3** Source: Figure 1 in Bergmann et al. (2025), REPCANCE Europe.



As we can see in Figure 4, there has been some small increase in the number and share of MPs of migrant ancestry present in the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament but it has been somewhat more noticeable among centre-left and left-wing parties, which were in fact lagging behind the centre-right PP at the start of the 2010s. Still, none of the parties includes parliamentarians of immigrant origin to the share levels of the migrant population in Spain.

**Figure 4:** The share of migrant-ancestry MPs by parties in 2011–2015 and 2019–2023



This situation contrasts with the findings for the other four countries studied in the REPCHANCE Europe project, where many centre-left and left-wing parties include migrant-ancestry legislators in shares close or above 14%: e. g., 14% for the German Greens, 17% for the German SPD, 21% for the Swiss Greens, 24% for the British Labour party, 28% for the German Die Linke, 33% for the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) and the Greens (Groen Links), and 39% for the Swiss Social Democrats (SP). As we can see, all parties in Spain are lagging behind in the representation of the diversity of the Spanish population, but centre-left and left-wing parties are markedly different in this regard to their sister parties in Europe.

**Figure 4** Source: Data for the X<sup>th</sup> term comes from the Pathways project, for the XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCHANCE project.

In fact, Table 2 shows that in Spain the parties on the centre-left and left side of the spectrum are not leading on the inclusion of migrant-origin politicians among their ranks, as the percentages are very similar for the radical right party Vox and the radical left parties (IU, Podemos, Unidas Podemos and other alliances). Although there is no reason to put the burden of increasing diversity in politics exclusively on the shoulders of ideologically progressive parties, the reality is that across Europe these are the parties that have been at the vanguard of equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives in political representation. They have been, historically, the parties leading in the push towards gender parity in politics, the ones advocating for gender quotas and those who have typically included higher shares of ethnic and migrant minority politicians within their ranks. The Spanish reality departs from that general pattern.

**Table 2** Source: Data for the X<sup>th</sup> (2011–2015) to XI<sup>th</sup> (2016–2016) terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> (2016–2019) from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> (2019–2019) and XIV<sup>th</sup> (2019–2023) from the REPCANCE project.

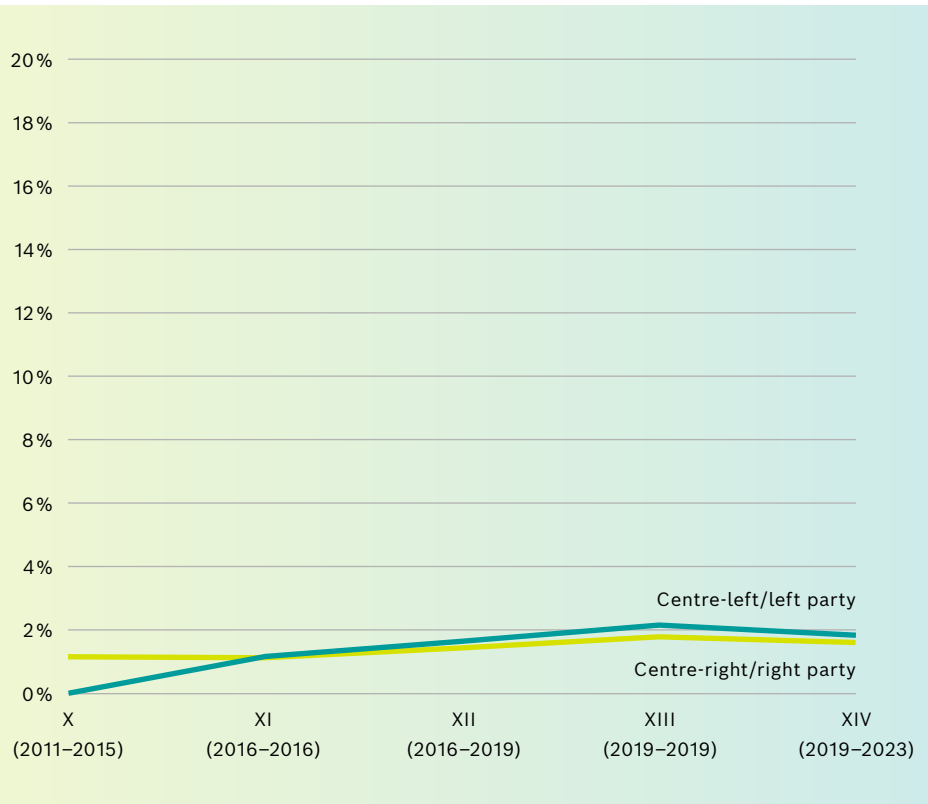
**Table 2:** The number and share of MPs by ancestry and parties in the Spanish national lower chamber (2011–2023)

Party	MPs without migrant ancestry	MPs with migrant ancestry	Total number of MPs
VOX	77 97.5%	2 2.5%	79 100.0%
PP & allies	669 98.4%	11 1.6%	680 100.0%
PDECAT	19 100.0%	0 0.0%	19 100.0%
Other centre-right regional/nationalist parties	75 100.0%	0 0.0%	75 100.0%
Cs, UPyD	150 99.3%	1 0.7%	151 100.0%
Centre-left wing regional/nationalist parties	75 94.9%	4 5.1%	79 100.0%
PSOE & allies	601 99.5%	3 0.5%	604 100.0%
Unidas Podemos/Podemos/IU/alliances	236 97.5%	6 2.5%	242 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1902 98.6%</b>	<b>27 1.4%</b>	<b>1929 100.0%</b>

As Figure 5 shows, when we aggregate the data for all political parties into just two categories – centre-right and right-wing parties and centre-left and left-wing parties – the differences in the magnitude of the underrepresentation of the population of migrant ancestry in the Spanish parliament by either side of the ideological spectrum are not significant. Both the parties of the left and of the right fail to incorporate the diversity present in Spanish society.

**Figure 5** Source: Data for the X<sup>th</sup> (2011–2015) to XI<sup>th</sup> (2016–2016) terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> (2016–2019) from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> (2019–2019) and XIV<sup>th</sup> (2019–2023) from the REPCHANCE project.

**Figure 5:** The evolution of the share of migrant-ancestry legislators by ideological leaning of the party (2011–2023)



In the same way that parties’ ideological leanings are not a major determinant for the incorporation of legislators of migrant ancestry to the Spanish parliament, the geographical concentration of the migrant-ancestry population or the size of the electoral districts are not driving diversity in political representation either. Table 3 shows the number and share of MPs by region for the period 2011–2023 alongside the percentage of the migrant population in 2019 (the start of the last legislature).

We can observe, first, that the regions with the largest shares of migrant population (e. g., the Balearic Islands or the city of Melilla) are not those with the highest shares of migrant-ancestry parliamentarians. In fact,

several of the regions with around or above 15% of the population of migrant origin have never elected an MP of migrant ancestry (e. g., Melilla, the Valencian Community or the Region of Murcia). Other regions with the highest levels of demographic concentration (the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Catalonia and Madrid) have elected a few legislators of migrant ancestry but at shares that are very similar to those of regions with far lower demographic concentration (e. g., Aragón, Ceuta, La Rioja or the Basque Country). The size of the region in terms of the number of seats allocated is also not the main driving factor, as some regions with the most seats (e. g., Andalucía) have returned proportionally fewer migrant-ancestry MPs than much smaller regions (e. g., the Basque Country).

**Table 3** Source: Data for the X<sup>th</sup> (2011–2015) to XI<sup>th</sup> (2016–2016) terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> (2016–2019) from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> (2019–2019) and XIV<sup>th</sup> (2019–2023) from the REPCANCE project. Population statistics are extracted from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) as of 1st January 2019 to match the start of the last legislative term.

Note: The total does not reflect “unique” individuals, as some MPs were present in several terms and are counted several times.

**Table 3:** The number and share of MPs by ancestry and regions in the Spanish national lower chamber (2011–2023)

Region	Total number of MPs	Immigrant Origin	MPs Immigrant Origin	Immigrant population in Spain (foreign-born)
Andalucía	341	3	0.9%	9.6%
Aragón	71	2	2.8%	13.7%
Canarias	84	2	2.4%	19.1%
Cantabria	28	0	0.0%	8.8%
Castilla y León	168	0	0.0%	7.8%
Castilla-La Mancha	114	0	0.0%	10.3%
Cataluña	256	9	3.5%	18.4%
C. A. Ceuta	6	1	16.7%	12.6%
C. A. Melilla	5	0	0.0%	22.4%
C. F. Navarra	26	0	0.0%	14.9%
C. Valenciana	185	0	0.0%	16.8%
C. Madrid	211	6	2.8%	18.6%
Extremadura	56	0	0.0%	4.2%
Galicia	126	0	0.0%	8.4%
Illes Balears	44	1	2.3%	23.3%
La Rioja	22	1	4.6%	14.1%
País Vasco	100	2	2.0%	9.5%
P. Asturias	44	0	0.0%	7.5%
R. Murcia	56	0	0.0%	15.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1943</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>14%</b>

In the qualitative interviews with Spanish elected officials,<sup>5</sup> the relevance of the demographic aspect has never been highlighted as an important factor in their selection as candidates or in discussions about diversity in electoral lists. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees did mention that the parties were recently becoming more aware of the need to better represent the diversity of origins of the population. This interviewee, a regional parliamentarian in Madrid, refers to a change of vision about the inclusion of migrant-origin populations within the PP in the region:

<sup>5</sup> All interviews have been slightly edited and condensed for clarity. They are presented in English (translated by Laura Morales) with the original in Spanish within parentheses.

*“President Ayuso is the one to launch it. I think, concerning Madrid where I am and from my point of view, that the impulse of the project of new Madrilenians stems from the vision of President Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who knows me well and moderated with me the first forum on immigration in the party. It was the first position I held. And I was lucky that, the first time I had to organise it, she was there to help me. That’s why I say that if there was someone who could see it, when it was not running, it was her.”*  
*(“La presidenta Ayuso es la que relanza. Yo creo, y hablo a nivel de Madrid obviamente, que es donde yo estoy y desde mi punto de vista, que realmente aquí la explosión de este proyecto de los nuevos madrileños es a raíz de la visión de la presidenta Isabel Díaz Ayuso, quien me conoce muy bien, quien moderó conmigo mi primer foro de inmigración en el partido. Fue mi primer cargo orgánico que tuve. Y tuve la suerte de que, la primera vez que no sabía ni cómo hacerlo, la que me ayudó fue ella. Por eso te digo que si hay alguien que pudo ver, desde cuando no estaba hecho, ha sido ella.”)* [Gustavo Eustache, man, centre-right wing party (PP), first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

In some cases, it is a parliamentarian of immigrant origin who makes the party aware of this underrepresentation and fosters greater inclusivity, as illustrated by this quote from one regional parliamentarian who is also in the leadership core of a left-wing political party in Madrid and who promoted a policy of greater diversity within electoral lists at both the regional and the national level for her party:

*“I was the one to open up the party and designed the strategy of Más Madrid for our organization so that it would resemble the population we aspire to govern at each level of participation, representation and decision-making. It’s been a slow and persistent policy of mine, which has led to Didi, Tesh and Samu to become parliamentarians. It was me, because they were obviously already activists but I opened the door of Más Madrid for them. At the end of the day, if you don’t have that experience, it may not have been pushed, they may not have entered (parliament).”*

*(“[...] yo he sido la que ha abierto y ha hecho toda la estrategia de Más Madrid para que nuestra organización se pareciera a la población a la que aspiramos a gobernar en cada uno de los espacios de participación, de representación y de decisión. Ha sido una política mía lenta y persistente que ha dado lugar a que Didi, Tesh o Samu sean los tres diputados. Es por mí, porque ellos ya venían de estar militando, evidentemente, y la puerta de Más Madrid la abrí yo, para ellos. Y al final, si tú no tienes esa experiencia, no se hubiera forzado tanto eso, a que ellos entraran.”) [Manuela Bergerot, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), first generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

The gradual inclusion of people of migrant origin can foster further recruitment at the grassroots level as well, as activists with a migrant background nudge other individuals of migrant origin to join the parties, as expressed by this former national MP of Brazilian origin:

*“Then, a person who was a grassroots activist like me, a very nice person, asked me after November 9<sup>th</sup>, the first ballot in Catalonia: ‘Maria, I see you’re very active, very feisty. How would you feel about joining some meetings we organise? We’re migrant people, some women also born here.’ And when she told me what those meetings were about, that these were party meetings, I said ‘no, no, I don’t want to get involved in that’. And that person, that I got very well along with replied, ‘just come along one day, we meet on Sundays, then you decide for yourself.’”*  
*(“Entonces, una persona con la que yo estuve haciendo trabajo de base, una persona muy maja, me preguntó, ya pasado el 9N, la primera consulta que hubo aquí en Catalunya: ‘Maria, te veo muy participativa, muy batalladora y tal. ¿Qué te parece si vienes a participar en unas reuniones que hacemos? Somos personas migrantes, mujeres también nacidas aquí’. Y cuando me dijo qué eran esas reuniones, que eran de un partido político, yo le dije, ‘quita, quita, no, no, no quiero saber nada’. Y esa persona, como me caía muy bien, me dijo, ‘pues pásate un día, nos reunimos el domingo y tú misma.’”) [Maria Dantas, woman, left-wing party (ERC), first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Hence, it is not that demographics are completely irrelevant. Politicians are highly perceptive people and understand how the social reality is changing around them and adapt accordingly, but the quantitative data and the qualitative interviews suggest that it is not necessarily the main driver.

Having described how many citizens of migrant ancestry access politics we now turn our attention to examining their main socio-economic characteristics.

### 2.3 Who gets to elected office?

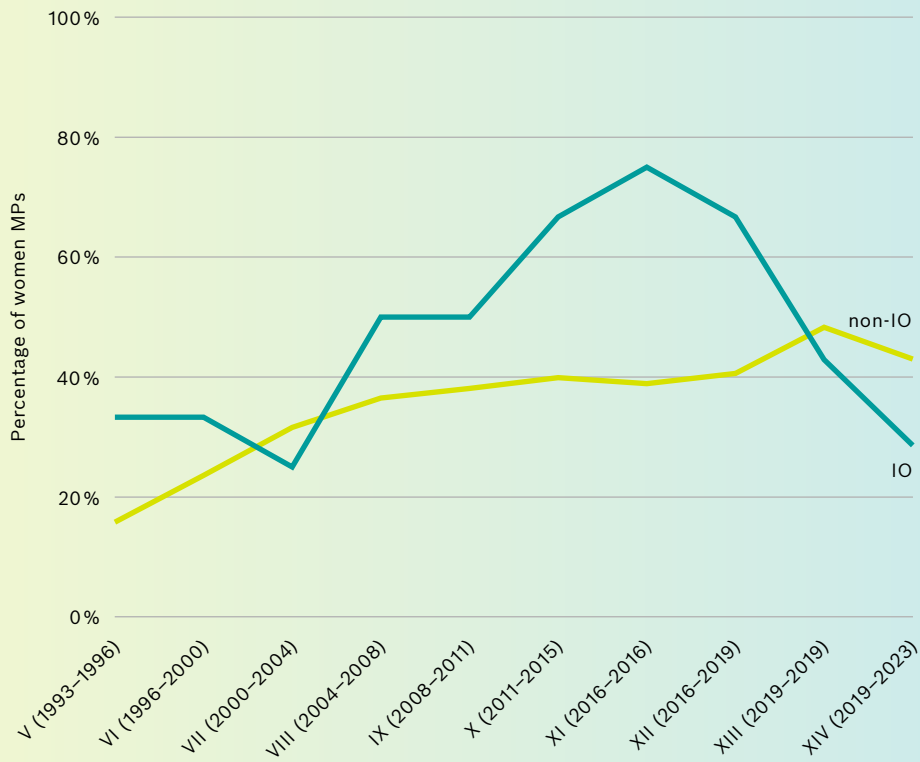
Understanding better who are the individuals of migrant ancestry who are successful in gaining elected office allows learning more about the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in politics. Figures 6 to 8 depict the evolution throughout time of the percentage of parliamentarians of immigrant origin who are women, young and who do not have a university degree, respectively. These are, typically, three demographic groups that are underrepresented in politics and, hence, add an intersectional perspective to the cumulative disadvantages in accessing elected office for migrant-ancestry individuals.

In Spain, the percentage of women in parliament has been gradually increasing since the early 1990s and reached 40 % even before the approval of parity quotas in electoral lists in 2007. In the last two studied elections of 2019, the percentage of women has surpassed 40 % for the first time. The percentage of women among migrant-ancestry MPs fluctuates considerably, to a great extent due to the handful of parliamentarians elected each legislative term. It has, nevertheless, tended to be higher than that among the remaining legislators. Hence, being a woman of migrant ancestry does not constitute a double disadvantage for getting elected into office in Spain.

By contrast, migrant-ancestry youth tend to be absent from national parliament. Except in the two terms starting in 2016, all legislators of immigrant origin have been older than 30 years. As Figure 7 shows, youth are a highly excluded group in elected office and young people of migrant ancestry seem to be at a disadvantage.

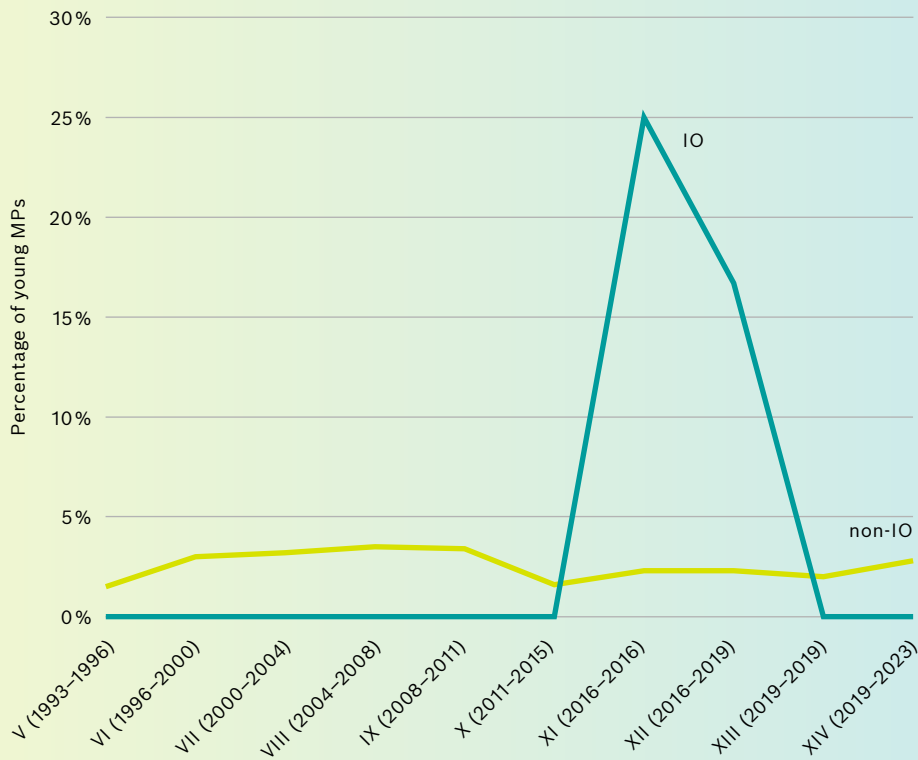
Instead, the importance of a university diploma seems to have been transformed with the eruption of new parties since the elections of December 2015. Whereas all migrant-ancestry legislators had a university degree before, from 2016 a minority of them do not hold a university diploma at rates that are higher than for the legislators with no known migrant ancestry. This suggests that parties are not placing an additional obstacle to the recruitment of parliamentarians of migrant ancestry, as migrant populations and their immediate descendants have lower rates of access to a university education than the average population. Still, the majority of them (between 75 and 90 %) have a university degree.

**Figure 6:** The percentage of women among immigrant origin (IO) and non-immigrant origin (non-IO) parliamentarians in Spain (1993–2023)



**Figure 6** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

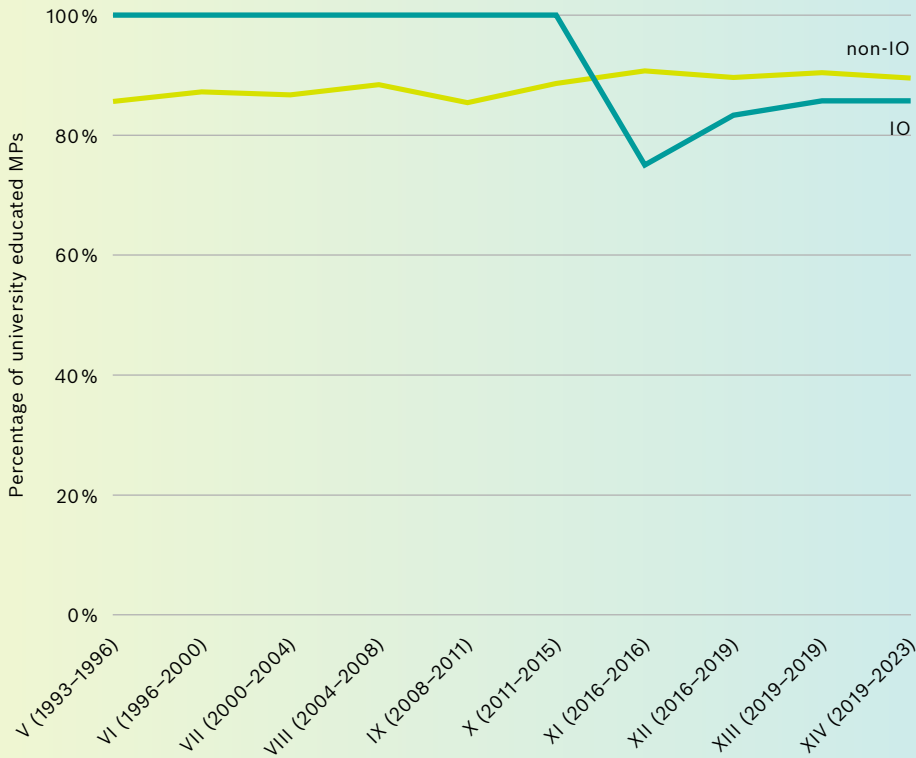
**Figure 7:** The percentage of youth (below 30) among immigrant origin (IO) and non-immigrant origin (non-IO) parliamentarians in Spain (1993–2023)



**Figure 7** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Figure 8:** The percentage of MPs with higher education among immigrant origin (IO) and non-immigrant origin (non-IO) parliamentarians in Spain (1993–2023)

**Figure 8** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

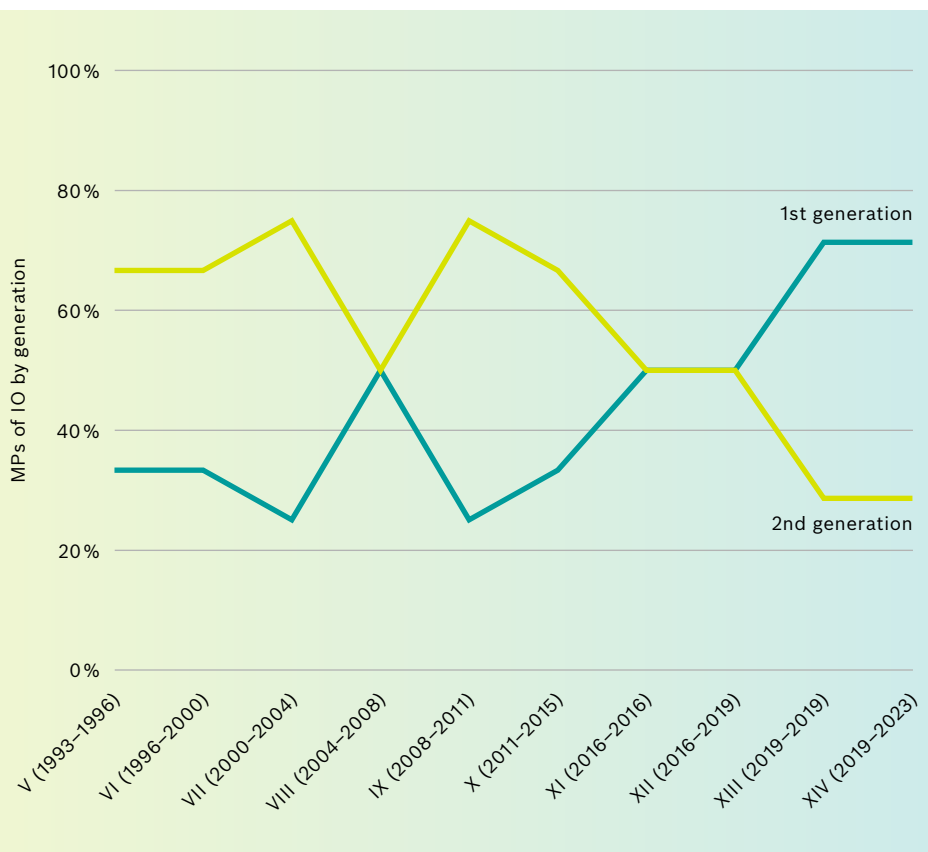


We now turn to the demographic characteristics of the migrant-ancestry parliamentarians in relation to their origins and migration trajectories. Figure 9 displays the percentage of the migrant-ancestry MPs who are foreign-born and those who are born in Spain to at least one migrant parent. Although the number of legislators per term is very small and all figures need to be read in that light, there seems to be a change in the patterns with the party system reconfiguration in 2015–2016. Up to the 2011–2015 term, most parliamentarians of migrant ancestry were the descendants of migrants or foreign parents. Since the 2016–2016 term, the pattern is reversed and we see a small cohort of legislators who are foreign-born entering parliament in higher numbers. Given that the majority of the adult migrant-ancestry population in Spain are foreign-born (first generations), this reversal of the pattern is more reflective of the actual composition of the migrant population living in Spain.

