

PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SPAIN. HISTORICAL AND TERRITORIAL PERSPECTIVES (1979- 2019)

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es evaluar la presencia de mujeres en los gobiernos locales en España desde 1979 hasta 2019, un período que coincide con cuarenta años de democracia y ha sido testigo de más de diez elecciones. En segundo lugar, determinar si la brecha de género en este aspecto ha aumentado o se ha estrechado. En particular, hemos querido identificar los posibles cambios producidos como consecuencia de la entrada en vigor de la Ley Orgánica 3/2007 para la Igualdad Efectiva de Mujeres y Hombres. Nuestros resultados muestran que la presencia de mujeres en los ayuntamientos ha aumentado, pero que existen marcadas diferencias en las tendencias internas. Además del punto de vista histórico, esta investigación incluye la perspectiva territorial. Así, para explicar la distribución territorial de los resultados se utilizó el Índice de Autocorrelación Espacial de Moran, analizando datos sobre la presencia de alcaldesas y concejales en más de 8.100 ayuntamientos. Las variables consideradas fueron: proximidad territorial, medida mediante el I. univariante de Moran; grado de ruralidad, definido según el tamaño del municipio; y la presencia de mujeres por primera vez. Para estas dos últimas variables, realizamos un análisis bivalente (I. bivalente de Moran), correlacionándolas con la presencia de alcaldesas y el porcentaje de concejales como variables dependientes. Encontramos pocos patrones territoriales, y por el contrario, nuestros resultados indican un alto grado de aleatoriedad, lo que podría atribuirse a la naturaleza diversa de los municipios del país.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Diferencias de género; Diferencias territoriales; Elecciones; España; Liderazgo femenino; Paridad; Política municipal.

PRESENCIA DE LAS MUJERES EN LOS GOBIERNOS MUNICIPALES ESPAÑOLES. PERSPECTIVAS HISTÓRICA Y TERRITORIAL (1979- 2019)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is, firstly, to assess women's presence in local government in Spain from 1979 to 2019, a period which coincides with forty years of democracy and has witnessed more than ten elections, and second-ly, to determine whether the gender gap has narrowed. In particular, we wanted to identify any possible changes produced as a result of the entry into force of Organic Law 3/2007 on the Effective Equality of Women and Men. Our results show that women's presence in town councils has increased, but that there are marked differences in internal trends. Besides the historical view-point, this research also includes a territorial perspective. Thus, in order to explain the territorial distribution of the results, Moran's Index of Spatial Autocorrelation was used, analysing data on the presence of female mayors and councillors in more than 8,100 town councils. The variables considered were: territorial proximity, measured using the univariate Moran's I; degree of rurality, defined according to municipality size; and the presence of women for the first time. For the latter two variables, we conducted a bivariate analysis (bivariate Moran's I), correlating them with the presence of female mayors and the percentage of female councillors as dependent variables. We found few territorial patterns; instead, our results indicate a high degree of randomness, which could be attributed to the diverse nature of municipalities in the country.

KEYWORDS

Elections; Female leadership; Gender differences; Municipal politics; Parity; Spain; Territorial differences.

INTRODUCTION

Women have acquired an increasingly significant presence in decision-making roles in recent decades. However, they generally continue to have a limited presence in most positions of power, whether in international organisations or in small town councils, although their numbers are rising. Research by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG 2015) Standing Committee on Gender Equality, which monitors and promotes women's participation at local level worldwide, estimates that internationally, only 5% of mayors and 20% of councillors are women. Meanwhile, according to a study by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), for the period 2008 to 2018 (Ceciarini 2019), the percentage of female mayors in Europe increased from 13% in 2008 to 16% in 2018: the top-ranked country was Iceland, with 36%, followed by Sweden with 32% and Finland with 30%. The percentage of female councillors also increased, from 27% to 31%, with Iceland and Sweden once again leading the way with 47% and 43% respectively, followed by Ukraine with 42%. The percentage for Spain was 35.6%, and the percentage of female mayors also rose to 21.7% in the last elections, held in May 2019.

In relation to women's access to political power, in 2019 Spain had the highest percentage in Europe of women in the lower house of parliament, according to the report "Women in politics: local and European trends" (Ceciarini 2019). Thus, 47.4% of lower house representatives in Spain were women, followed closely by Finland (47%) and Sweden (46.1%). These figures seem to indicate evidence that local government is the least equitable institution (Smith *et al.*, 2012), since the percentage of women in Europe holding local government positions has only risen from 23.4% in 2008 to 29% in 2019.

Until recently, no standardised information was available at global level concerning women's participation and representation in local government, among other reasons because of the large number and high diversity of local government structures. As part of the Sustainable Development Goals, an indicator was developed to measure the "proportion of seats held by women in local governments". The data report for SDG indicator 5.5.1b has provided the first global measure of the proportion of women in local government (iKNOW Politics 2018), revealing that although women are making progress in local government, there is still a long way to go to achieve parity. In this respect, some countries have advanced more than others: in 2018, representation of women in local government ranged from less than 1% (Yemen) to over 45% (Bolivia, Iceland, Senegal, Tunisia and Uganda), with an average of 26%. Only in 15 countries did

this proportion exceed 40%. Meanwhile, Spain is located above the average at 33.8% (United Nations 2019 a and b; UNWomen 2018).

In recent decades, the number of women holding political posts at various levels has increased and the question has sparked research interest. Several studies have also explored women's participation in local government, and some have analysed this question from a territorial perspective (Maškarinec 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2012). Hence, the main contribution of the present study was to analyse the progress and the spatial distribution of women in local government over the period 1978 to 2019. Focusing on the quantitative dimension, we analysed the number of female mayors and councillors in Spain during the democratic period.