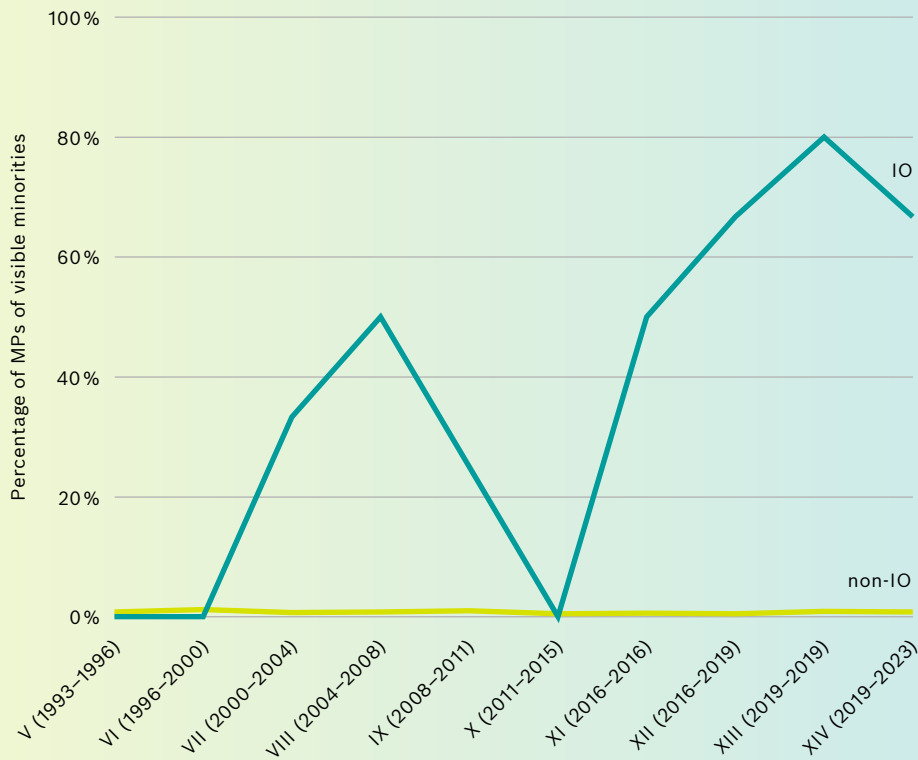
Similarly, Figure 10 shows that – with some exceptions – the share of legislators who are identifiable as of migrant ancestry by their names or physical characteristics, has been steadily increasing over time. Whereas in the 1990s and 2000s most MPs of migrant ancestry were relatively ‘invisible’ because their names, accents and skin colour made them indistinguishable from other legislators, from 2016 the pattern changes and a majority of them are visible minorities. This is consistent with the patterns shown in Figure 11 that depict an increase in the regional origins of migrant-ancestry legislators, which initially were primarily of European ancestry and gradually include more parliamentarians of Latin America and African ancestries. Moreover, all the non-native Spanish speaker MPs were also elected since 2016, thus indicating a greater openness to select and elect candidates who come from non-European and non-Spanish speaking countries.

**Figure 9** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Figure 9:** The percentage of migrant ancestry MPs who are foreign-born (1<sup>st</sup> generation) and native-born (2<sup>nd</sup> generation) in Spain (1993–2023)

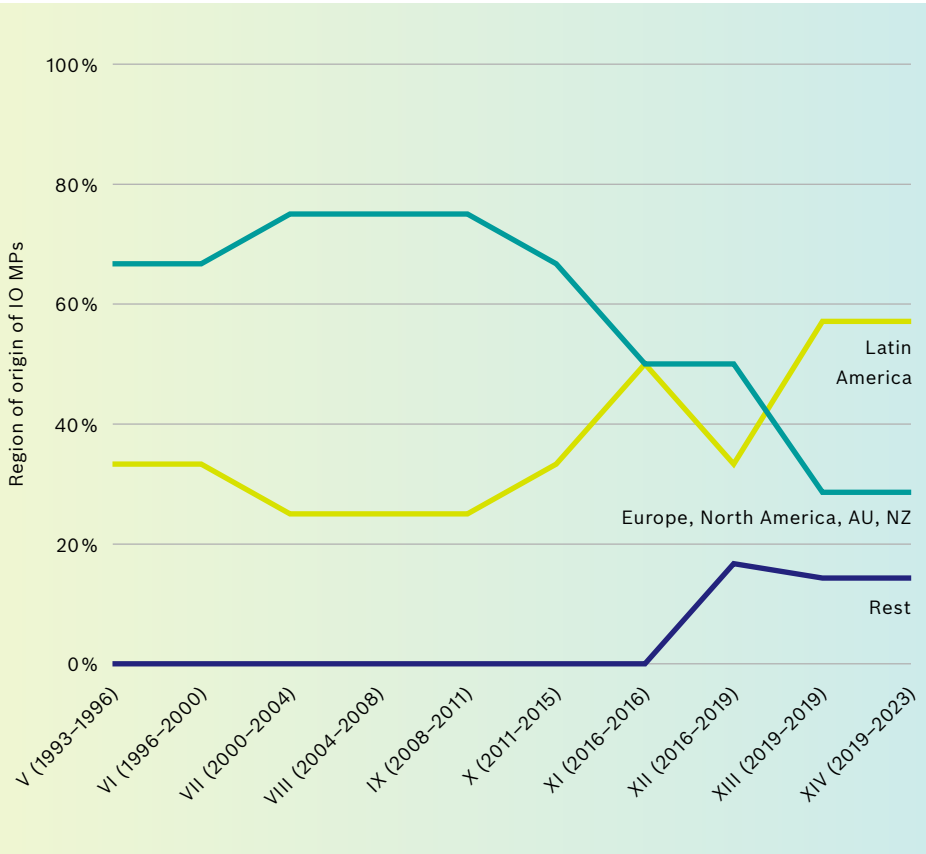


**Figure 10:** The percentage of MPs who are identifiable as a migrant-ancestry minority by name or appearance in Spain (1993–2023)



**Figure 10** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Figure 11:** The world regions of birth of migrant-ancestry MPs in Spain (1993–2023)



**Figure 11** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

The final aspect relating to the characteristics of the migrant-ancestry parliamentarians concerns the extent to which they originate from the countries that most of the population of migrant ancestry comes from. To this end, we compare the countries of ancestry of the legislators with the share in the population of the respective countries that resides in Spain. As Table 4 shows, although the MPs of migrant ancestry present in the Spanish parliament are from a variety of origins, Latin American ancestry legislators predominate. Additionally, the most represented Latin American countries of origin are not those with the highest shares in the migrant population in Spain. Indeed, by 2019, the largest Latin American communities in Spain were Colombians and Ecuadorians and no legislator has ancestry from either of these countries. Similarly, people of Moroccan descent are the most numerous group in Spain and over a period of 30 years only one legislator was of Moroccan origin: Mohammed Chaib, national MP for around one year but also a regional MP in Catalonia for seven years. With the second largest migrant community in Spain, there has not yet been any national legislator of Romanian ancestry. There are elected officials at

regional and local level of Romanian origin, such as Anka Moldovan (regional MP in Madrid between 2017 and 2019) or Aurel Truta (Mayor of a small village in the province of Palencia between 2015 and 2024), but none at the national level yet.

**Table 4:** Countries of ancestry of MPs of migrant ancestry and share of those backgrounds in the population in Spain (1993–2023)

Country of origin	Number of IO MPs	Share among IO MPs	Share among all MPs	Share in the Spanish population (Jan 1, 2019; born in given country)
Argentina	5	29.41%	0.25%	0.57%
France	3	17.65%	0.15%	0.44%
Venezuela	2	11.76%	0.10%	0.69%
Brazil	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.30%
Cuba	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.32%
Egypt	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.01%
India	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.11%
Morocco	1	5.88%	0.05%	1.86%
Senegal	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.16%
Ukraine	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.24%
Uruguay	1	5.88%	0.05%	0.17%
<b>Countries with no MPs of that ancestry and high shares in the population</b>				
Romania	0	0	0	1.25%
Colombia	0	0	0	0.94%
Ecuador	0	0	0	0.87%
United Kingdom	0	0	0	0.55%
Peru	0	0	0	0.46%
Italy	0	0	0	0.29%

**Table 4** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCHANCE project. Population statistics are extracted from the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE) as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 to match the start of the last legislative term.

Note: The figures have been calculated with "unique" individuals for both the number of IO MPs and the total number of MPs to calculate the shares among all MPs.

## 2.4 *The experience of getting elected into office*

The overall experience of getting into elected office can vary hugely from one individual to another depending on a number of factors. First, internal party politics and the processes of candidate selection determine how formalised or informal candidate selection stages are. In some parties, internal votes or party primaries where supporters select candidates are possible; in other parties, the selection of candidates is undertaken by a selection committee at the provincial, regional or national levels. Second, visibility of the migrant ancestry can become a determining factor of the experience, as it drives whether this categorisation is a factor in the chances to be selected (either way). In this section, we draw on the qualitative interviews to go deeper into the various factors that shape the varied experiences of accessing elected office. We take into account the path that took them into politics in terms of their family and social backgrounds, political socialization and how they became engaged in politics, as well as the types of tracks that they undertook during the aspiration and nomination stages. Although each biography is unique in the combination of elements that led to a given experience, we have found that visibility of the migrant ancestry shapes that experience. We first illustrate these differences with the following four profiles of national parliamentarians that held a seat at some point in the period 2011–2023.

Teófilo de Luis, who started in politics in the late 1970s/early 1980s in centre-right parties and then converged into the conservative AP-PP, and Pablo Echenique, who started in politics in the early 2010s in a moderate-liberal party to later join the left-wing Podemos in the mid-2010s. They had very different family backgrounds and political socialization experiences, but their experiences in politics are similarly shaped by the 'invisibility' of their migrant ancestry for most of their political trajectory. In fact, the invisibility of the migrant ancestry and the importance of the visible disability for Echenique is a major driver in his politicization towards increasingly left-wing positions. Both trajectories, while considerably different, illustrate the importance of the (in)visibility of migrant ancestry.

## Teófilo de Luis Rodríguez

Born 1952 in Cuba, arrived in Spain as a child in 1963. PP, MP between 1993 and 2019 (17<sup>th</sup> in the list for Madrid 1993, 10<sup>th</sup> in 2016). Not 'visible' as of migrant ancestry by name, skin tone or accent.

### **Relevant family background:**

*"[...] I remember it as a very smart thing to do, I was just 11 years old, and one day I arrived in my room, opened the closet and saw that all my American clothes had disappeared and only the stuff fashionable at that time was there – Lacoste polos, beige shorts – and I remember asking one of my aunts, who was very smart and my godmother, and she said 'look, we've come here to settle permanently and you're not going to go around dressing up like an American boy with Cuban accent.'"*

*("[...] Y lo recuerdo como algo muy inteligente, y fíjate que con 11 años, un día yo llegué a mi cuarto a abrir las puertas del armario y vi que toda mi ropa americana había desaparecido y estaba solamente lo que entonces se utilizaba: polos Lacoste, bermudas beige, y yo recuerdo que pregunté y una tía mía, que era muy inteligente y era mi madrina, me dijo 'mira nosotros hemos venido aquí a instalarnos definitivamente y tú no vas a recorrer este país vestido de americano con acento cubano'.")*

*"For the adults at home... they had thirteen kids, we had changed to three different countries – Cuba, the USA, and Spain – and with that integration philosophy they had, first, to achieve that the thirteen kids turned out decent in the widest sense of the concept possible and that we were able to forge our future as best as possible given our abilities and effort."*

*("Para los mayores de casa... tenían trece niños, nos habíamos cambiado a tres países distintos – Cuba, Estados Unidos y España – y con esa filosofía de integrar tenían que, uno, conseguir que esos trece chavales fueran trece chavales decentes en los términos más amplios del concepto y que además fuéramos capaces cada uno de forjarnos un futuro lo mejor que fuéramos capaces de lograr por nuestras capacidades y por nuestro esfuerzo.")*

### **Political socialization:**

*"[...] during the transition [to democracy], as I mentioned before I did not participate in student movements or anything of the sort..., back then, even if we were not part of any organization, democratic or otherwise, we were just living like 18, 19, 20, 21 year-olds, studying and going to university, skipping classes when we had to, passing our exams, and then going out like everyone else... But conversation started. And I was always of the view that, first, there had to be a political, economic and social*

*space that respected everyone's views, that would give them the essential freedom framework and that would offer the opportunities and personal development according to effort in equal terms from the starting point, right? Then, at that time that I started to become interested, I started working with a professor of economic thought, Pedro Schwartz, a great gentleman who taught me a lot of macroeconomics [...]"*

*("[...] en el momento de la Transición, que yo te señalaba antes que yo no pertenecía a ningún movimiento estudiantil ni nada que se le parezca..., en aquel entonces, aun cuando ninguno estábamos metido en ninguna organización, ni democrática, ni no democrática, ni nada, estábamos en lo que es la vida de un joven de 18, 19, 20, 21 años, que era estudiar e ir a la universidad a saltarte las clases que te tocaran, las papeletas aprobadas y luego salir como todo hijo de vecino... Pero sí empezaba a haber conversaciones. Y yo siempre me situé en, uno, que tenía que haber un espacio político, económico y social que respetara las opiniones de todos y cada uno de los ciudadanos, que les ofreciera el marco de libertad imprescindible y que les ofreciera sus oportunidades y su desarrollo personal en función de su esfuerzo, en términos de igualdad desde la posición de salida, ¿no? Entonces en aquel momento ya me empezó a interesar, empecé a trabajar con un catedrático de historia de las doctrinas económicas, Pedro Schwartz, un gran caballero que me enseñó muchísimo en macroeconomía [...]"*

### **First steps in politics:**

*"As I'm saying, I was already interested and was very conscious of the Constitution of [19]78... I couldn't vote for it [in the referendum] because I was stateless then, but it was obviously the confirmation of the principles I've mentioned. And, at a given moment in [19]83, coinciding with a visit of Milton Friedman to Madrid, [...], at a given moment, Pedro [Schwartz] was called by [Manuel] Fraga to set up the third leg of the democratic coalition, the Liberal Union. A party, the constitution of which I was not able to sign because I was stateless, but for which I had initiated the notary act of constitution. So, when he goes to Parliament to lead on budgets, which was Pedro [Schwartz]'s first role, I went [with him] to lead the economic advisory of the parliamentary group in [19]83. The spokesman was Miguel Herrero y Rodríguez de Miñón, who also taught us a great deal about the way the chamber worked."*

*("Yo ya te digo, tenía unas ciertas inquietudes y era muy consciente de que había la Constitución del 78... Yo no la pude votar porque era apátrida, pero evidentemente era la consagración de los principios que antes te he señalado. Y en un momento determinado en el año 83 coincidiendo con una visita de Milton Friedman a Madrid, [...] en un momento determinado, a Pedro [Schwartz], [Manuel] Fraga le llama para fundar la tercera parte*

de la coalición democrática que es la Unión Liberal. Partido, en donde yo no soy firmante de su constitución inicial, porque yo era apátrida, porque realmente el acto notarial de la constitución del partido lo inicié yo. Y entonces, cuando él se va al Congreso de los Diputados, como encargado de presupuestos, que fue la primera responsabilidad de Pedro [Schwartz], yo me fui como responsable de la asesoría económica del Grupo Parlamentario en el año 83. El portavoz del grupo era Miguel Herrero y Rodríguez de Miñón, que también nos enseñó un montón de funcionamiento de la Cámara.”)

**First inclusion in a list:**

“The decision on the lists, unfortunately in my view, and I have been a candidate for 25 years, it’s not... how can I put it? Although I was the technical secretary of the [parliamentary] group, and I know everyone in the group in that damned chamber, [...] Never did the national electoral committee request an evaluation. It could be that the president [of the party] may have asked the spokesman, who was Rodrigo [Rato], hey Rodrigo, draw me a list of the parliamentarians who should go on the lists. But an evaluation process, as is done in the private sector, [...] that doesn’t happen, perhaps in that very informal way I’m telling you. Hence, as I was already part of the [parliamentary] group leadership, supervising everything, and when I say everything I mean the activity of committees, initiatives, meetings with everyone, in summary a whole list I’m not going to bore you with, I ask Rodrigo [Rato], ‘hey, man, I want to be an MP, get me there’, and that’s how I got in, right? And, later, in subsequent lists, the mix of supervising the technical operation of the [parliamentary] group and my mandate must have been positively valued, so I stayed until I left to the Bureau [of the chamber].”

(“La elaboración de las listas, por desgracia, en mi opinión, y he sido candidato durante 25 años, no es el... ¿cómo te diría yo? Siendo yo el secretario técnico del Grupo, que conocía perfectamente todo el Grupo presentado a esa dichosa cámara, [...] Nunca jamás el comité electoral nacional pidió una valoración. Una cosa es que el presidente le haya dicho al portavoz que era Rodrigo [Rato], oye Rodrigo, hazme una lista de los diputados que tienen que ir en listas. Pero así un procedimiento de evaluación, como se hace en el sistema económico, [...] eso no se produce, se produce si acaso de forma informal como te estoy contando. Entonces, yo, evidentemente, siendo ya miembro de la dirección del Grupo, controlando todo, todo, quiere decir, todo, la actividad de las comisiones, la iniciativa, las reuniones con todo, bueno, un rollo que no te voy a contar, en un momento determinado, le digo a Rodrigo [Rato], le digo, ‘oye macho, quiero ser diputado, meterme ahí’, y así fue como yo entré, ¿entiendes? Y luego, en las sucesivas candidaturas, el mix de seguir controlando el

*funcionamiento técnico del Grupo y mi acta debieron de ser valorados satisfactoriamente y así me mantuve hasta que me fui a la Mesa.”)*

## **Pablo Echenique Robba**

Born 1978 in Argentina, arrived in Spain as a teenager in 1991. Podemos, MP between 2019 and 2023 (1<sup>st</sup> in the list for Zaragoza). Not ‘visible’ as of migrant ancestry by name (except for the second surname, which looks Italian) skin tone or accent. Has a visible motor disability. Regional MP between 2015 and 2017 and Member of the European Parliament between 2014 and 2015.

### **Relevant family background:**

*“There is no strong politicization in my family, but it’s true that there are no reactionary elements that I had to combat. Let’s say that there was a baseline that fosters politicization but doesn’t trigger it, it lets it be. And among my friends there was a lot of variation. I do have some politicized friends but many who aren’t.”*

*(“[...] no hay una fuerte politización en mi familia, pero es verdad que tampoco hay elementos reaccionarios contra los que yo tenga que combatir. Digamos que sí que hay un sustrato que facilita la politización, aunque no la impulsa, sino que la deja ser. Y luego, entre mis amistades, yo diría que hay una gran heterogeneidad. Sí que tengo amigos que están politizados y otros muchos que no.”)*

### **Political socialization:**

*“That interest [in politics] grows in me when I see that a good share of the most positive aspects of my country are collapsing and that mobilizes me in the first place. As I was initially not politicized, I mobilized initially in a somewhat chaotic way. For example, I became interested in a mix of a liberal view of politics and a communitarian one, in responsible consumption. If one thinks that parties are not the vehicle to channel demands one may ask what can I do in my individual sphere. One of the first answers that come to mind is, with my limited consumption ability, select well and buy where workers’ rights are met and where the environment is not harmed. This is one of the first attempts I make, personally so to say, and I also help organize a conference on this topic, and I also start approaching new parties. [...] I am also politicized by an economic analysis of disability. To be very brief, any person who has a high level of dependency will need several thousand euro per month in personal assistance. If one is not upper class, you can’t pay it, if you*

*can't pay it, you either end up in a care home or your family has to take care of you, hence one concludes quickly that the State should take care of it, but for the State to take care of it there needs to be a progressive fiscal system. That also politicizes me, because it is a very clear example that society is badly organized and, hence, we must organize it better. That's what takes me to more left-leaning positions [...]"*

*("A mí, ese interés se me despierta cuando veo que se está desmoronando buena parte de los elementos más positivos que existen en mi país y eso me moviliza, en un primer lugar. Como yo vengo de no estar politizado, me movilizo de una forma un poco caótica al principio. Por ejemplo, despierta mi interés, si queremos mixto entre una concepción liberal de la política y una concepción comunitaria, por el consumo responsable. Si uno piensa que los partidos no son el vehículo mediante el cual canalizar las demandas, uno se pregunta qué puedo hacer yo en mi esfera individual. Una de las primeras respuestas que viene a la cabeza es, con mi pequeña capacidad de consumo, elegir bien y comprar allí donde se cumplan los derechos laborales, donde no se agrede al medio ambiente. Ese es uno de los primeros intentos que hago, personales, digamos, también ayudo a organizar una conferencia sobre este tema y también me acerco a, digamos, nuevos partidos. [...] a mí también me politiza, un análisis económico de la discapacidad. Por ser extraordinariamente breve, cualquier persona que tenga una dependencia muy alta necesita varios miles de euros al mes en asistencia personal. Si uno no es de clase alta, no lo puede pagar, si no lo puede pagar, o acaba en una residencia, o se tiene que ocupar su familia, por lo tanto, uno concluye rápidamente que de eso se tendría que hacer cargo el Estado, pero para que el Estado pueda pagar eso, tiene que haber un sistema fiscal progresivo. Eso también me politiza, porque es un ejemplo muy evidente de que la sociedad está mal organizada, y por lo tanto, hay que organizarla mejor. Digamos que eso me va llevando a posiciones más de izquierdas [...]"*)

#### **First steps in politics:**

*"[...] My first attempt was in Ciudadanos, at that time it was a bit unclear what it was, as it almost only existed in Catalonia, but they had a certain will to open up participation to the grassroots.[...]"*

*("[...] El primer intento que hago es Ciudadanos, que en ese momento no se sabía muy bien qué era, porque prácticamente solamente existía en Cataluña, pero tenían una cierta voluntad de abrir la participación a las bases. [...]"*)

#### **First inclusion in a list:**

*"If they [Podemos] had not organized primaries, I would have never been included in a list for the European [elections], as I had no trajectory in a*

*political party and I didn't know those who were setting up the initiative [Podemos], hence, the element of the primaries I think is an objective one, although how I get there is vertiginous and circumstantial, and probably not generalizable."*

*("Si ellos [Podemos] no hubieran hecho primarias, yo nunca hubiera podido estar en una papeleta a las [elecciones] europeas, porque yo no tengo una carrera en un partido político, y no conocía a los que lanzaban la iniciativa [Podemos], por lo cual, el elemento de las primarias, yo sí creo que es objetivo, aunque cómo me acerco yo a aquello es coyuntural y vertiginoso, y seguramente no sea generalizable.")*

By contrast, Mohammed Chaib and Maria Dantas have political experiences that are shaped by the visibility of their migrant ancestry. In Chaib's case, both his name and his role in an association created by the children of migrants of Muslim faith and Islamic culture in Barcelona means that he comes to symbolize the whole community as 'the first' person of Maghrebi origin to be elected to the Catalan parliament with the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (PSC) and to one of the 17 regional parliaments in Spain. Maria Dantas is visibly of migrant origin both by her name and her accent as a non-native speaker of Spanish. She is encouraged to join the party due to her activism in anti-racist and anti-fascist activism and to join the branch of the Catalan nationalist left-wing party ERC specialized in migrants and their rights. Both cases illustrate trajectories into politics where being of migrant ancestry is central to electoral recruitment and the roles the elected representatives end up being assigned.

## **Mohammed Chaib Akhdim**

Born 1962 in Morocco, arrived in Spain in 1966 as a child, returned to Morocco as a teenager and settled in Spain to study at University. PSC-PSOE, MP between 2018 and 2019 as a replacement (6<sup>th</sup> in the list for Barcelona). 'Visibly' of migrant ancestry by name. Regional MP of Catalonia between 2003 and 2010.

### **Relevant family background:**

*"[...] my parents arrived in Catalonia in 1965. Later, like in all migratory processes, they brought the children. I arrived in Barcelona when I was four years old. I started my studies at the time in the Lluís Castells school of Sant Boi, and when I was 12 my father returned to Tangiers for various reasons. In Tangiers I continue my studies in the Spanish*

*School of Tangiers, learning... my studies were in Spanish, French and Arabic. And its there where I start understanding what is the Moroccan world, what is the Arab world, what is the Moroccan, Arab, Muslim culture. It's there that I start to understand the different cultural perspectives, the differences between one country and the other, between one society and the other. And when I returned, all of us who studied in the Spanish School, when we finished COU [pre-university course], I was only a few years in Tangiers, I've spent most of my life here in Spain. When I finished COU, they sent us to the University of Granada directly. There I started my degree in Pharmacy, I am a pharmacist. I started my degree there, but given that I had family in Barcelona, my parents, my siblings, all had returned, so I requested the transfer and came to Barcelona."*

*("[...]mis padres llegaron en 1965 a Cataluña. Posteriormente, como todo proceso migratorio, nos trajeron a los hijos. Yo vine a Barcelona con cuatro años. Empecé mis estudios en ese momento en el colegio Lluís Castells de Sant Boi y a los 12 años, mi padre vuelve a Tánger por diferentes motivos. Y en Tánger continuó mis estudios en el Colegio Español de Tánger aprendiendo... mis estudios eran en español, en francés y en árabe. Y es ahí donde empiezo ya a conocer qué significa el mundo marroquí, qué significa el mundo árabe, qué significa la cultura marroquí, árabe y musulmana. Y ahí es donde empiezo a ver ya diferencias de perspectivas culturales, diferentes entre un país y otro, entre una sociedad y otra. A la vuelta, todos los que estudiábamos en el Colegio Español al acabar el COU, estuve pocos años en Tánger, y yo prácticamente toda mi vida está hecha aquí en España. Al acabar el COU nos enviaron a la Universidad de Granada directamente. Allí empecé mi carrera de Farmacia, yo soy farmacéutico. Empecé mi carrera allí, pero dado que tenía familia en Barcelona, mis padres, mis hermanos, todos habían vuelto, pues yo solicité el traslado y me vine a Barcelona.")*

**Political socialization:**

*"No, no, not at all at home, not at all, neither my parents, nor my siblings, nor my cousins, nobody, not my nephews, nobody. Nobody had any contact with the Socialist Party at that time, they didn't even know about it."*  
*("No, no, el entorno familiar para nada, en absoluto, ni mis padres, ni mis hermanos, ni primos, ni nadie, ni sobrinos, ni nadie. Nadie tenía, digamos, un contacto con el Partido Socialista, en ese momento, ni siquiera lo conocían.")*

**First steps in politics:**

*"[...] I had joined the Socialist Party already in 1995, that is one year after creating the Foundation [Ibn Battuta], I joined the Socialist Party of*

*Catalonia [...] My interest was sparked because in Morocco, at the time, the Socialist Party was governing in Morocco. And, truthfully, Yusufi [Abderraman Yusufi] caught my attention. The values they defended, in the Socialist Party, the values of equality, the values of citizens' rights, the advocacy for women's rights."*

*("[...] yo me había afiliado al Partido Socialista ya en 1995, o sea a un año después de constituir la Fundación [Ibn Battuta] me afilié al Partido Socialista de Catalunya [...] Surge el interés porque en Marruecos, en ese momento, quien gobernaba era el Partido Socialista, en Marruecos. Y, la verdad, el Yusufi [Abderramán Yusufi] me llamó mucho la atención. Los valores que ellos defendían, en el Partido Socialista, los valores de igualdad, los valores de derechos, de la defensa de los derechos de la mujer.")*

**First inclusion in a list:**

*"In 2003, as I say, Pasqual Maragall was running as a candidate for the Generalitat [the government of Catalonia] and asked, through some people I knew, the MEP Ana Terrón and Dr. Achotegui who work on migration topics, they told me 'Pasqual Maragall wants to visit the association [Association Ibn Battuta]'. I said 'perfect, very well'. He came, visited the association, [...] and we explained everything we did in the association. [...] At that time, Pasqual Maragall, a few days later, tells me that he is going to run as a candidate for the Generalitat and that one of the issues he wants to discuss during the campaign is immigration. He then says 'I would like, I'm going to announce at La Pedrera [a historical building in Barcelona], in Catalonia, here in Barcelona, and I would like you to introduce me'. Well, I was a bit astonished, I thanked him very much and he said, 'no, no, I want people to see that the person who introduces the president of the Generalitat is a person of Maghrebi origin, that he is called Mohammed, but I want to give it that sense of normality.' [...] And once that announcement happened, when I was leaving, he said 'Chaib, Chaib, don't leave yet, I'd like to talk to you for a minute'. He then approached me and said 'in the same way that they had incorporated, that the Socialist Party of Catalonia had incorporated with normality other people who had arrived from various places in Spain, Andalusians, Extremadurans, Galicians, etc., and nobody asked them now if they were Catalan or not, because they fully were so, the time has arrived that a person of Maghrebi origin, Spanish, but of Maghrebi origin can be in the Parliament of Catalonia.' I was petrified, and he then said 'what I'm proposing isn't to include you in a list position at the end and that you won't be elected, no, I want to place you in the top positions so that you will become a parliamentarian if you accept.'"*

*("En el 2003 como digo, Pasqual Maragall se quiere presentar como candidato a la Generalitat y pide a través de unas personas que yo conocía,*

la eurodiputada Ana Terrón y el doctor Achotegui, que trabajan en estos temas de inmigración, me dijeron ‘Pasqual Maragall quiere venir a visitar la entidad’. Yo les dije, ‘perfecto, me parece muy bien’. Vino, visitó la entidad, [...] allí ya le explicamos todo lo que hacíamos en la entidad. [...] En ese momento, Pasqual Maragall, pasan unos días y me dice que él se va a presentar como candidato a la Generalitat, y que uno de los temas de los que va a hablar en campaña va a ser el de inmigración. Y entonces, me dice ‘me gustaría, lo voy a hacer en la Pedrera, en Cataluña, aquí en Barcelona, y me gustaría que me presentaras’. Bueno yo me quedé un poco parado, le dije que se lo agradecía muchísimo y me dijo, ‘no, no, es que yo quiero que la gente vea que quien presenta al presidente de la Generalitat es una persona de origen magrebí, que se llama Mohammed, pero que quiero dar esa normalidad.’ [...] Y entonces, una vez se produjo ya esa presentación, cuando ya me marchaba, me dijo: ‘Chaib, Chaib, no te marches, que me gustaría hablar contigo un momento’. Bueno, entonces él se acercó y me dijo que, ‘al igual que se habían incorporado, que el Partido Socialista de Cataluña había incorporado con normalidad a otras personas que habían llegado de diferentes sitios de España, andaluces, extremeños, gallegos, etcétera, y que nadie les preguntaba hoy si eran catalanes o no, porque lo eran plenamente, que había llegado el momento de que una persona de origen magrebí, español, pero de origen magrebí pudiera estar en el Parlamento de Cataluña’. A mí me dejó parado y entonces me dijo ‘lo que te estoy proponiendo no es ponerte en un puesto en las listas de manera que vayas al final o tal, y no vayas a salir, no, no, no, yo quiero ponerte en los primeros puestos, de manera que vas a ser diputado si tú aceptas.’”)

## **Maria Carvalho Dantas**

Born 1962 in Brazil, arrived in Spain in 1994 as an adult. ERC, MP between 2019 and 2023 (5<sup>th</sup> in the list for Barcelona in May 2019, 4<sup>th</sup> in November 2019). ‘Visibly’ of migrant ancestry by name and accent.

### **Relevant family background:**

*“I would not approach political parties. I already had enough on my plate with two jobs, taking care of two babies, my divorce and being undocumented, if you see what I mean.”*

*(“Yo no me acercaba a los partidos. Es que ya tenía mucho con tener dos trabajos y cuidar dos bebés, y estar separada y sin papeles. No sé si me explico.”)*

**Political socialization:**

*“[...] my ideology is obviously a left-wing political ideology. In Brazil I always voted PT and PSOL. [...] I had been around in Brazil in [19]85, the dictatorship in Brazil ended in [19]85. Hence, I experienced, as an adolescent, but I experienced... [the dictatorship], my family also experienced it, my parents, friends and also my older friends. I always studied repressive movements in Europe, I had a lot of knowledge at the time of the implications of the Francoist regime, I was always interested in social movements [...] with my intellectual curiosity, also while at university in Brazil, studying Law.”*

*“[...] mi ideología es obviamente una ideología política de izquierdas. En Brasil siempre he votado PT y PSOL. [...] Yo había salido en el 85 ahí en Brasil, la dictadura en Brasil acabó en el 85. Entonces, yo viví, era adolescente, pero viví... [la dictadura], mi familia también vivió, los amigos de mis padres y amigos míos también mayores que yo. Siempre estudié los movimientos represivos de Europa, tenía mucho conocimiento en aquella época de lo que supuso el franquismo, siempre me interesé bastante por movimientos, [...] con mi inquietud intelectual, a nivel también de universidad en Brasil en Derecho.”*

**First steps in politics:**

*“And it all started there, in my daughters’ school. We achieved many things. [...] It was my first social activism, in the parents’ association, well, I already had a trajectory in Brazil. I participated in the [Brazilian] National Students’ Union. When I got here, we had thrown away Collor de Mello from power, with the impeachment, with street protests, I’m sure you will know the case. Then, I joined all sorts of movements here in Barcelona, with two small kids, I was undocumented, and gradually I got to know other women, and I want to explicitly speak about women. [...] And by the time of November 9 [2014, a public consultation on the future of Catalonia], there was this consultation here in Barcelona and I was quite involved with another Colombian friend because my world was El Raval [a neighbourhood in Barcelona], the associations in El Raval, and I got really involved, because I was appealed by the issue, I was appealed by the famous right to decide.”*

*“Y ahí empezó todo, en la escuela de mis hijas. Conseguimos muchas cosas. [...] En la primera participación social, que fue en el AMPA, bueno, yo ya venía de Brasil. Yo participaba de la União Nacional dos Estudantes. Cuando yo vine, habíamos básicamente echado a Collor de Mello, del poder, con el impeachment, con manifestaciones en las calles, seguro que conoces el caso. Entonces, yo me metí en todos los movimientos habidos y por haber aquí en Barcelona, con dos niñas pequeñas, no tenía papeles, y poco a poco he ido conociendo otras mujeres y quiero feminizar mucho*

*el tema. [...] Y en la época del 9N, que se hizo una consulta aquí en Barcelona, yo estuve muy involucrada con otra amiga mía colombiana, porque mi mundo era El Raval, eran las entidades del Raval, y me involucré bastante a nivel de participación, porque a mí me interpeló mucho el tema, porque a mí me interpelaba el famoso derecho a decidir.”)*

**First inclusion in a list:**

*“In four or five occasions, I was asked and it was suggested I was asked to participate in a list of candidates. For example, I remember the time when Alfred Bosch called me to participate for the elections won by Ada Colau [May 2015], you remember? I think it was against Ada Colau. And I replied ‘no, I have no ambition to hold political office, my work is in the grassroots, it’s to influence internally [in the party] because through internal influence through the grassroots we can effect public policy change because this party governs a lot of local councils, a lot of cities and someday it will govern Catalonia.’ [...] Later, also for the Parliament of Catalonia, I also said no. Then for the Congreso [December 2015] I said no and I gave the name of a person I knew [...] I was called by Marta Rovira and it’s not like I was speaking every day with the leadership of the party, I had never had a meeting with Marta Rovira [...] So they called me to participate in the elections of the Parliament of Catalonia [in 2018]. [...] I was very sorry to say no, but I also said no [...] The context is very important, to explain the context of how I entered the Congreso, what moved me intimately and personally to accept after four or five requests, right?, to accept a request from my sectorial branch and Esquerra Republicana to join the lists, and that was when Marielle [Franco] was killed in 2018. I remember that in March 2018 the vote intention for Bolsonaro was not more than two or four percent and in September-October this man wins the elections. [...] Then in October or November VOX wins the elections in Andalusia [December 2018] and a few candidates from VOX are elected to the Andalusian Parliament. This was a total fall in April, sorry, in March, February/March, March [2019] I get a call and they ask me to join the lists of Esquerra [April 2019]. At first, I said no [...] and I’m going to tell you the exact date when my head turned around to accept to join the lists. On March 8, [...] I hear a sentence by Marielle [...] the famous sentence by Marielle that says ‘we have to occupy, the women, the Black women, the indigenous women, the prostitutes, the lesbians, the peasants, the raped women’, and she starts naming lots of women, ‘we have to occupy because if we do not occupy, they are going to do it for us, and we have a voice and a vote...’ Well, I looked at my daughter next to me and I said ‘Natalia, I’m going to accept, I’m going to accept’, and that’s it, I accepted and joined the list”.*

“En cuatro o cinco ocasiones me llamaron y me votaron, me llamaron para participar en listas de candidaturas. Por ejemplo, me acuerdo en la época me llamó Alfred Bosch, para participar cuando ganó Ada Colau [en mayo de 2015], no sé si te acuerdas. Yo creo que fue contra Ada Colau. Y yo dije ‘no, no tengo ningún tipo de aspiración a ejercer cargos políticos, mi trabajo es de base, es hacer incidencia interna porque yo creo que haciendo incidencia interna desde abajo se puede conseguir algún cambio de política pública, porque este partido está gobernando un montón de ayuntamientos de un montón de ciudades y algún día gobernará Cataluña.’ [...] Luego, también para el Parlament de Catalunya, que yo igualmente dije que no. Luego para el Congreso de los Diputados [diciembre de 2015], y yo dije que no, y di un nombre de una persona que yo conocía [...] me llamó Marta Rovira, yo ya te digo, no es que me hablara cada día con los cargos del partido, que nunca había hecho ningún tipo de reunión con Marta Rovira [...] Y, entonces, me llama para participar en las elecciones del Parlament de Catalunya [en 2018]. [...] Entonces, me dolió muchísimo decir que no, pero yo también dije que no [...] Porque es también muy importante el contexto, explicar el contexto, cómo entro en el Congreso, de hecho íntimamente y personalmente qué me mueve a aceptar por, yo qué sé, cuarta o quinta vez, ¿no?, un pedido de la sectorial y de Esquerra Republicana para ocupar un puesto en unas listas, que es cuando matan a Marielle [Franco] en 2018. Me acuerdo que en marzo del 2018 la intención de voto a Bolsonaro no pasaba del dos o cuatro por ciento, y en septiembre-octubre este hombre gana las elecciones. [...] Entonces, en octubre o noviembre VOX gana las elecciones de Andalucía [diciembre de 2018] y entran unos cuantos de VOX en el Parlamento Andaluz. Esto fue ya la debacle total y en abril, perdón, en marzo, febrero-marzo, marzo [de 2019] me llaman y me hacen una propuesta para ir a las listas de Esquerra [de abril de 2019]. Yo en un primer momento dije que no. [...] y voy a decirte el día exacto que me da un giro en la cabeza para aceptar a ir en las listas. El 8 de marzo [...] yo escucho una frase que dijo Marielle [...] la famosa frase de Marielle Franco que dice ‘tenemos que ocupar las mujeres, las negras, las indígenas, las prostitutas, las bolleras, las campesinas, las violadas’, y empieza a decir un montón de mujeres, ‘tenemos que ocupar porque si no ocupamos pues lo van a hacer por nosotras, y tenemos voz y voto...’ Bueno, en fin yo miro al lado a mi hija y digo, ‘Natalia, yo voy a aceptar, yo voy a aceptar’, y ya está, y acepté, fui a listas.”)

These four profiles illustrate the wide range of paths into politics and elected office, they are not meant to ‘represent’ all paths taken by the many personal biographical histories of each individual, but they illustrate how the visibility of migrant ancestry can become a critical factor in that pathway. We now tease out a bit more each of the elements that leads to starting a career in politics.

### Politics in the background

In most cases, those following a political path to elected office were politicized in primary political socialization settings – notably their families and their schools or universities. This is not surprising, as these are the primary political socialization settings for most citizens. Schools and universities provide fertile ground for political awareness around student elections and various forms of mobilization (e. g., associations, protests, etc.).

In general terms, the family setting was very important for many politicians because politics and current affairs would be discussed and political engagement was seen as a positive aspect. These interviewed politicians expressed how politics was at the heart of family life, and their most immediate environment, since they can remember:

*“Well, I would say that since always, as I have an older brother who is seven years older than me, and it was when he started secondary school. He joined the youth branch of the Communist party of Uruguay. He studied a lot, got a lot of political training, and he studied and he practiced his speeches with me trying to persuade me of the importance of all of this [laughs].”*

*(“Mira, yo te diría que desde siempre, porque yo tengo un hermano mayor que me lleva siete años, que él fue cuando entró al Liceo. Entró a militar políticamente en las juventudes comunistas del Uruguay. Y entonces estudiaba mucho, hay mucha formación política, estudiaba y él un poco se ejercitaba conmigo tratando de convencerme a mí sobre la importancia de esto [ríe].”) [Ana Surra, woman, Catalan left-wing party (ERC), national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

*“The truth is that it was a very natural process because when you live in a very politicized context, and it’s true that a lot of elements converged, it converged being a person who comes from a reality when you can clearly see the need of change, the injustices embodied in your loved ones, in your family, you friends, your people, and realizing that this is not acceptable, that something must be done, right? And, as I say, a refugee camp like those in Tinduf, the Sahrawi camps, we are raised with an ideology, we are raised with politics as a tool to change things, so it’s just a matter*

*of finding the space to continue exploiting that interest, triggering it and working around it.”*

*“Pues la verdad es que fue una cosa muy natural, porque realmente cuando tú vives en un contexto politizado, y yo es verdad que confluyeron muchos elementos, confluyó el elemento de ser persona que viene de una realidad en la que ves muy claramente la necesidad de cambio, la injusticia personificada en tus seres más queridos, en tu familia, en tus amigos, en tu gente y decir eso no puede ser, eso hay que hacer algo, ¿no? Y ya te digo, un campamento de refugiados como los campamentos de Tinduf, los campamentos Saharauis que a nosotros nos inculcan la ideología, nos inculcan la política como arma para cambiar las cosas, es encontrar el espacio para seguir explotándolo, despertándolo y trabajándolo.”*

*[ES\_POL\_19, man, left-wing party (PSOE), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

It is not unusual to find politicians whose parents or close family members had been actively engaged in politics either at the party grassroots level or as elected officials. This family history of political engagement can be both in the country of ancestry of their parents or in Spain. Several interviewees mention parents who were left-leaning or activists in the Communist party as the background that politicizes them into progressive politics.

*“I think that my family has a lot of influence on me. Both my mother’s and my father’s. My father was a member of the Communist Party in (another country). And also my mother’s family, my grandmother was a member of the Communist Party during the Transition [to democracy] and my mother, ever since I can remember, has taken me to demonstrations, for example I remember the ones of ‘No to war’ [against the war in Iraq from 2003], when I was quite young... It has always been something that has been very present in my house.”*

*“Yo creo que me influye mucho mi familia. Tanto la materna como la paterna. Mi padre fue militante del Partido Comunista en (otro país). Y también la familia materna, mi abuela era del Partido Comunista en la Transición y mi madre, desde que yo tengo memoria, me ha llevado a manifestaciones, por ejemplo recuerdo las del ‘No a la guerra’, que yo era bastante pequeña... Siempre ha sido algo que ha estado muy presente en mi casa.”* *[ES\_POL\_03, woman, left-wing party (Podemos), national level, second generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

*“Well, my origins are family-related because I was the son of a local councillor. I am from Colombia and my father was elected three times there. In a locality in Colombia in the province of Quindío, and then*

*some of my brothers have also held office. And, so, public affairs, politics, was always very present in my family. It's true that we are a lot and some have chosen politics and others went to the private sector. So, my interest from a very young age is in politics and that led me to have a very clear goal when I finished my degree and chose my path, right?"*

*("No, mis orígenes son familiares, porque yo fui hijo de concejal electo. Yo soy de Colombia, y entonces mi padre fue tres veces electo allí. En una población allí en Colombia, en el departamento del Quindío, y luego pues también tengo hermanos que han asumido responsabilidades públicas. Y entonces, bueno, pues en realidad siempre como que la cosa pública, la cosa política, siempre estuvo muy presente en mi familia. Y bueno, pues el interés me viene un poco de familia. Es verdad que somos muchos, hay unos que han optado por la política y otros que no. Hay unos que han optado por servicio público y otros han optado directamente por la empresa privada. Entonces mi inquietud desde muy pequeño es en la política y eso pues me llevó a tenerlo muy claro cuando ya terminé la carrera y un poco los derroteros, ¿no?") [Orlando Chacón, man, centre-right party (PP), local and regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Politicians who come as refugees or as the children of refugees repeatedly evoke the importance of the political asylum family experience, but also how that interacts with the environment where they land in the country of residence. For example, a Spanish politician from Western Sahara evokes the mix of factors of growing up in a refugee camp in Algeria and being adopted by a family that was active in local politics as councillors:

*"And I was the result of a political gamble, right? Of a mayor, of a councillor who is my foster mother, who at the time is no longer politically active, but was in the 'rearguard' and who evidently decided that I should be worthy, not only of living that experience, but also of having the great fortune, I saw that over the years. Bear in mind that I came when I was seven years old and, evidently, I absorbed politics there, because in the camps there is a lot of political, social, human rights activism and when you get here evidently that is when you see the opportunity of how politics well used, well operated, can also give you and can be a generator of opportunities, of rights. And, of course, seeing that I was welcomed by a political family, that I was welcomed by a mayor who supported me and another group of boys and girls, and that we came to spend the summer, from there the fight continued, right?"*

*("Y yo fui consecuencia de una apuesta política, ¿no? De un alcalde, de una regidora que es mi madre de acogida, que ya no estaba en política activa, pero sí que estaba en la retaguardia y que evidentemente decidieron que yo debía de ser merecedor, no solo de vivir esa experiencia,*

*sino tener también la gran fortuna, eso lo vi con los años. Piensa que yo vine con siete años y evidentemente engullía allí política, porque en los campamentos se hace muchísimo activismo político, social, de derechos humanos y cuando llegas aquí evidentemente es cuando ves la oportunidad de cómo la política bien utilizada, bien trabajada, también te puede dar y puede ser generadora de oportunidades, de derechos. Y, evidentemente, el ver que a mí me acogió una familia política, me acogió un alcalde que apostó por mí y por otro grupo de chicos y chicas, y vinimos a pasar el verano y a partir de allí, pues bueno, la lucha siguió, ¿no?”* [ES\_POL\_19, man, left-wing party (PSOE), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

The school setting was mentioned by several politicians in Spain as the place where their awareness of being an ethnic or racial minority developed, and they often mention it as a critical experience for them to become conscious of what that meant, as this quote vividly illustrates.

*“I always say that my first experience of racism was when I arrived here, because I came to Madrid when I was four years old. A few months later I turned five and, since it was summer, I started school straight away. At the beginning of the school year, as soon as I started, that’s when I had my first experience of racism, because a child told me ‘don’t touch me or you’ll stain me’. That’s when the burden of how others see you dawned on me. And, throughout my life, I’ve been experiencing these situations of racism at school and you grow up with that, right?”*

*(“Yo siempre comento que la primera experiencia de racismo que vivo es cuando llego aquí, porque yo llegué a Madrid con cuatro años. A los pocos meses cumpla cinco y al pillarme en verano comienzo el colegio directamente. Al inicio del curso, nada más entrar, es cuando vivo mi primera experiencia de racismo, porque un niño me dice ‘no me toques que me manchas’. Entonces cae sobre mí la carga de lo que es el cómo el otro te ve. Y a lo largo de mi vida, he ido viviendo esas situaciones de racismo dentro del colegio y vas creciendo con eso, ¿no?”*) [Diana Paredes, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

Interestingly, not many of the politicians interviewed evoke triggering events or periods that pushed them into politics or were critical in shaping their political path, except for the emergence of Podemos in 2014 around the “Indignados” and “15M” movement after the financial crisis. This is obviously an important moment of political effervescence for left-wing politicians, but it was also an opportunity to trigger counter-reactions. For example, this Spanish politician connects the emergence of the 15M movement,

the social and political mobilization, to her activation into party politics despite having been raised in a very political family:

*“Well, from a very young age I started to be active in NGOs, more of a social rights nature. At 18 or 19 years old. And then the 15M [the so-called ‘Indignados’ movement] was what reactivated me in a more active way with politics and put me more, much more, in contact with politics. [...] I studied the degree when I was older and the whole process of the 15M caught me somewhere in the middle, and from that moment on, I got interested the most on a political level, in active politics, by these parties that appeared with these movements of young people who go out on the streets at the time to question, this system that we refer to as the regime of [19]78. That’s when I got into politics in a more active way and I was part of the first groups of Podemos that were created in Alicante. That’s how it happened.”*

*(“Bueno, desde bien jovencita yo empecé a militar en ONGs, más de carácter de derechos sociales. Con 18 o 19 años. Y luego el 15M fue lo que me reactivó de una manera más activa con la política y me puso más, mucho más, en contacto con la política. [...] Estudié la carrera ya de mayor y me pilló todo el proceso del 15M por ahí en medio. Y, a partir de ese momento, quien más me interesó a nivel político, de política activa, fueron estos partidos que aparecieron con estos movimientos de la gente joven que sale a la calle en un momento determinado a interpelar el sistema este que reconocemos como el régimen del 78. Es cuando me metí de una manera más activa en política y formé parte de los primeros círculos que se crearon en Alicante de Podemos. Así fue.”) [Rita Bosaho, woman, left-wing (Podemos), national level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry and ethnic minority]*

The 15M movement in Spain and the emergence of Podemos is, however, also a triggering event for those who migrated from Venezuela, for whom the resemblance and connection to Hugo Chávez’s populism brings very negative connotations and politicizes them in the opposite direction, against what Podemos comes to represent:

*“If you remember, Spain in 2014 entered, well before 2014, into a political crisis with the 15M movement, a lot of political parties emerged, including Podemos, which in 2014 won representation for the first time, these were the first elections in which it stood and won representation in the European Parliament. Podemos began to rise and for almost all Venezuelans who are abroad, Podemos’ slogans remind us, if not to say that they are exact, of those of Chávez, not to go into personal considerations, okay? They are practically the same as those of Chávez. I saw that the*

formula that brought Chávez to power was being repeated, that is to say, a fracture of the two-party system, a political weariness of the population in the face of this alternation between two political parties that, from being in power for so long, became quite corrupt parties with an economic crisis in the middle. In other words, it was like replicating the conditions that had brought Chávez to power in Venezuela in 2000. Practically, I think that all the Venezuelans who were in Spain saw that the conditions and the rise of this political force were being replicated, which has all my respect, but which in my opinion resembles, has the same slogans, and also said by them and defended by them, the same slogans of Chávez. As I was saying, I was in a moment of professional pause and a centrist political force appeared with which I feel very represented, which is aligned with my most liberal values, of giving social possibilities but at the same time economic freedom so that people can grow and be productive, which is Ciudadanos and which in parallel to Podemos also makes its leap, from Catalonia to a national level, and I decided to take a step forward, I consulted with my family at that time, and I decided to take a step forward, a little because of what I was telling you, because of all the baggage that already preceded me.”

(“Si recuerdas, España en el 2014 entra, bueno antes del 2014, entra en una crisis política con el 15M. Surgen un montón de partidos políticos, entre ellos Podemos, que en el 2014 saca representación por primera vez, son las primeras elecciones a las que se presenta y saca representación en el Parlamento Europeo. Empieza el auge de Podemos y para casi todos los venezolanos que estamos en el extranjero, las consignas de Podemos nos recuerdan, por no decir que son exactas, a las de Chávez por no entrar en consideraciones personales ¿vale? Son prácticamente las mismas de Chávez. Yo veía que se estaba repitiendo la fórmula que hizo, aupó, que Chávez entrara en el poder; es decir, una fractura del bipartidismo, un cansancio político de la población ante esa alternancia entre dos partidos políticos que de tanto estar en el poder se convirtieron en partidos bastante corruptos con una crisis económica de por medio. O sea, era como replicar las condiciones que habían aupado a Chávez en su momento en Venezuela en el 2000. Prácticamente, yo creo que todos los venezolanos que estábamos en España veíamos que se estaban replicando las condiciones y el auge de esta fuerza política que tiene todos mis respetos, pero que en mi consideración se parece, tiene las mismas consignas, y además dicho por ellos y defendido por ellos, las mismas consignas de Chávez. Como te decía, yo estaba en un momento de parón profesional y aparece una fuerza política de centro con la que me siento muy representada, que está alineada con mis valores más liberales, de dar posibilidades sociales pero al mismo tiempo libertad económica para que la gente pueda crecer y ser productivo, que es Ciudadanos y que en paralelo a

*Podemos también da su salto, de Cataluña a nivel nacional, y decido dar un paso adelante, lo consulto con mi núcleo familiar en ese momento, y decido dar un paso adelante, un poco por lo que te decía, por todo el bagaje que ya me precedía.”) [María Luisa Alonso, woman, centrist party (Ciudadanos), local and national levels, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

### What triggers becoming active in politics?

We do not find any common motivating factors, issues, background, experiences or role models in Spain. A range of motivations, issues and experiences are evoked. For some, local issues and challenges are what triggered becoming active in politics, for example, relating to the neighbourhood, local social conditions or the local school, as is the case with this former national parliamentarian of Venezuelan origin:

*“But it always had to do with social housing, the improvements that my profession can bring to society, how social housing can be built through public-private collaborations. And I was lucky to have a job that was also about public-private collaboration. [...] And, from there, my PhD focused on public-private collaboration for public housing, in public land, with private construction and management for 30 years and that social rental regime. In the meantime, lots of things came to pass in Venezuela. People started retreating, retreating, retreating, and in the end it happened what happened. When I finished my period of public-private collaboration, I decided that now that I was over the topic, I could initiate something in politics. And so, I joined a party.”*

*(“Pero siempre tenía que ver con el tema de vivienda social, de las mejoras que puede traer mi profesión a la sociedad, de cómo hacer vivienda social en colaboración público-privada. Y tuve la suerte también de tener un trabajo que tuvo que ver con la colaboración público-privada. [...] Y de ahí, pues, mi tesis doctoral tuvo que ver con la colaboración público-privada en vivienda social, en suelo público, con construcción privada y gestión a lo largo de 30 años de esas viviendas en régimen de alquiler social. Dicho eso, claro, mientras tanto fueron pasando muchas cosas en Venezuela. La gente se fue apartando, apartando, apartando, apartando, y al final, pues, vino lo que vino. Cuando acabé mi periodo de colaboración público-privada, decidí que, bueno, ya que estaba fuera de ese tema, podía, pues, ya iniciar algo en política. Y me afilié, me afilié a un partido.”) [Carlos Martínez de Tejada, man, centre-right political party (PP), national level, first generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

In other cases, people are motivated by global issues or more abstract principles like social (in)justice, defending a particular vision of economic

policy and principles, peripheral national sentiments, etc. In fact, what is particularly interesting is that there is nothing too specific about what motivates these migrant ancestry politicians to get active in politics. Their motivations are as diverse and non-specific to their migration background as anyone else's. Discrimination experiences, racism or migrant-specific issues do not factor at all in the reasons provided for becoming actively engaged in politics.

However, it is often the case that political events, experiences or memories of the countries of origin or family ancestry can shape their motivations to become active in politics or join a political party. This has come up in many of the interviews. For example, Venezuelans almost invariably refer to the parallels they perceive between the collapse of the traditional party system and the rise of Hugo Chávez on the one hand, and the rise of Podemos and the left coalition governments in Spain on the other hand. Equally, politicians of Latin American origin on the left evoke the memories or experiences of dictatorship in Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay (to name but a few) as a motivating factor for their political activism in Spain. Hence, 'homeland' politics can help shape their political choices in important ways, while mediated by the local context.

How exactly they were mobilized into an electoral path, instead, brings a lot more commonalities. A very recurrent theme for many of the politicians interviewed is that they were primarily recruited or nudged to put themselves forward. A comment that is often made is that 'they had never thought of standing for office', many even say that it had never crossed their minds until someone suggested this option to them. There are numerous examples of such realization that without such proposals they would have never considered it as a possibility, as illustrated by this quote from a local councillor of British origin in Mijas, who was nudged into joining the electoral lists and was persuaded by the realization that a third of the local population was not represented at the time:

*"I didn't volunteer myself into the political world. What happened was that, to put you into the picture, the area where I live around 30% of the population are foreigners. And I was actually approached by one of the political parties because they said then, this was 2018, they said that, you know, given the number of foreigners that we have living in the municipality, they think that there should be a foreigner presented on the list. Various things had happened in Mijas that certainly I wasn't happy about. And the president of the party at that point had been a friend of ours for many years. And he said, you know, we really would like you to get involved and provide some representation of foreigners on the team. So I agreed to do*

*that. So that was really how I got involved in it. It wasn't to do with party politics. It was more to do with a little bit of persuasion that the foreign community should be represented on the electoral list. And, at that time, there were none of the parties that were actually presenting foreigners on the list. [...] So I really kind of got into the political world a little bit with a hand pushed up my back. And people see me as part of a party, or saw me as part of a party. But actually, to be really honest, I thought that the representation of a third of the population was more important than which party it was. If I'd been approached by one of the other parties, I may well have considered it." [Bill Anderson, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

This is not an uncommon situation. Of course, many people who are approached say no, or they may have more settled ideological preferences as to which parties they are willing to join, but quite a few of the politicians we interviewed said that within a range of the parties they would have been willing to consider, which one they joined was primarily determined by who asked them first, or who made a sufficiently credible proposal that did not imply just filling the list from the bottom.

Scouting for new talent is something that some particularly good mentors do, and they observe and coach new members in their areas. This was the experience of the current president of the District Council of Villaverde in Madrid and local councillor of the city of Madrid, of Colombian origin:

*"In 2000 I joined the party and I started to get very close. Once a member, you get invitations, to a rally, to a talk, to a workshop. So I started attending. And people start getting to know me. And among those who got to know me is Marta Escudero Díaz-Tejeiro, who passed away and may she rest in peace as well, also a regional parliamentarian in the Assembly of Madrid and who worked in this District Council. So she started to see me as a potential, I guess, as someone with potential. She started promoting me, she was really kind, like a mother in a sense because she was always asking 'How are the studies going? Are you finishing your degree? This and that. Don't quit. This and that.' So she was promoting and she saw that I would respond. And she was the local councillor here in the district of Villaverde. She was the secretary general of the party in Villaverde."*

*("Pues en el año 2000 yo me afilio, yo empiezo a acercarme mucho. Una vez afiliado, pues te llegan invitaciones, que si un mitin, que si una charla, que si una jornada. Entonces yo empiezo a asistir. Entonces, claro, la gente empieza a conocerme. Y entre las que me conocen, pues está mi mentora política, que ya también falleció, que en paz descanse también, Marta Escudero Díaz-Tejeiro, también diputada de la Asamblea de Madrid, y que*

*trabajó en esta Junta Municipal. Y entonces ella empieza a verme como un potencial, entiendo yo, como con potencial. Entonces empieza pues a promocionarme, la verdad que se portó muy bien, como si fuera una madre en ese sentido, porque la verdad que siempre muy preocupada, '¿qué tal van los estudios? ¿Termina la carrera? No sé qué, ¡no lo dejes! No sé qué.' Entonces ella me fue promocionando y vio que yo, bueno, pues iba respondiendo. Y ella era concejala de aquí, del distrito de Villaverde. Ella era la secretaria general del partido aquí en Villaverde.”*  
[Orlando Chacón, man, centre-right party (PP), local and regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

Being directly recruited by the party leader or the leading candidate is a recurring pattern in the interviews conducted in Spain, like for this councillor in Madrid directly recruited by the then Mayor of the city of Madrid, Manuela Carmena:

*“And after that, the truth is that I distanced myself from politics, even international politics, when Rajoy won the elections after the 15M [she laughs] [...] Well, I met Manuela Carmena in 2018, probably in July 2018. In February she proposed that I joined her list and knowing the person and her project I told to myself ‘well, the invitation makes sense. I have a developed and recognised career in the world of innovation, of R & D and technological transfer, this step into politics could be interesting’. But I wasn’t making a decision of the sort ‘yes, I’m going to settle here, I will be a councillor the next four years and will fight for the following four’. My approach was not that one, my approach was more ‘well, let’s get the most out of this experience, get to know how campaigns work, how local councils work from the inside, even if it is from the opposition’. In other words, a continuous learning and... since I accepted until now, I was not sure if I was going to continue.”*

*(“Y después de eso la verdad es que me alejé bastante de la política, incluso de la política internacional, cuando Rajoy ganó las elecciones después del 15M [ríe]. [...] Bueno, conocí a Manuela Carmena en el 2018, probablemente, en julio de 2018. Y en febrero me propuso formar parte de su candidatura y conociendo a la persona, el proyecto que llevaba, fue lo que dije, ‘pues es una invitación que tiene sentido. Yo ya tengo, de alguna forma, mi carrera desarrollada y asentada en el mundo de la innovación, de la I+D y de la transferencia tecnológica, y quizás sería interesante ese paso por política’. Pero tampoco era una decisión de decir ‘sí, me voy a asentar aquí, voy a ser concejala tanto estos cuatro años, y voy a luchar por seguir estando otros cuatro más’. Mi aproximación no era esa, mi aproximación era ‘bueno, vamos a tomar el máximo de esta experiencia, conocer cómo funcionan las campañas, cómo funcionan*

*los ayuntamientos por dentro, aunque sea desde la oposición'. Bueno, un aprendizaje continuo, y... desde que acepté a día de hoy no tenía claro si iba a continuar o no.”* [Maysoun Douas, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]

Obviously, not everyone gets nudged or recruited directly by the party leader, but interviews in Spain have also revealed such direct interventions of top members of the leadership in recruiting candidates from migrant backgrounds. A regional-level Catalan politician, who was recruited directly by one of the top leaders of the party puts it this way, emphasizing all the hesitations she had when she was invited to join the list for the Catalan parliament:

*“And I was four months pregnant, I think, or three months, I mean... And also, and I remember my conversation with Marta Rovira, I was like, why? If I have my comfort zone, I have my apartment, I have my job, I have my car, I have my children, I have my family. I continue to train, because I’m going to do a doctoral thesis, right? And I said to him, what need do I have?”*

*(“Yo estaba embarazada de cuatro meses, me parece, o tres meses. Y recuerdo mi conversación con Marta Rovira, y le decía yo ‘¿por qué? Si yo tengo mi zona de confort, yo tengo mi piso, tengo mi trabajo, tengo mi coche, tengo mis niños, tengo mi familia, yo continuo formándome porque voy a hacer una tesis doctoral, ¿no?’ Y le decía yo, ‘¿qué necesidad tengo?’”*) [Najat Driouech, woman, left-wing party (ERC), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

In fact, we have found this to be the most common path into elected office among all interviewees in Spain, where personal ambition or drive that leads to joining a party and then moving up the ranks is not a very common trajectory (but we also had a handful of cases of self-driven candidacy or aspirations). In the vast majority of cases, it is some form of invitation to join the party or, when they are party members, an unexpected invitation to join the electoral lists without them having previously thought they would make good candidates or even having thought about it. This pattern is common to both left, centre and right-wing parties:

*“So, that’s when the People’s Party really approached me and I approached them and the person who was the candidate for Mayor of Jerez de la Frontera, who is currently the mayor, invited me to the party as a supporter and later I joined the People’s Party and in the following elections, I was on the electoral list for the City Council of Jerez, already in 2019.”*

*(“Entonces, es cuando realmente el Partido Popular se acerca a mí y yo a él y quien era la candidata a la alcaldía de Jerez de la Frontera, que es actualmente la alcaldesa, me invitó al partido como simpatizante y, posteriormente, me afilió al Partido Popular y en las siguientes elecciones fui en la lista electoral para el Ayuntamiento de Jerez, ya en el año 2019.”)*

*[Yessika Quintero, woman, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

Only in rare occasions, we find people who ended up in an electoral list because they had themselves taken the initiative to ask someone in the local council or the local party, but there are some:

*“[...] it was my own initiative, I said to myself ‘I’m going to do this, I’m going to talk to the Mayor’, and that’s how it came about. ‘I’m going to propose this to him, if he agrees, great and if he doesn’t, it’s no big deal, if he says no, it’s fine but I want to try’ because I could see that there were lots of activities in the village and lots of people participated and I said to myself ‘but I also want to participate somehow’, and that’s what motivated me to do it.”*

*(“[...] a mí se me dio una iniciativa propia y dije, ‘voy a hacer esto, voy a hablar con el señor Alcalde’, se me vino así. ‘Voy a plantearle esto, si está de acuerdo bien y si no, pues no pasa nada, si me dice que no, no pasa nada, pero quiero hacer el intento’ porque yo veía que se hacían actividades en el pueblo y mucha gente participaba y yo decía ‘pero a mí me gustaría participar también de alguna forma’, y eso me animó a hacerlo.”)*

*[Amalfi Rivera, woman, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

### Becoming an aspirant and the process of electoral selection

None of the political parties in Spain have formalised quotas or even informal targets for migrant-ancestry or minority candidates. All accounts confirm that the selection process is too unstructured to include any structural mechanisms for inclusion and diversity. Some parties and leaders are somewhat more sensitive to introducing a diverse range of candidates in their lists, but no informal quotas or targets are set.

The role of local or community support is very variable. Many of the elected officials we interviewed had no local base whatsoever that supported them at the selection or nomination stages. Collective support bases are nearly absent in the Spanish case, with very rare exceptions, primarily those who were activists in Podemos or similar grassroots-based left-wing parties, as was the case of this former local councillor of Madrid:

*“I think it arises in a very natural way because, as I said, I was very engaged and, if I can put it that way, I was a key person, so to say, in the organization and extension of Podemos in Madrid. [...] I was one of the founding members of the local chapter [in Vallecas], I worked a lot in Madrid, hand in hand with Miguel Urbán in the political extension of the local chapters in Madrid, in the organization, the campaign, well I really worked a lot.”*

*(“Yo creo que surge de una manera bastante natural porque, como te decía, yo me involucré bastante y, bueno, no sé si decirlo así, pero fui una persona bastante clave, digamos, en la organización y extensión de Podemos en Madrid. [...] fui una de las fundadoras de ese círculo [Vallecas], trabajé mucho en Madrid, trabajé mano a mano con Miguel Urbán en la extensión política de los círculos en Madrid, en la organización, en la campaña, bueno, es que trabajé muchísimo, la verdad.”)*  
*[Rommy Arce, woman, left-wing party (Podemos/Ahora Madrid), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Some interviewed politicians refer to a generic support in their community of origin, but as a general positive reception, rather than a grassroots movement that is pushing to get representatives into political parties or onto electoral lists.

*“So, my perception is that, from the Venezuelans, total joy that someone from Venezuela and a professional would enter politics, mostly because everyone was afraid with the rise of Podemos and it was a way of saying, of course, Venezuelans need to be there to stop this progression that reminded us so much of Chávez and nowadays Maduro. My perception, at the time, was not bad. People were surprised, on the one hand, but also people were very active, and so I was not the only one entering a party from civil society and it was like a boom, so surprise and acceptance, and on the other hand, joy and pride.”*

*(“Entonces mi percepción es esa, después de los venezolanos, alegría total de que alguien venezolano y profesional entrara en la política más que nada porque todo el mundo tenía miedo con el tema de Podemos y era una forma de que, claro, los venezolanos tenemos que estar ahí para frenar este avance que tanto nos recordaba y nos recuerda a Chávez y en este momento Maduro. Mi percepción, en ese momento, no era mala. Era sorpresa, por una parte, pero también la gente estaba como muy activa, entonces bueno tampoco no era yo sola que entraba, de la sociedad civil a un partido político, sino que era como un auge y un boom, entonces bueno sorpresa, aceptación y, por el otro lado, alegría u orgullo.”)* *[María Luisa Alonso, woman, centrist party (Ciudadanos), local and national levels, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

Individual sponsors or mentors are more common. Given that a very large share of the migrant-ancestry politicians are explicitly recruited or nudged to run for selection, these same individuals who propose that they run are often those who mentor them through the selection and nomination process. Yet, this is generally a very 'light touch' form of mentorship, with general advice when they ask or just the availability to answer questions. Nobody mentioned a structured mentorship scheme or pairing. In many cases, however, the mentorship ends after they are selected and is not a structured mentoring model that continues through the early stages of being an elected official after they win office.

The fact that formal mentorship is not a very typical 'way of doing things' in Spain is perfectly captured by this very acute observation by a local councillor of Scottish origin:

*"This is going to sound very harsh, but I've been here in Mijas for 22 years, I've worked in a number of different companies, and the idea of mentoring people is not that common. People tend to get dropped into situations in Spain, or in this part of Spain at least, and it's like throwing someone into the sea and say 'wiggle your arms and legs and that's how you swim' [laugh] I was always used to, whether we call it mentorship or whether we call it sort of preparation, I was certainly very used to that. I ran businesses in the UK and we always did that with new staff or people who'd be incorporated. And in my experience, I'm not saying it doesn't happen, but in my experience, it's not the way things are done down here. People are generally just thrown into situations, and you have to find your own way to sink or swim." [Bill Anderson, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

And the lack of proper training even for relatively senior positions, like Government Delegate in the regions, is illustrated by this quote of a politician in Melilla who held such a function:

*"You need to write yourself the handbook, you need to figure it out, shall we say. Figure it out, day after day, trying not to make mistakes, trying to manage, so that you won't get sued by another political party or a civil society person who wants to make your life miserable." ("Tú mismo tienes que hacer tu manual, tú mismo tienes que buscarte la vida, como se suele decir. Buscarte la vida para ir, en el día a día, intentando no meter la pata, intentando gestionar, y que no te caiga una denuncia por algún grupo de partido o representante social que quiera amargarte la vida.") [Abdelmalik El Barkani, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

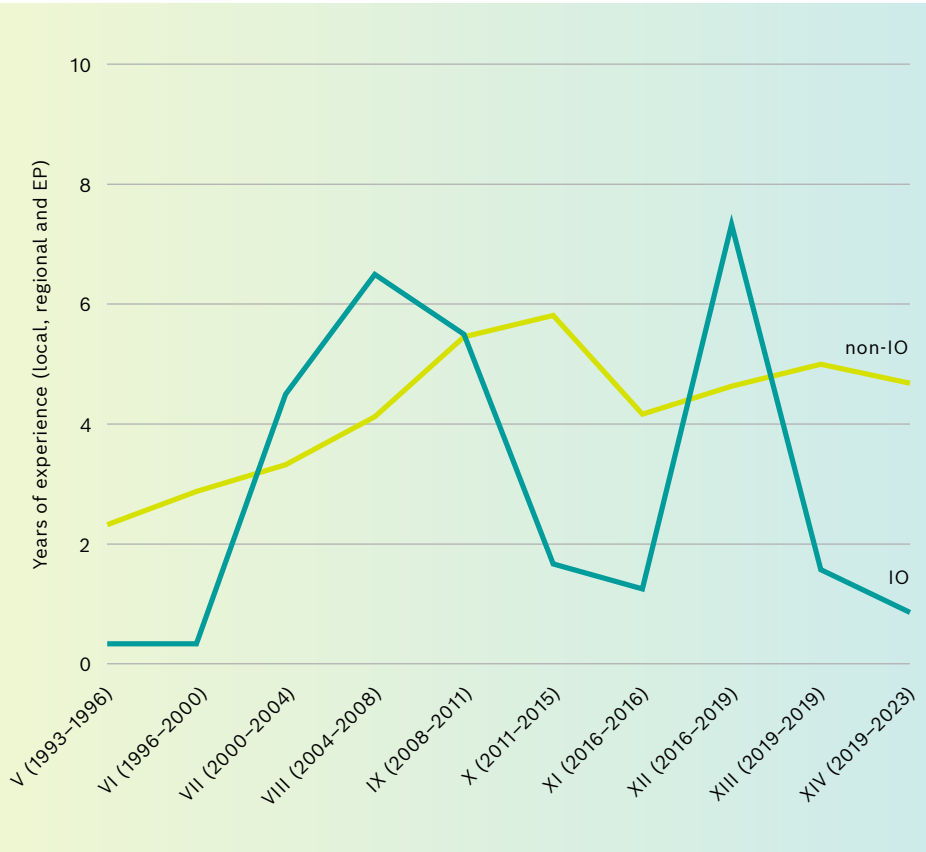
This less structured access route to political office is well reflected in the quantitative data based on the biographical information on the legislators that held a seat between 1993 and 2023. When we compare MPs with migrant ancestry and those with no known migrant ancestry (Table 5), we observe that the former are considerably less likely to have held a prior local or regional level elected office. These are the previous positions that build up a local base and a support network in politics. Moreover, when we consider the previous years of experience in local, regional or European elected positions before becoming a national legislator (Figure 12), we see that there is a clear pattern of increasing length of the political experience ‘required’ before gaining a seat in the *Congreso de los Diputados* for the average legislator but that MPs of migrant ancestry do not follow such a pattern and that the length of their previous elected experience is quite haphazard depending on who is recruited into parliament on any given legislative term. In practice, this means that migrant-ancestry candidates are not being recruited into the electoral lists through the same routes of access than the non-IO candidate, as reflected in the biographical interviews conducted.

**Table 5** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Table 5:** The percentage of legislators, by migrant ancestry, in the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* who held a prior electoral office before becoming MPs (1993–2023)

	non-IO	IO
Local level office (councillor, mayor, provincial councillor)	41.9%	31.1%
Regional legislative assembly member	21.7%	15.6%
Member of the European Parliament	1.4%	2.2%
<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>3942</b>	<b>45</b>

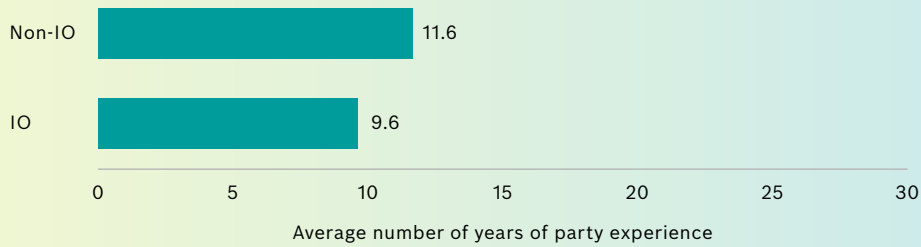
**Figure 12:** The average length of cumulative prior experience in other electoral offices before becoming MPs (1993–2023)



**Figure 12** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

This pattern of less experience in elected office is reflected also in the length of their experience as party members (Figure 13), which is several years shorter for migrant-ancestry legislators than for other MPs. The fact that they have trajectories that are different from those of the non-IO legislator is also reflected in the results displayed in Table 6, which suggest that they are less likely to enter parliament from local or regional party positions of leadership. They are more often directly recruited into national-level bodies of internal party representation and leadership and make it straight to national parliament from those positions.

**Figure 13:** Average length of time as a party member before becoming MPs (1993–2023)



**Figure 13** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project. Note: These calculations are produced only with those who are elected for the first time to parliament on the given term, plus all those elected for the 1993–1996 legislative term.

**Table 6** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

**Table 6:** Types of positions in the party held immediately before becoming MPs (1993–2023)

Position in the party	non-IO	IO
Grassroots member	23.5%	12.2%
Local level leadership position	23.4%	4.9%
Member of regional level party executive body	1.0%	2.4%
Member of regional level party in central office executive committee	17.3%	9.8%
Regional party leader	2.8%	0.0%
Member of national level party in central office executive body	9.4%	41.5%
Member of national level party in central office executive committee	20.6%	24.4%
Leadership of national parliamentary group	0.6%	4.9%
National party leader	1.3%	0.0%
<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>3559</b>	<b>41</b>

This adds up to the consistent profile portrayed also by the biographical interviews in that the interviewees are more likely to be individually recruited instead of going through the ‘cursus honorum’ of moving up the ranks from grassroots membership to local and/or regional positions.

*“It was our Mayor, Vicente Arqués, the mayor for 17 years now who 8 or 9 years ago, yes, in his third term, contacted me and asked me if I was*

interested in joining his team, his list of candidates. For the local elections. And I was surprised, I was surprised because I had never thought about it. On the other hand, I felt flattered. Because he had thought of me, he had seen me. And he told me that he had thought that I could help with the department for residents of other nationalities. Hence, after thinking about it, I thought that if I can offer something with my skills and personal experience to people who arrive to Alfaz del Pi, why not? So, at the time, I didn't get elected because I was on number 14 and at the time we had 12. I was not elected, but there was a change mid-way through the term and a colleague got a very good offer from the private sector and he decided to leave politics and start a new path. Hence, the list moved down and that's when he called me again and said 'The time has arrived to enter the team.' So then I replied 'OK, I will think about it'. And he said, 'no, no, this is something you have to do, right?' And I'm very happy, very happy to have had the opportunity. In fact, I've spent two legislatures more."

("Fue nuestro alcalde, Vicente Arqués, alcalde aquí desde hace ahora 17 años, que hace 8 o 9 años, sí, en su tercera legislatura, me contactó y me preguntó si yo tenía interés en formar parte de su grupo, de su lista de candidatos. Para las elecciones municipales. Y me sorprendió, me sorprendió, porque claro, yo nunca me lo había planteado. Por otro lado, me sentí halagada. Porque había pensado en mí, se había fijado en mí. Y él me contó que lo que tenía pensado era para el departamento de residentes de otras nacionalidades. Entonces, tras reflexionar, yo pensé, pues si yo puedo aportar algo de mis conocimientos, de mi experiencia a las personas que llegan al Alfaz del Pi, ¿por qué no? Entonces, en ese primer momento no salí elegida porque estaba en el número 14 y en aquel momento había, creo que 12. No salí elegida, pero hubo un cambio a mitad de la legislatura, que un compañero tuvo una oferta muy buena desde el sector privado y decidió dejar la política e ir a emprender un nuevo camino. Entonces, corrió la lista y entonces es cuando me volvió a llamar y decir 'Ha llegado el momento de entrar en el equipo.' Entonces, yo lo que le dije en ese momento, digo, 'vale, me lo pensaré'. Y me dijo, 'no, no, es para que lo hagas, ¿eh?' Entonces, realmente estoy muy contenta, muy contenta de haber tenido la oportunidad. De hecho, ya son dos legislaturas más allá.") [Martine Mertens, woman, centre-left party (PSOE), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

In most cases, the successful politicians we interviewed were elected because they were selected for safe list positions. Those who were in risky list positions were a minority. Indeed, the dataset on the biographical information of national legislators in the *Congreso de los Diputados* confirms that there is no significant difference in how likely it is that a migrant-

ancestry legislator will be elected from the inauguration of parliament (hence, having been placed in a list position with a good likelihood of success) instead of accessing later on as a replacement to someone who left the seat. Regardless of migrant ancestry, around 88 % of the legislators are elected from the start of the parliament and around 12 % get a seat to replace a legislator that leaves.

From fieldwork preparation, we know, however, that there are also plenty of candidates of migrant ancestry in hopeless seats or list positions. Clearly, as for any candidate, the prior likelihood of getting elected by seat/list position makes a huge difference. In Spain, very few parties run internal party primary elections (one member, one vote selection processes) and the few interviewees that had experienced them thought they were helpful in getting into lists that otherwise would not have been accessible to them. The experience was very widespread in Podemos, a party that organised itself at the beginning around radical participatory democratic principles and systematically used primaries for both leadership and candidate selection. These two quotes from politicians who were active at the founding moment of Podemos illustrate how primaries provide an opportunity for the emergence of unsuspecting candidates, as not even they were counting on getting selected:

*“As the group on migrations we decided to put forward a list, there were several lists at the time, and at that time we decided to present a list just formed of immigrants [...] at that time we had all the signatures required internally and statutorily by the party and we decided to present the list, and serendipity has it that the electoral committee of Podemos or whatever was there at the time, I can’t remember the exact name, invalidates one of the lists and so we automatically move up and there we were some 20 or 22 migrant persons who had the right to be, to participate in the electoral list.”*

*(“Como círculo de migraciones decidimos presentar una lista, había en ese momento varias listas, en ese momento nosotros decidimos presentar una lista compuesta solamente de inmigrantes [...] en ese momento nosotros con todos los avales que exigía internamente y orgánicamente el partido decidimos presentar la lista, y da la casualidad que dentro del comité electoral de Podemos o lo que había, no me acuerdo exactamente cómo se llamaba ese órgano, invalida una lista, entonces nosotros automáticamente subimos, subimos al invalidar una, pues nosotros subimos y en ese momento pues éramos como unas 20 o 22 personas migrantes, que teníamos derecho a estar, a participar en lista electoral.”) [Diana Paredes, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

*“In that assembly I decided ‘colleagues, I will stand myself if nobody wants to do it, because we cannot allow the local chapter of Zaragoza not to present a candidate’ [...] let’s say that I did it as a matter of principle at that time because I had no inkling that I could win for an electoral slate.”*  
*(“En aquella asamblea decidí ‘compañeros, pues me presento yo, si no queréis nadie, pero no puede ser que el círculo de Zaragoza no tenga candidato’. [...] digamos que un poco lo hago por principio porque en ese momento no tenía yo ningún elemento para pensar que yo podía ganar en una papeleta electoral.”)* [Pablo Echenique, man, left-wing party (Podemos), EP, regional and national levels, invisible migrant ancestry]

Electoral success is, thus, primarily pre-determined by the selection process and is not typically seen as driven by the candidates’ personal initiative or electoral targeting, except in rare cases. In very few of the interviews, we found that the electoral strategy was particularly geared towards migrant background or minority voters. This does not mean that some of that targeting may not happen, but it was not seen as that central by any of the politicians we interviewed.

*“In 2004 we already started to organize the migrant groups within the party. That’s why we always say that Pedro Zerolo opened the doors of diversity to the Socialist Party. For me he was a role model in my political career. [...] But there was no associational field around migrant groups. That’s when, without really trying, I found a space of political development. Why? Because the two largest parties, but especially PSOE and very timidly Izquierda Unida, started to identify profiles within the migrant communities to attract the migrant vote. I want to say that PSOE was the first party where you did not need to be a permanent resident to join, that was not the case in any right-wing party, as they opposed back then to anyone joining without the residence permit. The PSOE allowed it back then and I was a PSOE member before I was a permanent resident. Afterwards, I obviously naturalized.”*

*(“[...] en el año 2004 ya empezamos a hacer, de alguna forma, a organizar dentro del partido a los colectivos migrantes. Por eso siempre decimos que Pedro Zerolo abrió las puertas de la diversidad al Partido Socialista Obrero Español. Y para mí fue un referente muy importante en mi carrera política. [...] Pero no existía un tejido asociativo organizado en torno a los colectivos migrantes. Entonces yo ahí realmente, sin querer, encuentro un espacio de desarrollo político. ¿Por qué? Porque los dos grandes partidos, pero fundamentalmente el PSOE y tímidamente Izquierda Unida, empezaron a identificar perfiles del mundo de la inmigración para atraer el voto inmigrante. Sí quiero decir que el PSOE fue el primer partido que no necesitabas tener residencia para poder afiliarte, eso no lo tenía ningún*

*partido de derecha que se oponía en su momento a que se pueda afiliarse a un partido político sin tener la residencia. El PSOE sí lo tuvo en un momento, o sea, yo fui antes afiliada al PSOE que tener la residencia española. Después obviamente me nacionalicé.”) [ES\_POL\_21, woman, centre-left party (PSOE), local, regional and EP levels, visible migrant ancestry]*

In fact, some interviewed politicians thought that – even if their candidacy was not pushed by migrant grassroots networks or communities – it was a lost opportunity not to have capitalized on the presence of a migrant candidate for the first time in a given municipality for electoral mobilization, as illustrated by this quote:

*“My origins were a political asset that was not used as much as it could have been, in my view. It’s true that many media were interested in it, and they thought it was newsworthy. And, indeed it was, because I feel that there were very few examples of people of first generation, as is my case, because it’s quite different to second generation people. But I am first generation. Yes, yes. I have been a migrant worker in conditions of enormous precariousness. So, I think it was not used from a political point of view, because my link to Anticapitalists and a minority sector in Podemos that was excluded, internally persecuted and stigmatised was given more weight. All of that weighed more than the asset I could become for the organization.”*

*(“Que, digamos, mi origen, para mí, creo que era un activo político que no se aprovechó lo que debería haberse aprovechado, en mi opinión. Es verdad que a muchos medios el tema les interesó, les pareció que era algo noticiable. Y desde luego que lo era, porque creo que hay muy pocos ejemplos de personas de primera generación, como es mi caso, porque es muy diferente a una persona de segunda generación. Pero yo soy primera generación. Sí, sí. O sea, yo misma he sido trabajadora migrante en condiciones de enorme precariedad. Entonces, creo que fue algo que no se aprovechó desde el punto de vista político, porque pesó mucho más mi vinculación a Anticapitalistas y a un sector de Podemos que estaba minorizado, excluido, perseguido internamente, estigmatizado internamente. Todo eso pesó mucho más que el activo político que yo pudiera suponer para la organización.”) [Rommy Arce, woman, left-wing party (Podemos/Ahora Madrid), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

The one community that seems to be, in the last 5–7 years, a greater focus of targeting is the Venezuelan one, alongside other Latin American communities, by the PP, given its more politically homogeneous character and better diaspora structuration, as suggested by this regional parliamentarian in Madrid of Venezuelan origin:

“So, the campaign is always centred and centralized by the party. The party distributes their candidates and tries to cover the whole territory, and what I did was to mobilize the sector of new Madrilenians wherever I was sent. Hence, I would go regardless of the event. If I had to go to Móstoles, then we would move to Móstoles; if they sent me to Alcorcón, then we went to Alcorcón. That’s really it. The big rallies were handled by the President, who leads the list and who handles matters, and there we would all go to support her, and that’s what was shown on the media and on TV, a group with flags always there, and that’s what we had set up. But we had Ecuadorians, Bolivians, Dominicans, Venezuelans, and Europeans, a lot of Romanians, a lot of Polish that supported us too, and all those other Latin American communities.”

“Nada, la campaña está siempre centrada y centralizada por el partido. El partido reparte sus candidatos y trata de ir cubriendo y abarcando el territorio, y yo lo que hacía era evidentemente a los que me mandaban a mí y a donde me tocaba ir a mí pues yo obviamente movilizaba la parte de los nuevos madrileños. Entonces yo venía, fuera el evento que sucedía el que fuera. Te toca ir a Móstoles, entonces nos movíamos nosotros a Móstoles ahora; me mandan a mí a Alcorcón, pues vamos a Alcorcón. Era un poco aquello realmente. Los mítines grandes importantes los llevaba la presidenta que es la cabeza de lista, que es la que realmente lleva, y ahí sí ya íbamos todos a apoyarla y bueno era lo que se podía ver un poco en los medios de comunicación en la televisión, un grupo con unas banderas allí siempre, pues bueno eso fue lo que lo que teníamos nosotros armado. Pero allá habían ecuatorianos, bolivianos, dominicanos, venezolanos, y europeos, muchos rumanos, muchos polacos que nos apoyan también y esas otras comunidades de latinoamericanos en Madrid.” [Gustavo Eustache, man, centre-right wing party (PP), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

In some cases, the targeting of the migrant voters was perceived as linked to a tokenistic form of candidate recruitment as well, to ensure that there was at least one candidate of migrant background on the list:

“At that time, I think it was an attempt to attract the foreign vote. Because the foreigners are notoriously disinterested in local politics. And I think it was an attempt to attract the local vote. I don’t really think that it was a point of principle, as I had naïvely thought, perhaps prior to that, because what we saw in 2023 was that all of the main parties, one or two of the new parties, all presented at least one foreigner on their list. So I think they sort of cottoned onto it and decided it would be a good idea to try and, you know, have a token foreigner. And I do think it was tokenism.”

*[Bill Anderson, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

In Spain, some of the Latin American-origin politicians of left-wing parties did mention campaigning with migrant associations and communities, but as part of much larger targeted campaigns with other civil society and local neighbourhood organisations. In fact, most of the politicians interviewed are reluctant to be pigeonholed into such roles and are very wary of 'ethnic voting' dynamics. This does not mean that there cannot be a sense of the recognition they receive from the country of ancestry or ethnic minority communities, especially if they are 'the first' of their community to get elected in their district/territory, or by voters who are supportive when they see a candidate who 'looks like them', as experienced by this local councillor of Salvadoran origin when she was first running for office:

*"[...] I remember that we had placed an information desk right in the park of Aluche and we were handing out leaflets, and a colleague who is Spanish, while a man who seemed Latin American, Ecuadorian or Peruvian, passes by with his daughter, she hands out a leaflet of Más Madrid and he didn't want to pick it. So she says 'our candidate is Latin American and there she is' and the guy opens his eyes wide and he turns around to see me and greet me and he takes the pamphlet. That, for me, was quite significant because somehow: 'are you really a candidate? How great! Congratulations! Let's see what you can do for us!' And those were his words, and he took the leaflet, and so I found the response of Latin American people really great."*

*("[...] recuerdo cuando se había puesto una mesa informativa justamente en el parque de Aluche, y estábamos repartiendo folletos, y entonces una compañera que es española, y en eso iba pasando un señor con su hija que parecen de origen latinoamericano, ecuatoriano o peruano, y le detiene ella y le da un un folleto de Más Madrid y entonces él no quiso cogerlo. Y entonces ella le dice, 'nuestra candidata es latinoamericana y ahí está', y entonces se le llevaron los ojos al tipo, me vuelve a ver, y entonces ya se acercan a saludarme, ahí ya se queda con el panfleto y se lo lleva. Entonces para mí eso fue muy significativo, porque de alguna forma: '¿de verdad va de candidata? ¡Qué bueno, enhorabuena! ¡A ver qué puede hacer por nosotros!' Es que esas fueron sus palabras, y ya se llevó el folleto, entonces encontré esa respuesta entre la gente latinoamericana, fue muy buena.")* *[Ana Carolina Elías, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

But the politicians' "own" community is not always supportive. When the candidates do not heed to the expectations of acceptable behaviour,

the conflict can be intense, as expressed by this local/regional councillor of Melilla:

*“And, on the other hand, there was another party that had been founded in 1995, Coalition for Melilla, that was primarily made up by activists of Berber and Muslim background, and it was really tough, very tough, because they thought that all Berbers and Muslims had to be with them. Hence, they were running a negative campaign against anyone who was not running with that party and supported another, see? So it was a really tough battle.”*

*(“Y, por otro lado, había otro partido que había nacido en el año 1995 que era Coalición por Melilla, que estaba fundamentalmente compuesto de militantes de origen étnico bereber, musulmán, que era muy duro, muy duro, porque ellos pensaban que todos los bereberes y musulmanes tenían que estar a su lado. Entonces pues hacían una campaña de desprestigio a todos aquellos que no pertenecemos a ese partido político y defendíamos a otro, ¿no? Entonces fue una batalla muy dura.”) [Abdelmalik El Barkani, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

In Spain, we have not found any specific programs or initiatives run by the political parties or external organisations that the politicians interviewed have resorted to or found useful for skills development, networking, mentoring or just generally diversity promotion at the stage of becoming aspirants to elected office or being considered for list selection by the parties. In fact, networks or programs are never spontaneously mentioned by any of the interviewed politicians. At most, when asked, they refer to media and policy training in some parties (particularly the PP) but in fact it seems rarer than in the other European countries studied in the REPCHANCE Europe project for candidates to get this essential skills training, even when they were running in the list for the national parliament. As one local councillor puts it, the support is mostly provided through the collective work of the parliamentary or municipal groups of elected officials or through some of the induction training days provided by institutions/parliaments:

*“Of course, of course. I remained in the Senate until 2019, when I joined here [Rivas-Vaciamadrid] as a candidate and spokesperson, and that is when the role changed. In that first stage, I was just another councillor, a rank-and-file councillor, let’s say. And as for training, the party has always been responsible for providing us with training on different subjects: education, housing, the environment. The party is committed to informing all its councillors and the Madrid Federation of Municipalities also organises courses, seminars and conferences in which councillors of*

*all political affiliations can participate. [...] and, in fact, communication with the group was permanent, we had weekly meetings of the municipal group where we discussed all the current issues, everything that was being discussed at any given time in the municipality, we analysed it and no speaker on any topic that was going to the plenary session was alone, abandoned, obviously it was the one who studied all the documentation but you always had a spokesperson who is the one who organises and distributes the work, who supports you and also guides you.”*

*(“Claro, claro. Yo me mantuve en el Senado hasta el año 2019, que ya sí me incorporo aquí [Rivas-Vaciamadrid] como candidata y portavoz, ahí sí cambia el rol. Yo en esa primera etapa era una concejala más, una concejala rasa, digamos. Y, en cuanto a la formación, el partido siempre se ha encargado de darnos formación en diferentes temas: de educación, de vivienda, de medio ambiente, el partido se vuelca en informar a todos sus concejales y también la Federación Madrileña de municipios desarrolla cursos, seminarios también, conferencias en las que pueden participar los concejales de todo signo político. [...] y, de hecho, la comunicación con el grupo era permanente, nosotros semanalmente teníamos reuniones del grupo municipal donde se debatían todos los temas de actualidad, todo lo que en cada momento se estuviera tratando en el municipio, lo analizábamos y ningún ponente de algún tema que iba a pleno estaba solo, abandonado, evidentemente era quien se estudiaba toda la documentación, pero tenías siempre a un portavoz que es quien organiza y distribuye el trabajo, que te arropa y también te guía.”) [Janette Novo, woman, centre-right party (PP), local and regional levels, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

However, the most common situation in Spain is to receive no substantial training. As several novice national MPs put it, very eloquently:

*“It was shock therapy and it was terrifying. No one had explained to me how to behave in front of a camera, no one had told me how to give a press conference. It’s true that in social media we worked very closely with the press people and we worked a lot with the spokespersons, so I knew what a “canutazo” was, what a duplex was and that in a duplex you have to look at the camera and things like that, but no one had explained it to me. And, in addition, they threw us into an electoral campaign directly, which is not like you will only give a press conference every now and then. No, it means that you have 15 days of appearing in the media every day, and I remember it as something tremendously terrifying, and especially the electoral debates. It’s true that later on, on TV, etc., you were accompanied by a press relations person, but what happened to me is that the press relations person who accompanied me,*

who later continued to be my press chief until I left, was also new, he was a person my age who had never worked, he had been an editor in some media, but he had never worked as a press officer for an electoral campaign, so he was just as lost as I was. It's true that he was supportive because, well, he was a person who when you left an interview would say to you 'look, this is very good' or 'you could have done this in another way', but he wasn't trained either."

("Fue terapia de choque y fue aterrador. Nadie me había explicado cómo te tienes que comportar delante de una cámara, nadie me había dicho cómo dar una rueda de prensa. Es verdad que en redes trabajábamos muy cerca de la gente de prensa y trabajábamos mucho con los portavoces, entonces, yo sabía lo que era un canutazo, lo que era un dúplex y que en un dúplex tienes que mirar a la cámara y cosas así, pero a mí nadie me lo había explicado. Y, además, es que nos lanzaron a una campaña electoral directamente, que no es que des una rueda de prensa de vez en cuando. No, es que tienes 15 días de aparecer en medios todos los días, y yo lo recuerdo como algo tremendamente aterrador, y muy especialmente los debates electorales. Es verdad que luego a la tele, etc., te acompañaba una persona de prensa, pero lo que me pasó a mí es que la persona de prensa que me acompañó, que luego siguió siendo mi jefe de prensa hasta que me fui, también era nuevo, era una persona de mi edad que no había trabajado nunca, había sido redactor en algún medio, pero no había trabajado nunca como responsable de prensa de una campaña electoral, con lo cual estaba igual de perdido que yo. Es verdad que era un apoyo porque, bueno, era una persona que cuando salías de una entrevista te decía 'mira, esto está muy bien' o 'esto podrías haberlo hecho de otra forma', pero que tampoco estaba formado él.") [ES\_POL\_03, woman, left-wing party (Podemos), national level, second generation, invisible migrant ancestry]

"I had a bad time, and I still do every day, because you first enter the institution and you are not a jurist and I did barely know the distinctions of what each branch of government was exactly responsible for. Did I know what was a parliamentary question? That's a big problem for citizens; everyone can be a politician and can be a legislator but there is no training [...] but it's true that it is very complicated very often to translate that into a law immediately and I do pedagogy in the sense of telling them that a national law on the Sahrawis is coming out but it's now in the amendments stage and then there will be some politicians who will be called from Morocco and will not want the law to pass."

("Lo pasé mal, muy mal, lo paso mal todos los días, creo. Porque primero entras en la institución y tú no eres jurista. Es que yo sabía la diferenciación en qué hace cada poder más o menos. ¿Pero sabía yo qué es una

*pregunta parlamentaria? Ese es un gran problema de la ciudadanía; cualquier persona puede ser política y puede ser legisladora pero no hay una formación [...] pero es verdad que es muy complicado muchas veces traducir eso en una ley inmediata y eso yo hago pedagogía en el sentido de decirles ya ha salido la ley nacional de saharauis, vale, pero ahora está en fase de enmiendas y luego habrá unos señores políticos que los llamarán desde Marruecos y no querrán que la ley se desbloquee.”) [Tesh Sidi, woman, left-wing coalition (Sumar/Más Madrid), national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

At the local level, the experience seems to be quite variable, depending on how the parties are organised at the local and regional level. A few local-level politicians we interviewed, especially of PP, said that they had received formal training at the regional party headquarters right after having been elected on the basis of their role as local councillors; others, also including of PP in other regions, received none. Although the local government associations in Spain have formal training, it seems that the information about their existence does not trickle down to every municipality or to all municipal party groups.

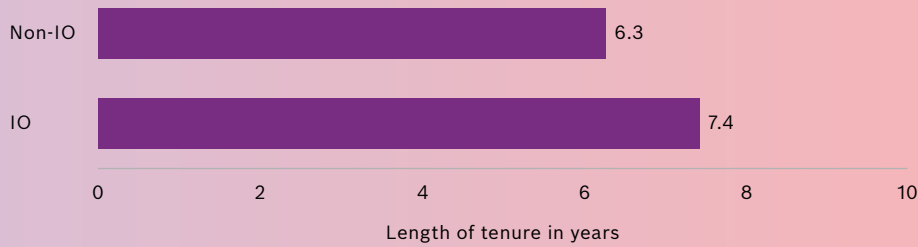
*3. WHAT DO THEIR CAREERS LOOK LIKE?*

Chapter 2 has discussed how individuals of migrant ancestry access positions of political leadership and elected office. This chapter focuses on their experiences throughout their political careers: how long they stay in office, what sort of committee or policy areas they get assigned to or they choose to focus on, how important it is for them to develop a policy expertise and how that happens, the role of their migrant ancestry in the committees or policy portfolios they end up working on, as well as the reasons for them to leave elected office and, sometimes, politics altogether.

### *3.1 Length of the parliamentary career, committee assignments and policy expertise*

What is the length of the political career of migrant-ancestry politicians? Clearly, this is highly variable and very dependent on various attributes of the individual politician. If we analyse the average number of years spent in the *Congreso de los Diputados* (Figure 14), the length of parliamentary tenure is similar regardless of ancestry. In fact, most legislators (of any family origin) in Spain do not last more than two consecutive legislative terms, as legislative turnover is quite high in the Spanish lower chamber. Since 1993, the percentage of novice legislators – who have never been elected to the chamber before – oscillates between 40 and 60 per cent, only being well below those figures in the repeated elections of June 2016 and November 2019, with only 16 and 26 per cent of novice legislators, as political parties primarily replicated their ballot lists for the second polling date and renewal stemmed primarily from electoral gains and losses for each party. Thus, most of the national MPs of migrant ancestry have stayed in the chamber for three to eight years in total. Only a very small minority has remained for more than a decade and they tend to be the legislators whose migrant ancestry is less visible or less stigmatised: Celia Villalobos (PP, 31 years in the chamber, Spanish-born of Argentinian father), Teófilo de Luis (PP, 26 years, Cuban-born of Cuban parents, no Cuban accent), Enrique Múgica (PSOE, 23 years, Spanish-born of French mother) and Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo (PP, 13 years and still in office, Argentinian-born of Argentinian and French parents, with Argentinian accent).

**Figure 14:** The length of the parliamentary career in the *Congreso de los Diputados* (1993–2023)



**Figure 14** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

Participation in parliamentary committees (and their equivalent in regional assemblies and local councils) is an important part of the role of elected officials. They allow effective influence over policy and legislation, holding the executive accountable as well as becoming a policy expert. The dataset of legislators for Spain collected by the Pathways project until the XI<sup>th</sup> legislature of 2016–2016 allows comparing committee participation for legislators with and without known migrant ancestry.

The results, up to that term, indicate that most legislators (more than 90%) participate in at least one committee, with the share of migrant-ancestry MPs that do so being slightly lower (92%) than those with no migrant ancestry (95%). Moreover, migrant-ancestry legislators participate (on average) in fewer committees: 2.4 (with a maximum of 5) compared to 3.7 (with a maximum of 17). They also are less likely to take on a more senior role in these committees, as only 39% take on the roles of chair/deputy chair or party spokesperson compared to 62% of legislators without migrant ancestry. They are also less likely to join parliamentary committees that are regarded as more ‘relevant’ or ‘powerful’ because they have legislative powers and/or focus on core ministerial portfolios (as defined by Valiente et al. 2003): 72% of migrant-ancestry legislators join such committees compared to 93% of all other MPs. They are, however, less likely to join committees that deal with policy areas where migration or migrant integration is more often discussed: only 32% of migrant-ancestry legislators compared to 52% of the remaining MPs.

We also discussed committee assignment with the politicians interviewed. If there is a ‘secret garden’ in parliamentary politics, this seems to be committee assignments. With almost no exceptions, the politicians interviewed did not really know how committees were exactly assigned, which were the exact criteria used for assignments and who gets precedence for what. The common answer to whether they were assigned the committees

they were interested in is relatively simple: they were asked to make a list with their preferences, they got some they had written down, but not others. Yet, why they were assigned to those they had not mentioned is not always entirely clear to them.

One interesting aspect that emerged in one of the interviews with a former politician of Podemos is that, even in new parties with a policy platform of radical social and economic reform and a very present rhetoric of gender equality, committee preferences and assignments are highly gendered and 'traditional'. The portfolios and committees that have always been considered hierarchically superior in prestige are the same that are highly coveted by all MPs and the ones that men get assigned to the most: Constitutional affairs, Internal affairs and Foreign affairs. Even in new parties with a strong emphasis on social policy reform and redistribution, the priorities do not seem to change easily, and this seems driven to a large extent by media attention to the various portfolios:

*“Now, looking back, for example, I think I should have been much more strategic when choosing committees, or trying to. I think the distribution of committees was full of prejudices, for example, a lot of gender bias. I think I should have asked to be in Foreign Affairs, but it was a tremendously male-dominated committee, and I probably wouldn't have managed to get into it, but I didn't even try. [...] You could ask for the committees you wanted, but that counted for very little. I think it was decided beforehand, and I really think there was a lot of gender bias, that the important committees, on the important issues, were much more male-dominated and no criteria were established to compensate for that. And committees like Health, Education, Disability, Equality, of course, were much more full of women. [...] I remember that I asked for Constitutional and Home Affairs and they laughed at me: 'It's impossible for you to get into either Constitutional or Home Affairs', and then it was ironic because Home Affairs dealt with a lot of [anonymised] issues and in the end they ended up inviting me to go to those sessions because, of course, the rest didn't know what to think about those issues. Foreign Affairs was also considered important, and I would say mainly those. Then, for sure, it changed a lot depending on which laws were being debated. There were committees that suddenly acquired more weight because they were discussed in plenary, but in the end what everyone in the group wanted was to speak in the plenary. So, if an education law was being debated, suddenly [the] Education [committee] acquired a lot of weight because there were going to be debates on Education in the plenary. And, ultimately, the spokesperson of the committee is the one who speaks in the plenary. The same happened with parliamentary questions: there were*

*elbow strikes to be able to ask questions, I was never able to ask [an oral question] in plenary, for example.”*

*“Ahora pensándolo con la distancia, por ejemplo, creo que tendría que haber sido mucho más estratégica a la hora de elegir comisiones, o de intentarlo. Creo que el reparto de comisiones estuvo llenísimo de prejuicios, por ejemplo, mucho sesgo de género. Creo que yo tendría que haber pedido estar en Exteriores, pero era una comisión tremendamente masculinizada, en la que probablemente no habría conseguido entrar, pero es que ni lo intenté. [...] Tú podías pedir las comisiones que querías, se respetó muy poco. Yo creo que estaba decidido antes de que las pidiéramos y, de verdad, creo que hubo muchísimo sesgo de género, que las comisiones importantes, con los temas importantes, estaban muchísimo más masculinizadas y no se estableció ningún criterio para compensar eso. Y comisiones como Sanidad, Educación, Discapacidad, Igualdad, por supuesto, estaban mucho más llenas de mujeres. [...] Yo recuerdo que pedí Constitucional e Interior y se rieron de mí: ‘Es imposible que entres ni en Constitucional ni en Interior’, y luego fue irónico porque en Interior iban muchos temas [anonimizado] y al final me tenían que acabar invitando a ir a esas sesiones, porque, claro, el resto no sabían qué opinar de esos temas. Exteriores también se consideraba importante, y yo diría que principalmente esas. Luego es verdad que, claro, cambiaba mucho según qué leyes se estuvieran debatiendo. Había comisiones que adquirían de repente más peso porque tenían visibilidad en pleno, pero al final lo que quería todo el mundo en el grupo era hablar en el pleno. Entonces, si se estaba debatiendo una ley de educación, de repente Educación adquiere muchísimo peso porque va a haber debates de Educación en el pleno. Y al final quien habla en el pleno es el portavoz de la comisión. Lo mismo pasaba con las preguntas parlamentarias: había codazos para poder preguntar, yo nunca pude preguntar en pleno, por ejemplo.”*

*[ES\_POL\_03, woman, left-wing party (Podemos), national level, second generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

Some of the politicians interviewed who hold subnational elected office confirm this feeling of being sidelined to be present in the most influential or central spaces within the elected assemblies. For example, this local councillor in Madrid explains how she was less successful than others to bring the initiatives she led to plenary debates:

*“I’m very happy with myself for the little or the much I have been able to do, because the circumstances were very difficult, beyond being in opposition. Have I left things undone? Sure. In fact, if you review all the proposals taken to plenary, I think I have been the one with less proposals arriving to plenary. Proposals, questions, initiatives or any of the instruments*

*accepted in plenary. I have tried to do what I could, and sometimes you can and others you can't."*

*("Estoy muy satisfecha de mí misma por hacer lo poco o mucho que haya podido hacer, porque las circunstancias eran superdifíciles, más allá de estar en la oposición. ¿Me he dejado cosas sin hacer? Seguro. De hecho, si te das un paseo por las proposiciones llevadas a pleno, creo que la persona que menos proposiciones ha podido empujar hasta llegar al pleno he sido yo. Proposiciones, preguntas, iniciativas o cualquiera de las formas que se aceptan en el pleno. He intentado hacer todo lo posible, y a veces se puede y a veces no se puede.") [Maysoun Douas, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Policy expertise does not have the same career progression value in Spain as in other countries (like the UK). Interviewed Spanish politicians rarely mentioned policy expertise as a critical aspect of their success and continuity in elected office. Other political skills or merits seem more important for career progression and continuity in elected office – among others, factional membership within the party and political discretion. This elected official in a Catalan party expressed it very vividly when explaining the consequences of disagreeing with the party leadership over regional government appointments for the immigration portfolio, and how that ended with removal from the lists to national parliament and replacement by a 'functionally equivalent' migrant-origin candidate, thus implying that tokenistic dynamics were at play:

*"Of course, when I was elected and a Catalan government was set up and they were going to put a Catalan person in the immigration regional ministry, I made a fuss. I made fuss because I said, 'No, no, look, you took a step forward with me and we have to keep going. So, this place has to be taken by an immigrant, just like the minister for women is a woman and not a man, just like for the LGBTI portfolio they don't put a heterosexual person, they put an LGBTI person, in the immigration ministry there has to be an immigrant! Or are we one million eight hundred thousand fools and there is not a single one skilled enough!? And if there is not one skilled enough, let the party train one! And if they can't train one, let the party surround him with advisors, but the person that we see as minister, this one, has to be an immigrant!' Well, there was a big row after that. I got a few stabbings in the back. And one of the issues is that the stabbing happened because I didn't know how the party worked. [...] And when the change came, the new elections to Congress, they played a trick on me to leave me out of the lists in 2019. They put a person with the same characteristics as me, but obviously not with the*

*same political position as me [laughs]. But, of course, the appearance was that everything was fine, you know? That everything was fine.”* (“Claro, cuando yo después que soy elegida viene un Govern de la Generalitat y van a poner en la secretaría de inmigración a un catalán yo patalié. Patalié porque dije ‘No, no, a ver, ustedes dieron un paso conmigo hacia adelante y hay que seguir. Entonces, este lugar lo tiene que asumir un inmigrante, así como la secretaría de la dona [NdT: mujer] es una dona y no es un hombre, así como la secretaría LGTBI no ponen un hetero, ponen un LGTBI, ¿en la secretaría de inmigración tiene que haber un inmigrante! ¿O somos un millón ochocientos mil tontos que no hay ninguno que sepa!? ¡Y si no hay ninguno que sabe, que lo forme el partido! ¡Y si no lo pueden formar que le rodee el partido de técnicos, pero la persona que nosotros vemos como secretaria, este, tiene que ser un inmigrante!’ Bueno, ahí se armó un queco que ahí ya... Ahí me llevé unas cuantas puñaladas por la espalda. Y uno de los temas es que la puñalada viene porque yo no conocía cómo funcionaba el partido. [...] Y cuando viene el cambio, la nueva elección al Congreso, me habían hecho una jugada para sacarme del Congreso, en 2019. Poniendo una persona con la mismas características que yo, pero evidentemente no con la misma posición política que yo [ríe]. Pero, claro, quedaba todo como que estaba todo bien, ¿entendés? Que estaba todo bien.”) [Ana Surra, woman, left-wing Catalan party (ERC), national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

Mentorship, as a whole, is not a very common experience for Spanish politicians of migrant ancestry. In fact, most expressed not having had any mentors – some with regret and most as a matter-of-fact thing – and emphasised that politics is a relatively lonely career. None mentioned mentorship as a key factor in career progression once elected. All references to mentors were exclusively restricted to the early stages of being an aspirant and candidate. Once elected into office, the few mentors that were mentioned, seem to disappear from the picture. For career progression, being in the right ‘faction’ or in line with the party leadership is what matters the most.

The importance of support networks is also limited in most politicians’ experience, especially for regional and national careers. Party factions or historical clienteles can be, at times, more important than anything else. This is the reason why, given how candidates are often recruited as outsiders to the party, they rarely end up having an internal party career. In one of those rare exceptions where a local councillor who was recruited directly into the party for the local elections ended up going up the internal party ranks to the regional party organisation, she expressed how intimidating this promotion can be at first for an ‘outsider’:

*“I felt very small. Very small. Because, obviously, I was there with Ximo Puig, who was the president of Generalitat [Valenciana], and all regional councillors. And I was coming from a small municipality and I didn’t know almost anyone. And, yes, I knew them from interviews or television but personally, practically nobody. So, little by little... And that is why going on site to Valencia was so important. To meet, to talk. Just the fact of sitting next to one person, and another on the other side, well... you can establish a relationship.”*

*(“Me sentí muy pequeña. Muy pequeña. Porque, claro, estaba allí con Ximo Puig, que era el presidente de la Generalitat, todos los consellers. Y entonces, claro, yo venía de un municipio pequeño que no conocía prácticamente a nadie. Y sí, los conocía de entrevistas o de televisión pero personalmente, prácticamente no conocía a nadie. Entonces, poco a poco, pues... Y por eso era tan importante también poder ir presencialmente a Valencia. Conocer, poder hablar. Porque el hecho de estar sentada una persona y al otro lado otra persona, pues... Entablar una relación.”)*  
*[Martine Mertens, woman, centre-left party (PSOE), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

But often, it’s larger political or electoral strategies from the top that can determine upward mobility in a career, as illustrated by the case of this local councillor who was included in the lists for the regional parliament without expecting it:

*“[...] the request, the proposal was for me a surprise, it was a source of pride, something I had never thought about, that I could become a regional parliamentarian in the Assembly [of Madrid], it was not an ambition of mine [...] It was not just me, as I say, there were other [municipal] spokespeople.”*

*(“[...] la petición, la propuesta para mí ya fue una sorpresa, era para mí un orgullo, era algo que nunca me había planteado que pudiera llegar a ser diputada en la Asamblea [de Madrid], no estaba en mis ambiciones [...] No solo estaba yo, como te digo, estaban otros portavoces [municipales].”)*  
*[Janette Novo, woman, centre-right party (PP), local and regional levels, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

In any case, one of the most pervasive aspects in the interviews was the sense of loneliness in the role that emanated from the biographical narratives of political trajectories, as illustrated by this quote of the current national MP of Sahrawi origin Tesh Sidi:

*“I battled the storm, I wrote a lot, because I like to write, to write articles in the first tense. I remember an article about the loneliness of a vote and*

*how bad it feels... I think we must externalize a lot and I do a lot of pedagogy on the social media, I don't know if you use them, but I do a lot of pedagogy on the social media about what is it like here. You will never see me undervalue political work, which is something I combat a lot."*

*("Aguanté el chaparrón, escribí mucho, porque a mí me gusta mucho escribir y escribir artículos en primera persona. Me acuerdo de un artículo diciendo la soledad de un voto y lo mal que está... Creo que hay que externalizar mucho y hago mucha pedagogía en redes sociales, no sé si usas redes sociales, pero hago mucha pedagogía en redes sociales sobre cómo es la realidad aquí. Yo nunca me verás, que es algo que combato mucho, infravalorar el trabajo político.") [Tesh Sidi, woman, left-wing coalition (Sumar/Más Madrid), national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

### *3.2 The relevance of migration-related issues and target groups*

Many of the migrant-ancestry politicians interviewed in Spain were not particularly interested in issues relating to migration or the integration of minorities as policy areas, or diaspora politics, and the majority of them did not engage in policy-making on those matters; hence, dealing or not with these issues played no role in their career progression or absence of it. This does not mean that they do not afford relevance to the migrant ancestry or personal migration histories for the understanding of their biographical trajectories in politics, but they do not see themselves as particularly well-suited to engage in policy-making on migration or integration just because they are migrants or the children of migrants. In fact, some of them decline proposals to lead on migration-related issues within their parliamentary groups, as illustrated by this quote of a local councillor of Madrid:

*"[...] in fact, [in] one of the first conversations we had in the [local council party] group to decide how to distribute portfolios, a colleague told me 'well, I see you helping us with topics relating to migration, and this and that' and I said 'look, in the team of local councillors there are several people professionally focusing on this. I have not worked on this. In other words, beyond being one [migrant-ancestry person], I am not a professional on this topic. I won't add any value. Hence, I don't need to take it up. What I am interested in, what I know about, is innovation and entrepreneurship and all economic topics. And that's what I want to focus on, of course I can handle something more, but I should not take over the expertise that others bring to the table. And that conversation did not sit well."*

*(“[...] de hecho, [en] una de las primeras conversaciones que tuvimos en el grupo [municipal] para ver cómo nos distribuíamos los temas, un compañero me dijo ‘uy, yo te veo ayudándonos con los temas migrantes y no sé qué y no sé cuántos’ y yo le dije ‘mira, dentro del equipo de concejales hay varias personas que os dedicáis profesionalmente a esto. Yo no me he dedicado. O sea, yo más allá de la circunstancia de serlo, yo no soy una profesional de esto. No os voy a añadir ningún tipo de valor. Entonces yo no tengo por qué estar. A mí lo que me mueve y de lo que entiendo es de innovación y de emprendimiento y de los temas económicos. Y es de lo que me quiero ocupar y no me quiero ocupar, o sea, me podría ocupar de alguna cosa más, pero no tengo por qué invadir las competencias que, claramente, no sé, encarnáis ciertas personas’. Y esa conversación no gustó.”) [Maysoun Douas, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Nevertheless, due to the reduced presence of politicians of immigrant origin or ancestry in elected office, many either want to represent migrant communities or are, sometimes unintendedly, drawn into doing so. A Cuban-origin politician mentions how he was nudged by a close relative to speak up for Cuban political prisoners and against political repression in Cuba:

*“[...] because one of my cousins nudged me. She told me, ‘you are in a position, operating in the political field, and you have a margin of maneuver, so you have to do something for those who are persecuted and repressed back there.’ And so I did, and I had the satisfaction of working, in such a diligent manner, by receiving all the main dissidents who came to Madrid, taking them to see the President, taking them to see the Minister of Foreign Affairs, taking them to see the Speaker of the Chamber, and many of them as well, that is a great personal satisfaction. Some very well-known ones, like José Daniel Ferrer, who is a leader of the eastern part of Cuba in opposition to the Castros dictatorship, thanked me publicly in a meeting for my work. But some unknown ones, who had been in prison, told me, ‘I want to thank you because your activity, according to my jailer, meant protection from the mistreatment I received in prison’. So, I was doing something for the benefit of..., but I also knew that the smallest nonsense, which is a written question that I filed, which is the simplest parliamentary product, had an effect on the oppressors, you know?”*  
*(“[...] porque me empujó una de mis primas. Me dijo, ‘estás en una situación, jugando en el campo político, y tienes un margen de maniobra, algo tienes que hacer por los que son allí, perseguidos y reprimidos.’ Y así lo hice, y tuve la satisfacción, en esa forma de trabajar muy solvente, de recibir a todos los disidentes significados que venían a Madrid, llevarlos a ver al Presidente, llevarlos a ver a la Ministra de Exteriores, llevarlos a ver*

*al Presidente de la Cámara, eso es una gran satisfacción personal. Algunos muy conocidos, como José Daniel Ferrer, que es un líder de la parte oriental de Cuba en contestación a la dictadura de los Castro, me agradeció en una reunión públicamente mi trabajo hecho. Pero alguno no conocido, que había estado en la cárcel, me dijo, 'quiero agradecerle porque su actividad, según mi carcelero, significaba una protección para el maltrato que recibía en la cárcel.' Entonces, yo estaba haciendo algo en beneficio de... pero es que además sabía que la más mínima chorrada, que es una pregunta escrita que yo metía en registro, que es el producto parlamentario más simple, tenía un efecto sobre los opresores, ¿entiendes?") [Teófilo de Luis, man, centre-right party (PP), national level, first generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

Other elected representatives in Spain make an explicit choice to represent migration-related issues. For example, a Latin American-born local councillor in Madrid speaks about her desire to work on these topics in the local council committees:

*"That's why I'm on the Social Policies, Family and Equality Committee, dealing with the issue of migration. I'm the one who coordinates a working group that we call 'Madrilenians by choice'. The issue of social policies is what I like the most, and citizen participation too, it's one of the things that I like, because it was one of the things that I also worked on from 2017 to 2019, as a facilitator in local forums, in citizen participation during the government of Manuela Carmena."*

*("[...] estoy, por eso, en la Comisión de Políticas Sociales, Familia e Igualdad, llevando el tema de migración, soy la que coordino un grupo de trabajo que le llamamos 'madrileños y madrileñas por elección'. El tema de políticas sociales, y participación ciudadana también, es una de las cosas que más me gustan, porque fue una de las cosas que trabajé también del 2017 al 2019, como dinamizadora en los foros locales, en la participación ciudadana durante el gobierno de Manuela Carmena.") [Ana Carolina Elías, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Another first-generation migrant, this time from Morocco, describes his desire to be seen by the Moroccan community to boost electoral participation but also how, once elected, migrants and the children of migrants would approach him with claims for representation. While he was happy to work on issues on migration (he was the leader of a prominent association promoting Arabic culture), he also expressed his desire not to be exclusively pigeonholed into that topic:

*“[...] there was a debate about whether I should present myself as a candidate, let’s say, on a poster exclusively in Arabic, or in other languages, or if I should only go on the general list, and people would see me, right? And, of course I had and I have, to work so that people of immigrant origin, of Moroccan origin, participate in the Socialist Party, participate in the general elections. The truth is, nowadays, they participate much more than in the first elections that I ran for, it’s nothing like it. [...] Something else also happened, I had appointments with so many people in Parliament, I am one of the legislators, if not the most, who has received the most people in Parliament, but not just people of immigrant origin, many people, who are Spanish, from here, Catalan, interested in talking to me, from different sectors. Many children of immigrants on matters of education, who came to explain to me many things, about how they were experiencing it, who wanted to interview me and many young people, many young girls of Moroccan origin, Pakistani origin, etc. [...] It is the parliamentary group that really decided whether I would join these committees or not, and it is true that the only thing I said was that I would not like to only join [those], let’s say, that I would be perceived primarily as the parliamentarian of immigrants.”*

*“[...] estaba el debate entre si tenía que presentarme como candidato, digamos, en un cartel exclusivamente en árabe o en otros idiomas, o tenía que ir solamente en la lista en general, y la gente ya me vería, ¿no? Y, claro, yo tenía y tengo que trabajar porque también las personas de origen inmigrante, de origen marroquí, participen en el Partido Socialista, participen en las elecciones generales. La verdad, hoy en día, participan muchísimo más que en las primeras elecciones que yo participé, no tiene nada que ver, nada que ver. [...] Es que además pasaba una cosa, que yo recibía tantas personas en el Parlament, yo soy uno de los diputados, por no decir el que más, que más personas ha recibido en el Parlament, pero no solamente personas de origen inmigrante, sino muchísimas personas españolas, de aquí, catalanas, interesadas en hablar conmigo, de diferentes ámbitos. Muchos hijos de la inmigración en temas de educación, que venían a explicarme muchísimas cosas, sobre cómo lo estaban ellos viviendo, que querían efectivamente entrevistarme, muchos jóvenes, muchas chicas jóvenes de origen marroquí, pakistání, etcétera. [...] Es el grupo parlamentario quien decidió realmente que yo llevara esas comisiones o no. Es verdad que lo único que yo trasladé fue que no me gustaría llevar solo [esas], digamos, o que se me visualizara más como el diputado de los inmigrantes.”* [Mohammed Chaib, man, centre-left party (PSC), regional and national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]

Hence, even in contexts where the politician is coming from migrant associations and has gained public visibility in that role, there is always this

underlying tension between substantively representing migrant and minority communities and representing a wider set of issues and constituencies. Although they may care about migrant communities and migration-related issues, they do not want to be pigeonholed exclusively into these policy topics.

In the interviews conducted with migrant-ancestry politicians in Spain, it transpired that having or not having a local base of one's own – particularly of a migrant community – is not too consequential for career progression. Migrant-ancestry politicians are sometimes selected by party leaders because of their rooting with migrant associations, though this is not as common as one might expect. Many migrant-ancestry politicians had no previous notable connections with local migrant communities and were selected due to their professional profiles and how they could symbolically represent diversity in the electoral list. Hence, a local base can sometimes (but not that often) be relevant for the candidate selection stage. It is, however, never mentioned as a relevant factor for career progression once elected. At that stage, the most relevant factor is keeping a good standing with the party leadership.

### 3.3 *Leaving politics: reasons and routes*

Extant research (Vanlangenakker, Wauters and Maddens 2013) suggests that the reasons for leaving elected office can be broadly categorised into three (if one discounts death or serious illness): voluntary, party-related and electoral-related reasons. We coded the reasons for departure from the lower chamber for migrant-origin national legislators since 2008 and the findings are displayed in Table 7.

As we can observe, the vast majority of migrant ancestry legislators left parliament because of party-related reasons, which include disagreements with the party (e. g., the cases of Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo after the end of the 2011–2015 legislature), individuals who were not selected again for the lists (e. g., the case of Mohammed Chaib or Ana María Surra after the 2016–2019 legislature) or were placed in a worse position in the lists (e. g., the case of Maria Dantas after the 2019–2023 legislature, placed in position 6 when she had been in position 5 in April 2019 and 4 in November 2019). A few of them were not re-elected due to poorer electoral results of their party despite keeping the same position on the list (e. g., María Luisa Alonso, who was head of the list for La Rioja with Ciudadanos in November 2019) or had personal or professional reasons for stepping down (e. g., Kissy Chandiramani in Ceuta after the 2016–2019 term). Hence, though

the number of migrant-ancestry legislators is very small overall to be sure about patterns yet, it seems that their careers end for reasons other than their own choice.

**Table 7:** Rate and reasons for leaving the lower chamber of the Spanish parliament, only migrant-ancestry legislators (2008–2023)

**Table 7** Source: Data for the V<sup>th</sup> to XI<sup>th</sup> terms comes from the Pathways project, for the XII<sup>th</sup> from the InclusiveParl project, and for the XIII<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> from the REPCANCE project.

	%
Rate of non-renewal after each term	35.5
<b>Reasons for leaving</b>	<b>N=12/15</b>
<i>Voluntary reasons</i>	16.6
Other job/mandate in politics (primarily a career jump)	8.3
Personal reasons (not a conflict with the party: retirement, own term limit)	8.3
<i>Party 'victim'</i>	66.7
Not nominated again	41.7
Nominated at a worse list place than before	8.3
Conflict with the party	16.7
<i>Electoral 'victim'</i>	8.3
<i>Other</i>	8.3

We asked interviewed politicians who had ended their political careers for their reasons to have left politics, but we did not find a systematic pattern in interviews that pointed to a major reason for exit. Some politicians leave office after several terms because they feel they have been in politics long enough or because of the personal or family toll they have experienced. Others failed to be re-elected because their party obtained less seats than previously. Others were not re-selected by their parties for a variety of reasons.

Nevertheless, we have some accounts of migrant-ancestry politicians who feel that they were on the list for relatively tokenistic reasons and were replaced by another migrant-ancestry candidate who was also selected for equally tokenistic reasons. This was not too common, however, but there were a few cases like this one:

*“I think that due to my knowledge, my experiences and the fact of having driven so much media attention at the beginning, I wanted to become a*

*role model and I thought I could be a role model within the party. And not a role model on immigration, or a role model on citizenship, but a political role model. I could see myself in the future, not immediately, but in the future, as an intellectual within the party, who could draw some specific lines within the party. And I see that it cannot be, that the same racism, with a different shape, different undertones, but the same racism I experienced in Convergència, or that elitism I experienced in Convergència, exists also in Esquerra, and it exists from the source, in my own municipality. And that's where I realized that everything breaks down, that I cannot, that I really cannot continue my path in this party, because it makes no sense, no sense to continue in a place where you are really used and they do not want you."*

*("Yo creo que por mis conocimientos, mis vivencias y por el hecho de haber sido tan mediático inicialmente, yo quería ser un referente y creía que podía tener el potencial para ser un referente dentro del partido. Y no un referente de inmigración, ni un referente de ciudadanía, sino un referente político. Yo me veía en un futuro, no inmediato, pero en un futuro me veía como un intelectual dentro del partido, que pudiese marcar unas líneas específicas dentro del partido. Y veo que no, que ese mismo racismo, de una forma diferente, de un color diferente, pero ese mismo racismo vivido en Convergència, o ese mismo clasismo incluso vivido en Convergència, también existe en Esquerra, y existe desde el origen, desde mi propio municipio. Y ahí es donde digo, ahí es donde ya se rompe todo, ahí es donde me doy cuenta de que no, de que realmente no puedo seguir mi camino en este partido, porque es que no tiene sentido, no tiene sentido seguir en un sitio donde realmente te utilizan y no te quieren.")*

*[Omar Noumri, man, Catalan left-wing party (ERC), previously as a youth in Catalan right-wing party (CDC), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Despite the exposure to prejudice, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and threats of violence (especially in social media), it is interesting to note that nobody mentioned this as a factor for leaving office. The toxic environment seems to be more relevant to discourage starting a career in politics than to push people to leave politics. Yet, it is a recurrent theme in many of our interviews, especially with women who are visibly of migrant background:

*"As a negative, as soon as videos of me started to be uploaded on to social media, I got 'if you shout so much, go shout to your country, go back to your country', 'this woman, you can tell she likes pastry...' that is, to start insulting me as a fat person, as a brown woman, there I started to see how tough social media was, which I had not had at all as a reaction when I was an activist."*

*“En negativo es que en cuanto en las redes comenzaron a colocar videos míos ‘si tanto gritas, ve a gritar a tu país, que regreses a tu país’, ‘esta señora se nota que come todos los bollos de...’ o sea, a meterse con lo gorda, con lo panchita, ahí comencé a ver lo duro que son las redes, que como activista no había visto ninguna reacción de ese tipo.” [Ana Carolina Elías, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Indeed, many politicians (including those who had experienced hate and abuse) emphasised how much they liked their roles and jobs as elected representatives and how they felt privileged for the time they spent in office, whether short or long:

*“Social media is more cruel and it’s true that the odd MP of another party has made a nasty comment, but generally all has been fine, and the people that know me of other parties, including Vox, who are quite closed-minded on this topic, they respect me. Hence, those who know me in the work sphere respect me very much but it’s true that there is racism in our country and we have to combat it. [...] Well, I’m very grateful, I think I had strengths, I’ve undertaken the positions I’ve been assigned and people have trusted me. In life there are always obstacles, that’s not just for me, that’s for everyone, so that’s a reality and it happens everywhere, but I consider myself privileged.”*

*“La redes son más crueles y luego es verdad que algún diputado de otros partidos ha tenido algún comentario un poco desagradable, pero bueno, por lo demás todo bien ¿eh? y la gente que me conoce de otros partidos políticos, incluso de Vox, que son con este tema muy cerrados, me respetan. O sea, que la gente que me conoce en el ámbito laboral me respeta mucho, pero es verdad que hay racismo en nuestro país y que hay que combatirlo. [...] Bueno, estoy muy agradecida, creo que he tenido muchas fortalezas, he desempeñado los puestos que he desempeñado y que se haya confiado en mí. En la vida siempre hay obstáculos, eso no es algo para mí solo, es algo para todos, entonces yo creo que eso es una realidad y esto pasa en cualquier trabajo del mundo, pero yo me considero una persona afortunada.” [ES\_POL\_20, woman, centre-left party (PSOE), regional, national and EP levels, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

*4. SPRINGBOARDS AND BARRIERS IN  
THEIR POLITICAL CAREERS*

## 4.1 Support factors

Many of the politicians interviewed mentioned, first and foremost, their families as a key supporting anchor. In most cases, families were supportive of the decision to run for office and many of them provided the main reasons to do so with encouraging words and considerations about the symbolic importance of their presence, as in the case of these visibly Muslim local councillor in Madrid and visibly Muslim Catalan regional parliamentarian:

*“And, then, my family, while I was still digesting the proposal [to join Carmena’s list], the invitation she had made, my family was saying ‘no, no, you need to accept, it’s the opportunity for you to get to know how all works from the inside, and this and that. And we really do not have Muslim people who are in politics and who can guide us as to how things work and why it is so difficult to change things for us, isn’t it?’ So, my family, my friends, everyone was positively surprised.”*

*(“Y entonces, mi familia, mientras yo estaba terminando de masticar, de digerir un poco esa proposición [de ir en la lista de Carmena], esa invitación que me estaban haciendo, mi familia me estaba diciendo ‘no, no, cógelo, es un momento para que conozcas todo eso desde dentro o veas tal, cual, no sé qué. Además, es que no tenemos realmente a musulmanes que estén dentro de la política que nos puedan orientar también en cómo se hacen las cosas y por qué es tan difícil cambiarlo para nosotros, ¿no?’. Entonces mi familia, mis amigos, todo el mundo estaba sorprendido para bien.”) [Maysoun Douas, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

*“My mother, I had all sorts of excuses to say no. Especially with that trick that women sometimes use and it’s not great, but we do, which is to say ‘no, mom, I have my children, I’m pregnant, why would I get into that mess.’ And I remember my mother saying [...] ‘but I’ve cleaned too many homes, too many stairs, too many gardens, too many restaurants, ovens, etc., so that you could have the future, the present that you have, so now it’s your turn to demonstrate that all of this was worth it’. And my husband, instead, said [...] ‘but if you don’t do it, we will take too long to get someone who will dare break the spell, because we’re really not in the public sphere, think that if you don’t do it maybe in 10 years more there won’t be a Najat, and in 10 years they won’t have the background, the connection that you still have with your own community, because your son will not have your same connection to the community, he’s a child born here, he’s a local child, and so we will have lost a generation before someone steps forward.’ And truth be told, this is what really nudged me to say, OK, yes.”*

*(“Mi madre, yo pongo todas las excusas para decir que no. Sobre todo, como eso que hacemos las mujeres y que no está muy bien, pero que lo hacemos, es decir, ‘no, mamá, yo tengo mis hijos, yo estoy embarazada, qué necesidad tengo’. Y recuerdo que mi madre me dijo [...] ‘es que yo he limpiado demasiadas casas, demasiadas escaleras, demasiados jardines, demasiados restaurantes, hornos, etcétera, para que vosotros tuvierais el futuro, el presente que tenéis, pues, ahora te toca a ti y demostrar que todo eso ha valido la pena’. Y mi marido, en cambio, me dijo [...] ‘pero es que si no lo haces tú, tardaríamos mucho en que alguien se atreva para romper con esa maldición, porque realmente no estamos en la esfera política, piensa que, igual, si tú no lo haces de aquí a 10 años no hay una Najat, de aquí a 10 años, no van a tener ni el bagaje, ni la conexión que tú aún tienes con tu propia comunidad, porque tu hijo no va a tener la misma conexión que tienes con su comunidad, es un niño nacido aquí, es un niño que tiene un entorno aquí, entonces igual habremos perdido una generación para que alguien diera el paso’. Y la verdad que esto básicamente fue lo que más me empujó a decir, bueno, vale, sí.”) [Najat Driouech, woman, left-wing party (ERC), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

In some cases, but not all, the local migrant community was supportive of migrant candidates, especially in areas where there is an acute sense that they are hugely under-represented, as is the case in the Mediterranean coastal areas of Spain where large shares of the resident population are of, primarily EU, migrant ancestry:

*“But I felt, at that point, that there was quite a lot of support from the international community, which is really what I personally focused on. You know, I felt that in a council like Mijas, we have 25 councillors and there were 24 of them targeting the Spanish community and one targeting the international community. And even that is an underrepresentation. If a third of the population are foreigners and one out of 25 is a foreigner, it’s a real underrepresentation of foreigners on the local government process. So, no, I didn’t personally get a lot of flak.” [Bill Anderson, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Undoubtedly, a supporting factor is to have a party leadership that believes in diversity, in the need for the party to mirror the diversity of the party from the ground up, beyond just inclusion in the lists and who promotes diversity at the grassroots level as well. As one of the interviewees, who is also responsible for leading her party in Madrid, put it:

*“And the things that are working for us with a slow process is to first do some education within the party, you first need to ask the local chapter of Más Madrid in Usera why is it that there is not a single Chinese person participating in their chapter or why haven’t they ensured that one of their neighbour representatives in the District Council be a Chinese person or of Chinese background, second generation. They are not there, they do not represent that small local, tiny reality that they aspire to represent in the institution, which is the District Council. And it’s the closest sphere of politics. And I went around doing this in all chapters, in Parla with the Ecuadorian community, in Usera, and I encountered messages that are, well, painful but that reveal a structural and unconscious racism, right?”*

*(“Y las cosas que a nosotros nos han funcionado con un proceso lento, es que tú primero tienes que hacer pedagogía dentro de tu organización, que tú primero tienes que preguntarle a la Asamblea de Más Madrid de Usera, por qué no hay una sola persona china participando en su Asamblea, o por qué no han forzado que uno de sus vocales vecinos en la Junta de Distrito sea una persona china o de origen chino, segunda generación. No están, no representan a esa realidad local pequeñita, chiquita, a la que aspiran a representar en la institución, que es la Junta de Distrito. Y es la política más cercana. Y eso lo fui haciendo en todas las asambleas, la de Parla con la comunidad ecuatoriana, la de Usera, y me encontré mensajes, bueno, que son dolorosos, pero que evidencian el racismo que hay estructural y a veces inconsciente, ¿no?”) [Manuela Bergerot, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), regional level, first generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

## 4.2 Barriers, prejudices and biases

One of the main barriers for political participation and for joining political parties that several of the persons interviewed in Spain highlight relates to the complexities of ensuring the material survival in an adverse economic and administrative environment. Several of the politicians we interviewed were, at some point, irregular migrants in Spain. Their visa or residence permits may have expired and they were staying in Spain without the administrative documentation required, or they had relatively precarious stateless or non-permanent protected status. This is not an anecdote, as around a third of all the people we interviewed (half of those who were foreign-born) had been in such a situation. Several of them were in such a precarious situation for a decade or more, and this meant that ensuring a living for them (and, sometimes, their children), with the also precarious jobs available for people who are unauthorized migrants, was their first priority.

*“In my case, my experience and trajectory is the opposite, that of a migrant person who arrives to Spain without authorization, who first starts at university but cannot study because I needed to make ends meet, I needed to start working, and I started a political career as an unauthorized migrant, at a time when Spain was stopping to be a sending country.”*

*(“Yo, mi experiencia y mi trayectoria es todo lo contrario, de una persona inmigrante que llega a España sin papeles, que primero entra en la universidad, no puede seguir estudiando porque, obviamente, no tenía de qué mantenerme, me tengo que poner a trabajar, y empecé una carrera política en España como inmigrante sin papeles, en un momento que España dejaba de ser un país emisor.”) [ES\_POL\_21, woman, centre-left party (PSOE), local, regional and EP levels, visible migrant ancestry]*

*“... we were walking down Princesa street and, well, one of these situations due to being undocumented until I was 15 years old, walking down Princesa and, all of a sudden, two policemen or civil guards or whatever were coming down, stopping people and requesting documentation. And they had stopped two migrants with a much darker skin colour than ours, obviously, and my mother pinched me, what she used to do when she wanted to give me an order, and she pinched me and hurt me and said ‘Shut up, do not open your mouth. Shut up.’ And we walked by. Obviously, we didn’t have our documents. And, then, in time, I was able to understand and I realized the privilege of being an immigrant with this skin colour. All, each of us, in our different experiences with immigration, we have privileges compared to others. Mine, I understood, was my skin colour, because if I just kept silent, that was enough.”*

*(“... íbamos caminando por Princesa y, bueno, una situación de no tener papeles hasta los 15 años en regla, caminando por Princesa, y de repente delante venían, creo que eran dos policías, dos guardias civiles o lo que fueran, y paraban y pedían papeles. Y habían parado a dos personas inmigrantes con el color de piel mucho más oscuro que el nuestro, evidentemente, y mi madre ahí me retorció, lo que siempre me hacía cuando quería darme alguna orden, me apretaba la carne y me hacía así, me giraba. Sí, me pellizcaba, haciéndome daño, y me decía ‘Cállate la boca, no abras la boca. Cállate.’ Y caminábamos. Claro, porque no teníamos papeles. Y yo ahí ya, con el tiempo, pude traducir a los años, y ahí me di cuenta del privilegio de ser inmigrante con este color de piel. Todas, cada una, en las diferentes experiencias vitales con la inmigración, tenemos privilegios frente a otras. Y el mío, entendí que era mi color de piel, porque solo si me quedaba callada, con eso bastaba.”) [Manuela Bergerot, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), regional level, first generation, invisible migrant ancestry]*

The importance of lowering such barriers is emphasized by this local councillor of Venezuelan origin in the city of Jérez:

*“The grieving process must be supported by public administrations, a supportive training to encourage self-confidence, so that people can say, ‘well, I had a relevant economic and professional career in my country, why shouldn’t I have it also in this country contributing the best of me to this country’. I think this should be done in all aspects. And that means that when you get to a job interview with a big company, as was my case in 2012–2013, you’ll get there with the confidence that they will view you as an equal and that you having an accent that is slightly different to the local one will not mean they won’t accept you. We need to support people in the migratory grieving process and give them the opportunity, if they meet the requirements to work, because many people have a lot to contribute to this country that is positive and maybe for administrative reasons they are not given their documentation, so those who have the characteristics, the rights, I won’t get into matters of the law, but if you’re here and you have a right and you can stay in Spain, I’m going to speed up the paperwork so that you can work and that will build your self-confidence. I think that’s part of the integration process, because work dignifies the man and migrant people who spend too much time with no work get depressed, and between the migratory grieving process and not being able to fend for yourself, to earn your living, that emotionally destroys a person. I can see it around, there are doctors, engineers, who are here and the bureaucracy does not allow them to move on and they get really depressed and they are very valuable people, a doctor no less, don’t we need them?”*

*“Ese proceso de duelo es importante que lo acompañemos en las administraciones, esa formación positiva para que la gente vuelva a la autoestima de decir, ‘hombre, si yo tenía una trayectoria importante económica y profesional en mi país, por qué no voy a tenerla también aquí aportando lo mejor de mí a este país’. Yo creo que se debería hacer en todos los aspectos. Y eso hace que cuando tú llegues a una entrevista de trabajo con una empresa grande, como por ejemplo la que yo entré por 2012–2013, llegues con la seguridad de que te van a ver en calidad de igual y que no por tú tener el acento un poquito distinto al que está aquí, no te van a aceptar. Tenemos que acompañar un poco a las personas en el duelo migratorio y enseguida darles la oportunidad, si cumplen las condiciones de trabajar porque muchas personas tienen mucho que aportar a este país positivo y quizás por trámites burocráticos que no le permiten una tramitación de su documentación, a quienes tengan las características, los derechos, yo no voy a entrar en temas de ley, sino que, oye, si estás aquí y te corresponde, y puedes quedarte en España, te voy a agilizar el trámite*

*para que tú puedas trabajar y que eso te haga subir un poco la autoestima. Yo creo que esa es parte de la integración, porque el trabajo dignifica al hombre y las personas migrantes que pasan mucho tiempo sin trabajar aquí se deprimen, entre el duelo migratorio y no tener la capacidad de valerte por ti mismo, de ganarte el pan que te comes y eso emocionalmente destruye a la persona. Que se ve, hay médicos, hay ingenieros que están aquí, que la burocracia administrativa no les permite avanzar y se deprimen muchísimo y son personas muy valiosas, un médico, imagínate ¿no necesitamos?” [Yessika Quintero, woman, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

Though pressure from below, from migrant organisations and communities, to support a migrant-ancestry candidate to run for a position on the lists is not that common, the few cases where it has happened have been met with resistance from the leadership of the political parties. These accounts from two politicians of Latin American origin who managed to organise the migrant-ancestry rank-and-file in their respective left-wing parties, the Catalan ERC and the nation-wide Podemos, are illustrative of the difficulties met:

*“That’s the time when Together for a Yes [Junts pel Sí, a pro-Catalan independence coalition] emerged and all associations got together and we had to attach ourselves as an association to either Esquerra [ERC] or CiU, and we chose Esquerra because it was left-wing and CiU was more right-wing. So we spoke to them to tell them that we wanted to participate in Together for a Yes as an association and that we thought that there needed to be an immigrant in a winnable seat on the list of Together for a Yes because it was going to be historical and there needed to be an immigrant raising their hand to vote for the independence of Catalonia. It was a historical moment, we were not pleading to get a parliamentary seat, we just wanted to raise our hand to vote and then we would resign the seat, but it was a historical moment and the historical records needed to show that there was an immigrant there. They did not understand me, they did not engage with us, these people. It seems that they would kill for a seat in the Catalan Parliament. So they placed me 18<sup>th</sup> in Barcelona [of the ERC slate...]. I was eventually placed 47<sup>th</sup> for Barcelona [of the full Together for the Yes list] and I was not elected. They didn’t even have that number of seats for the whole of Catalonia, let alone for Barcelona only, anyway. But I still campaigned for them.”*  
 *(“En ese mismo momento es cuando viene Juntos por el Sí, cuando viene Juntos por el Sí es donde se juntan todas las asociaciones y había que ir como asociación o a Esquerra [ERC] o al CiU y nosotros fuimos a Esquerra porque era más de izquierda, que CiU era más de derecha.*

*Entonces fuimos ahí a decir que nosotros como asociación queríamos participar en Juntos por el Sí y que nos parecía que tenía que haber un inmigrante en posición de salida en la lista Juntos por el Sí porque iba a ser histórico y tenía que haber un inmigrante levantando la mano por la independencia de Cataluña. Porque era histórico, no peleábamos por un lugar de diputado, que una vez que levantábamos la mano renunciábamos al escaño, pero era histórico y tenía que quedar en los anales de la historia que había un inmigrante. No me entendieron, no me dieron bolilla, la gente. Parece que para el Parlament de Catalunya se matan. Y me pusieron en el lugar 18 por Barcelona [...]. Quedé en lugar 47 por Barcelona, que no salía. No tenían ni todos esos escaños en total, menos solo por Barcelona, bueno. Pero igual yo hice campaña.” [Ana Surra, woman, Catalan left-wing party (ERC), national level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

*“[...] the executive, the people, the leaders of Podemos, because we in the branch on migrations did not have any leadership member, we were all grassroots, activists, supporters. And right then, when we got to the top nobody expected it and that’s when they told us ‘Hey, what are we going to do with 22 people who need to be on a list’ and as we were all from Madrid, we were due to go on the Madrid lists. But then, they decided to send us elsewhere. And that’s when, for example, our scores were not respected because I was sent to Albacete and the guy who ended up heading the list had got a lower score than I did. So if the technical criteria had been followed I should have been the head of the list, but they didn’t do that with everyone.”*

*“[...] la ejecutiva, las personas, los dirigentes dentro de Podemos, porque nosotros del Círculo de Migraciones no había ningún dirigente, éramos todos gente de base, gente militante, simpatizante. Y en ese momento cuando nosotros subimos yo creo que eso no se lo esperaba nadie y ahí sí que nos dicen, ‘oye, qué vamos a hacer con 22 personas que tienen que ir en una lista’, y que como todos éramos de Madrid, nos correspondería haber ido por Madrid. Pero luego, ellos nos deciden cómo gestionarnos a nosotros de manera interna y nos mandan por diferentes sitios. Y ahí sí que, por ejemplo, no se respeta la puntuación que tenemos, porque yo iba en Albacete y el que iba primero de lista había sacado menos puntos que yo. Si hubieran seguido los criterios técnicos de esto a mí me correspondería haber ido primera, pero eso no lo hacen con todos” [Diana Paredes, woman, left-wing party (Más Madrid), regional level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

This connects with the perception of some of the migrant-ancestry politicians that we interviewed that Spanish political parties are not truly

interested in incorporating the migrant voters. They may want their votes, but they do not really want them to be fully involved, as one local councillor perceptively put it:

*“I think that there’s a lot of theatre with regards to the foreign community, and I’m sure this is not just in Mijas. In 2022, in a council meeting, I asked the then councillor for foreigners if the council would launch a campaign to encourage the foreigners to vote, or to register and then to vote, and I was told, ‘No, we won’t do that, because everyone knows what to do’ which was clearly not the case. So I think that there is just a lot of theatre around the foreigners. I think they certainly want the votes, but they are not really keen on them being involved in the process, and this is not party political. This applies across all of the parties. They would love the foreigners’ vote, but they don’t really want the foreigners having a say in any part of the process.” [Bill Anderson, man, centre-right party (PP), local level, first generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

In some circumstances, visible markers as an individual of migrant ancestry can mean that the aspirants or candidates are placed in positions that would be less advantageous than what they would get if that was not a factor. For example, this former local councillor who was also briefly a national parliamentarian, explains how her mild Latin American accent prevented her from being head of the list in the first elections she ran for, despite her prominent role in the local party, because she could be perceived as not a ‘local’:

*“It had an effect on my first candidacy. Internally, it was considered that I could not lead the list for the Logroño city council as I had an accent, I was Venezuelan and people were going to perceive me as someone who was not part of the society of Logroño, which was not true, as I had been living in Logroño for many years. But it’s true that I was a new face and that I could be perceived as an outsider to Logroño, so it was understood that this could be a negative factor, and I agreed. Strategically, I thought it made sense. With the passing of time, this was no longer a factor, as people got to know me, people saw me many times in the media, in press briefings, in interviews with the media, and I became a known face. Then, I was no longer perceived as an outsider to La Rioja.”*

*(“Para mi primera candidatura sí influyó. De forma interna se consideraba que yo no podía ser cabeza de lista para la candidatura del ayuntamiento de Logroño por tener acento, ser venezolana y que la gente lo iba a percibir como alguien que no era parte de la sociedad logroñesa, cosa que no es cierto, porque llevaba muchísimos años viviendo en Logroño. Pero sí es cierto que entre ser una cara nueva y, además, que se pudiera percibir*

*que no era parte de la sociedad logroñesa, se entendió que podía ser un factor negativo, cosa que yo estaba de acuerdo. Estratégicamente, me parecía que tenía sentido. Esto, con el paso del tiempo, para mi segunda candidatura, ya no era un factor, porque la gente me conocía, porque la gente me había visto infinidad de veces en los medios de comunicación, dando ruedas de prensa, en entrevistas en los medios de comunicación, entonces ya era un rostro conocido. Entonces ya no se percibía como alguien ajeno a La Rioja.” [María Luisa Alonso, woman, centrist party (Ciudadanos), local and national levels, first generation, migrant ancestry visible only mildly by accent]*

In other cases, they perceive a general sense of ‘otherness’ in the party that sends the signal that the party is not fully open to diverse backgrounds, as illustrated by this experience of a Catalan local councillor of mixed Algerian and Catalan parents:

*“In one of these breakfasts with Jordi Pujol, a visit he made to Balaguer with his wife Marta Ferrusola. [...] There was like a handshaking protocol. All the youth branch members were in line. He would come along and shake our hands one by one. ‘What’s your name?’ [...] The main thing is that in one of these rounds, she [the wife] said ‘what’s your name?’ to a girl and the girl answers ‘Lucía’. And she replied, ‘no, dear, no, better Llúcia, better Llúcia, it’s more from here’. She said ‘better in Catalan, it’s more from here’. Hence, make your name Catalan because it’s better, right? Well, I was next, or after two or three more people. And I said to myself, when she gets to me, this lady is going to crucify me, right? She didn’t say anything because my name cannot be made to sound Catalan. But I did notice a ‘what’s this guy doing here?’ I noticed something like, this guy is not one of us.”*

*(“En uno de estos desayunos con Jordi Pujol, una visita que hizo a Balaguer y su mujer, Marta Ferrusola. [...] Había como un besamanos. Entonces todas las juventudes nos ponían a todos en fila. Y entonces él iba pasando, nos iba dando la mano a todos. ‘¿Cómo te llamas?’ Bueno, ‘com et dius, com et dius?’. [...] El caso es que en esa ronda de saludos, ella dijo, ‘com et dius?’ le dice a una chica, ‘¿cómo te llamas?’ Y le dice la chica, ‘Lucía’. Le contestó, ‘home, no, millor Llúcia, millor Llúcia, que és més d’aquí’. Le dijo, ‘mejor Lucía en catalán, es más de aquí’. O sea, catalanízate el nombre porque es mejor, ¿no? Claro, yo era el siguiente o venía al cabo de dos o tres personas más. Y dije, bueno, es que cuando llegue a mí, esta señora me va a poner la cruz, ¿sabes? No me dijo nada porque mi nombre no se podía catalanizar. Pero sí que noté como, ‘¿y este tío qué hace aquí?’ Sí que noté como, este tío no es de los nuestros.”) [Omar Noumri, man, Catalan left-wing party (ERC), previously as a youth in Catalan*

*right-wing party (CDC), local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

Beyond internal party politics barriers, external political dynamics can also become important barriers for a career in politics. Hate speech and violence are pervasive elements of the experience of many politicians of migrant ancestry – whether of White European ethnicities or visible ethnic minorities. Politics has become increasingly polarized in Spain (as elsewhere) since the mid-2010s, to a point that many politicians have expressed that the constant media attacks and hate speech is making their public lives unbearable. As this former MEP, regional parliamentarian and national MP – who became a very high-profile leader of Podemos – puts it, there was a stark difference between how people perceived what getting into a political career implied in 2014 and what it implies nowadays:

*“There wasn’t any fear back then, because I think that the systemic violence against Podemos is completely new in Spain, I don’t think anyone could have anticipated it in 2014 that they would try to defame us and get us into prison repeatedly just because we were running for elections. Hence, that fear was not there, it arised later, of course, yes, when the attacks started, obviously my family started to worry and my friends started to worry. But not at the beginning, as that didn’t happen, quite the opposite, people thought that getting into politics was something prestigious, that would lead to a more comfortable life, not a more difficult one as it proved to be for us.”*

*“Lo que no había era miedo, porque yo creo que la violencia sistémica que se ejerce contra Podemos es algo completamente nuevo en España, yo creo que nadie se lo podía imaginar en 2014 que se nos iba a intentar difamar y meter en la cárcel en repetidas ocasiones simplemente por presentarnos a las elecciones. Entonces ese miedo no estaba, aparece, después sí, claro, después sí, o sea cuando la ofensiva comienza, pues claro que mi familia se preocupa y que mis amigos se preocupan. Pero al principio no, porque eso no existía, al revés, la gente pensaba que estar en la política era algo prestigioso, que te permitía tener una vida más fácil, no más difícil como resultó ser nuestro caso.”* [Pablo Echenique, man, left-wing party (Podemos), EP, regional and national levels, invisible migrant ancestry]

However, interestingly, none of them points to prejudice, discrimination or racism as an obstacle in their career progression as such. Racism and xenophobia are part of ‘the scenery’. Something they need to deal with in the public and private spheres – sometimes on a regular basis – as a constant bias that they are confronted with. The number of negative

experiences that migrant-origin politicians go through that are connected to prejudice, racism, xenophobia, hate or violence is endless but, surprisingly, none seem to feel that prejudice or racism has blocked their selection, election or career progression in politics. Instead, their way of reflecting about it is often as a more structural undercurrent that is always there but not necessarily in a direct manner in their political experience. As one of the interviewees, a former national MP and later on Junior Minister in the Spanish government, put it:

*“[...] at the end of the day, we are invisibilized in spheres like the political one, in important spheres like politics, the mass media, and in the psyche of white Spanish people, so to say, with that autochthonous seal, to put it that way, there has been no revision of the way to relate with the ‘others’ who are also Spanish. Hence, that generates difficulties to join politics, it doesn’t matter in which party, it generates the same difficulties that we face in our daily lives.”*

*“[...] a la hora de la verdad estamos invisibilizados en ámbitos como pueden ser la política, en ámbitos importantes como pueden ser la política, los medios de comunicación y en la psique de las personas blancas españolas, digamos, con ese sello de autóctono, digámoslo así, no se ha planteado todavía un revisionismo de las relaciones que mantienen con las otras, que somos también españolas. Entonces, eso plantea una dificultad para entrar a formar parte de la política, da igual en qué partido, plantea dificultades que son las que generalmente tenemos en nuestro día a día, en nuestras vidas.” [Rita Bosaho, woman, left-wing party (Podemos), second generation, visible ethnic minority]*

While few refer to prejudice and discrimination as having been a direct or specific barrier for themselves, some were very aware of how it affects other groups that are subject to more discrimination and racism than their own group of origin, as explicitly referred to by a European white origin local councillor in the Balearic Islands:

*“Well, we will see if we decide to run for the elections of 2027, but it would be interesting to have a representative of the Moroccan community, for example. But we would have to think about it a lot before because there’s still... It’s not racism, but there isn’t a lot of inclusion. It’s like a group of people that... Well, it’s changing. I am working on it, it’s really very important to me. [...] But in the future it would be fantastic to have someone born in a different country, maybe Argentina, or I don’t know, Germany or Morocco. But we need to be a bit cautious, because I’m not sure we’re at the point where [municipality] can have a Moroccan local councillor.”*

*(“Bueno, ja veurem si decidim presentar per les eleccions de 2027, però seria interessant tenir un representant de la comunitat marroquí, per exemple. Però tindrem que pensar molt abans, perquè encara ‘hay’... No és racisme, però no ‘hay’ molta ‘inclusión’. És com un grup de persones que... Bueno, està canviant. Estic fent feina, “per a jo” és superimportant. [...] Però, al futur, seria fantàstic tenir una persona que va a néixer en un altre país, potser Argentina o no ho sé, Alemanya o ‘Marruecos’. Però hem d’anar amb una miqueta d’alerta, perquè encara no sé si hem arribat al punt, que [municipi] pot tenir un regidor marroquí.”) [ES\_POL\_10, man, left-wing coalition, local level, visible migrant ancestry]*

Instead, interestingly, a considerable number mention that being a woman, and especially being a young woman is an additional intersectional disadvantage they have experienced personally. Although such references to gender disadvantages are more common among progressive and left-wing politicians, several conservative politicians also mention it. The advantages and disadvantages of being a woman (or a young woman) are polyhedric: they can be a plus at the selection stage but a minus, once elected, for being recognized the necessary *auctoritas* to perform a representative or leadership role. An ethnic minority politician in Spain expresses it this way, explicitly referring to the glass ceiling for career progression:

*“Maybe at that time the fact that I was Hindu weighed in because the fact of having people from all communities on the list was something that the party considered appropriate to obtain more support from the citizens and at that time I was young, I was a woman, and, well, I am still a woman [smiles] and Hindu, right? And I think that those qualities made me be on the list. [...] Maybe throughout my life I have noticed more that... these feelings that one has... more for being a woman than for being Hindu. [...] I think it has been more for being a woman than for being Hindu. And age perhaps, maybe. The positions with most responsibility, I have them now, right? Now that I am already mature. I am now 44 years old. But maybe at the start, it was the fact of being a woman that was more decisive, when I started noticing that difference in treatment, than for being Hindu. But nothing too exaggerated anyway. But yes, to a certain extent, that glass ceiling is more noticeable. I also noticed it more before than now. [...] But yes, I would say that more often because I am a woman than because I am from another culture.”*

*(“Quizás en aquel momento pesó el hecho de yo ser hindú porque el hecho de que llevar a gente de todas las comunidades dentro de la candidatura era algo que el partido consideraba lo adecuado para obtener más apoyos por parte de la ciudadanía y en aquel momento yo era joven, era mujer y, bueno, sígo siendo mujer [sonríe] e hindú, ¿no? Y creo que esas cualidades*

*hicieron que yo fuera en la lista. [...] Quizá a lo largo de mi vida he notado más esa... estas cuestiones que uno siempre dice... más por ser mujer que por ser hindú. [...] Creo que ha sido más por ser mujer que por ser hindú. Y la edad quizá, a ver. Yo los puestos que creo que más responsabilidad tienen los tengo ahora, ¿no? Que tengo ya cierta madurez, ya. Ahora tengo 44 años. Pero quizá en mis inicios fue el hecho de ser mujer algo más determinante a la hora de notar esa diferencia de trato que por ser hindú. Y tampoco algo muy exagerado. Pero sí que en cierta medida ese techo de cristal se nota más. También lo notaba más antes que ahora. [...] Pero creo que sí, que podría decir que más por ser mujer que por ser de otra cultura.”) [ES\_POL\_04, woman, centre-right party, local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]*

In the current climate of anti-immigrant sentiment, radical right parties in Spain have crossed the line of insulting migrant-origin elected representatives in parliamentary or local council debates, questioning their Spanish-ness or their right to be here. For example, in September 2024, the Catalan regional MP of the extreme right party Catalan Alliance (Aliança Catalana), Sílvia Orriols, questioned the right of Catalan regional MP Najat Driouech, who is of Moroccan ancestry and wears a hijab, to be in the Catalan parliament arguing that it was incongruent to combat gender discrimination and to allow the entry of a woman in the Catalan parliament who (according to her) symbolizes Muslim misogyny. This is, by no means, limited to Islamic faith politicians. In November 2024, a local councillor of the radical right party Vox in Madrid made xenophobic comments against the local councillor Carolina Elías, who is of Salvadoran origin, questioning whether she was Spanish or not and saying she should study some history, after she had complained about an advertising campaign in bus stops in Madrid that glorified the Spanish colonization of the South American continent calling colonizers ‘heroes and saints’. Recurrently, these incidents that are becoming more common, happen whenever a migrant-ancestry or ethnic minority representative ‘dares’ speak out about discrimination, racism or colonialism. The social media spiral of hate speech and threats that follows these verbal aggressions in representative assemblies is becoming increasingly violent.

Indeed, many ethnic minority and migrant-ancestry politicians interviewed expressed their dismay at the social media context and how it is making the environment incredibly toxic and threatening, and their perception that this is a major factor putting off migrant-ancestry and minority individuals from a career in politics, especially women. Yet, it is not just social media, the hate speech dynamics even in the elected assemblies are sometimes very marked and some interviewed politicians have referred to it:

*“It’s difficult to share spaces with people who say that immigration generates problems and is the seed of crime, and at the end of the day it hurts me, because I am fourth generation and my flag is the Spanish one and my flag is the Ceuta one, which you can see to my left. [...] There are times that in the plenary of the Assembly statements are made, lightly and easily without thinking of the person in front of them [and that it’s] their background, that I am fully proud of, because they define me as a person, and it’s unacceptable. [...] Because half of the population from Ceuta has a different religion or culture, but they feel fully Spanish and it’s a constant insult, right? From: ‘take off the hijab’, ‘making Ceuta Moroccan’. All things that are untrue.”*

*(“Es difícil convivir con gente que te dice que la inmigración provoca problemas y que es el germen de la delincuencia, y al final eso a mí me duele, porque yo, aunque ya soy la cuarta generación, mi bandera es la española y mi bandera es la ceutí, aquí las puedes ver a mi izquierda. [...] Que hay veces que en el pleno de la Asamblea se proclama, con una facilidad y con una ligereza, sin pensar que quien tiene enfrente [son] sus raíces, de las que yo me siento absolutamente orgullosa, porque me definen como persona, pues no se pueden consentir. [...] Porque la mitad de la población ceutí profesa otra religión u otra cultura, pero se siente absolutamente española y es un insulto constante, ¿no? Desde: ‘quítate el pañuelo’, ‘marroquinizando Ceuta’. Cosas que no son verdad.”)*  
[ES\_POL\_04, Woman, centre-right party, local level, second generation, visible migrant ancestry]



The politicians we interviewed had a wide range of recommendations about how to improve inclusion and diversity in leadership and politics. We start with recommendations directed at **individuals** of any background who may be considering a political path or career:

- You cannot make it alone, you need collective support. Build a support network in your local community, civil society or the party.
- Be visible, let yourself be known, be very active. Politics is about occupying the public space and speaking for yourself.
- You need real life experience and training. It is not a good idea to go straight into politics before trying a profession, it grounds you and makes you free.
- Speak out and be straight-speaking, this can be a problem at the beginning but builds up a solid base of support.
- Look for a party that will represent the majority of your values, assess who are the people that form them, assess the quality of leadership, don't be shy.
- You need a service vocation. Politics is about serving the public, not about serving yourself.
- Go for it, but be aware that it won't be easy. You may feel excluded but don't give up. You may have to be twice as good as others, but it will be worth the effort if you have the right motivation.
- Politics is a lonely business, you are on your own most of the time and you need to be very clear about who you are. You will need a support net; also, prepare yourself emotionally to public exposure, it's tough out there.
- For first-generation migrants, learn about the politics of the country where you're now living, about their institutions, get to know political parties and become a member. Joining a party is essential or you will always remain an outsider.
- Racialised women need to dare. It's a challenge but they need to dare to avoid exclusion.
- Party membership requires a lot of time, be prepared for that, it is nearly a 24/7 dedication.

Many interviewees had multiple recommendations for **political parties**:

- Parties need to make an extra internal effort against racism. It is not like feminism, it will not happen 'organically'.
- Parties need to provide training on structural racism, or unconscious biases won't go away.
- It is essential to represent visible minorities, to provide role models for children. They need to see women who are of immigrant ancestry and visible minorities in positions of influence so they know they can also make it if they try.
- Parties need to truly listen to migrant communities on their political positions; to truly treat them as political equals without patronising them, they need to really believe in diversity for it to work, like with zipper lists for women.
- Parties need to properly understand what diversity means, recognise difference and respect it, including religious differences.
- Parties need greater internal democracy that allows factions to share power, and a real effort to diversify their lists. If there are more visible candidates and elected officials, then more migrant-ancestry people will join parties; it is essential to include racialised individuals in both the grassroots and the leadership positions of the parties.
- Parties should not be selecting candidates just because they are immigrants. They need to view the selection process as a head-hunting exercise to attract new talent, and widen the pool of talent to migrants from all origins – African, European, Latin-American, etc., it needs to be more than a box-ticking exercise of including ethnic minorities on the short list.
- Parties need to stop being suspicious of first-generation migrants (e.g. of Moroccan origin), being suspicious of being a 'Manchurian candidate', of having a double agenda, it's absurd and very pernicious for the migrant-origin politicians.
- The loneliness and the lack of protection against hate speech and harassment takes a huge toll, so parties need to step up and improve in providing adequate solidarity mechanisms for those affected.

- Political parties need to change, they need to regenerate themselves, reconstruct from the ground up. They need to improve how they operate to demonstrate that politics is a duty.
- More participation is needed within political parties. They need work to be more sensitive, more inclusive, they should discuss quotas or targets and force themselves to open up.
- Migrants are not just labourers or a solution for ageing societies or the economy. Such discourses are negative and hurtful. Migrants are part of our society, they are not just an economic commodity or a solution to the demographic challenges.
- Internal primaries (one member-one vote) are not enough, the leadership needs to be proactive to place migrant-ancestry candidates in electable list positions.
- Because party membership takes time, it's essential that party life is "nice", that members can see the party as another "family", where they feel welcome and at ease, conflict scares people out.
- Parties need to actually believe and accept that migrating is a right.

Some of the recommendations were directed at **civil society organisations and charities**:

- Strengthening anti-racism organisations is fundamental. Civil society organisations and charities should make more resources available to apply for projects to better combat racism through education.
- Foundations and charities can help normalize the political participation of migrant-ancestry people, help forge contacts, talk with political parties about diversity, provide educational support, normalize feelings of belonging.
- It is essential for civil society to promote diversity and intercultural exchange for greater awareness as an overall goal.
- It's important for civil society organisations to open up spaces for migrant-ancestry people in public life, to join forces with one another, build up coalitions.

- Educational material is necessary, about how to vote, migrants' political rights, how to get informed about politics in an easy way and who are the role models that they can look up to for advice or inspiration.
- Civil society organisations can play an important supporting role to build up the skills for future candidates who may be included in party lists as independents/unaffiliated, they can build up public speaking skills and policy expertise in general for novice candidates.
- Civil society organisations are the breeding ground for leadership in local politics. It is fundamental to encourage people of migrant origin to join associations so that they can get the necessary networks and skills.

Interviewed politicians also had recommendations for **public institutions**:

- There is a need for a specific legal framework to combat ethno-racial discrimination and racism and to collect data in Spain also on the basis of self-identified racial and ethnic categories to address discrimination.
- Institutions need to combat bullying and racism at school, combat racism and prejudice by skin colour, combat hate speech, racist speech (references to “moritos”, “panchitos”, etc.) and ghettoization.
- Getting involved in politics and running for office is expensive. The personal employment situation can be a barrier (paying your mortgage, loans, sustaining your children's schooling, need to move homes, etc.). Good public funding for candidates and elected officials is essential (salary and per-diem). The financial barrier can be a real one. Especially for those who cannot afford to lose their job, the experience in politics may be a very short one, especially in a context where parliamentary terms can be cut short with no notice.
- Money is an issue, salaries for elected officials do not protect from the uncertainty of the positions.
- Perhaps more civics education in schools is needed to generate a greater conscience about the importance of politics, create a sense of belonging, educate in politics, citizenship and values, generate interest in politics at school and provide clear role models. Parliaments and local councils should partner with schools for visits about their institutional work and role model elected officials.

- All elected institutions should provide better briefings and trainings well before their mandate starts, as well as continuous training during the mandate.

### **Support mechanisms: Skills training**

Multiple interviewees pointed to the need of providing skills training very early on, before aspirants become candidates. As a priority, this is seen as the job of political parties, but some also mentioned external organisations as being able to do this.

Many skills-revamping initiatives were mentioned: public speaking training, how to write leaflets, speeches, policy pamphlets, training for campaigning, etc., how to deal with the media and social media, how to use technology, better legislative induction when they get elected, how to ask questions in parliament/assemblies, being succinct, etc.

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*APPENDIX*

## Descriptive summary of interviews – Spain

**Interview characteristics****conducted**

30 interviews;  
conducted by two interviewers;  
March 2023 to April 2025

**mode**

Presence: 11 (37%);  
Online/Zoom: 19 (63%)

**Interviewee characteristics****sector**

All politicians (30)

**gender**

11 men (37%);  
19 women (63%)

**political ideology**

19 left-wing (63%);  
11 right-wing (37%)

**political level**

9 national level (30%);  
9 regional level (30%);  
12 local level (40%)

**identifiability of IO**

Politicians:  
18 identifiable (60%);  
5 not identifiable (17%);  
7 ambiguous – only Latin  
American accent (23%)