Our hypothesis is that women's access to political power in local government in Spain varies widely, reflecting rural-urban contexts, and that the processes involved also reflect the specific contexts of many municipalities, especially the smaller ones. Thus, several processes associated with territorial dynamics common to the entire country (e.g. rural depopulation, the highly rural nature of some regions), the particular political culture characterised by the consolidation of female leadership and the individual context of each municipality (e.g. a candidate's charisma, personal contact with residents or inertia that prioritises men for the principle posts) may all exert an influence when explaining women's under-representation in local government.

Regarding these principles, the aim of this research was to analyse women's presence in local government in Spain from both a historical and a territorial perspective. We analysed trends from the transition to democracy, after the death of General Franco, until 2019, and explored possible relationships with different territorial attributes, where explanatory variables may include proximity, as expressed by classical theories of spatial diffusion (Hagerstrand 1953, in Haggett 2001), and other socio-territorial characteristics (specifically, the rural-urban dichotomy –measured as demographic size– and the consolidation of female leadership).

Through this study, we have mainly sought to make a small contribution to the field of gender geography, where the visibility of inequality is an undeniable phenomenon. Thus, we explored the urban-rural dichotomy in Spain when analysing the data and evaluating trends in women's representation in municipalities, based on evidence that women's representation in larger municipalities appears to be more promising (Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2012). To this end, we analysed data on women's access to local government posts (as mayors or councillors) throughout Spain, covering more than 8,100 town councils and considering three

time periods corresponding to significant government legislatures: 1979-1983, 2007-2011 and 2015-2019. Besides drawing up maps, figures and a statistical table, we calculated Moran's Index of Spatial Autocorrelation (Moran's I) to assess the degree of territorial association of the variable in general and conducted a LISA (Local Indicators of Spatial Association) analysis to visualise clusters of high, low and outlier spatial values in municipalities (Anselin 1995). We also estimated a bivariate Moran's I , relating the data to explanatory variables such as municipality size (an indicator of a municipality's degree of rurality) and women's prior presence in local government.

Some studies on women's involvement in municipal politics, such as those by Makariniec (2020) or Regulska *et al.* (1991), have considered spatial implications. Regarding Spain, a quite similar analysis was previously proposed by tracing historical voting trends (results in the general elections) using municipal electoral data, so as to provide an accurate overview of trends in modern Spanish politics and demonstrate that several processes remain hidden when aggregated data is used (Tapiador *et al.*, 2009). To assess geographical factors in our study, such as municipal size or regional behaviours, we examined trends in women's presence in local governments in accordance with the methods described below (sources and methodology section).

STATE OF THE QUESTION

In order to understand the context of women's access to local government in Spain, it is necessary to draw on evidence from various sources. Thus, gender and feminist explanations of women's unequal access to political power must be combined with knowledge of the Spanish political and territorial context derived from the 1978 Constitution, which initially signalled the arrival of democracy but, in the longer term, marked the shift from a centralised, authoritarian State to a highly decentralised one in which municipalities play a fundamental role in providing basic services to citizens. It is therefore necessary to examine local territorial organisation, which is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation and very diverse municipalities, presenting a wide range of demographic and economic circumstances and disparate dynamics.

The fundamental legal basis worldwide for applying gender positive action measures is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). For several decades, significant initiatives have been implemented to promote women's access to political power. Norris and Krook (2011:7) have proposed a six-step action plan: constitutional rights (equal rights in suffrage and

candidate selection); electoral system (proportional rather than majority electoral representation); legal quotas; review of party rules and candidate nomination; capacity- and skills-building to facilitate women's access to political parties; and gender-sensitive policies to remove obstacles to women's equal participation. It is also important to consider the benefits that equal access to power for women and men entails for the political system in general, such as a better quality of elected politicians (Baltrunaite *et al.*, 2014).

As Kjaer and Krook (2019: 1) state, *diagnosing women's under-representation in electoral politics often involves a "blame game," seeking to identify the primary factor responsible for depressing the share of women among candidates as well as elected officials*. One of the most exhaustively studied questions in the literature is women's under-representation due to the existence of significant barriers (Johansson Sevä and Öun 2019; Palmieri 2018; Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Barnes 2016; Archenti 2014; Hinojosa 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2012; Htun and Piscopo 2010; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Reynolds 1999), including cultural (gender stereotypes), social, partisan, organisational, institutional and political obstacles (Došek *et al.*, 2017; Tello and Vega 2009; Zaremborg 2009; Norris 1987), which are also present in local government (Bird 2003).

In this respect, gender norms in the definition of the "ideal" candidate are reinforced by a strong gender imbalance in favour of men in the political party organs responsible for candidate recruitment and selection. Male "homosocial capital" provides men not only with "expressive" resources such as trust, sympathy, or familiarity, but also with "instrumental" resources such as privileged access to the informal social networks that operate in politics. In the literature, this phenomenon is termed "old boy networks", and these are critical in selection processes (Lombardo and Verge 2017; Crowder-Meyer 2013). Furthermore, recent research shows that in many political contexts, female candidates may benefit from emphasising stereotypically male attributes (Bauer 2020), and they may require more advanced training and experience than their male counterparts in order to attain the same political objectives (Kjaer and Krook 2019; O'Brien 2015).

Modernisation, in terms of socio-cultural change and women's economic advancement, partially explains the increasing number of women in parliaments and political arenas (Lovenduski 2005) but is far from being the only factor involved in women's success. The rules on gender parity in representation and, in some cases such as Spain, intra-party politics that allow for effective implementation of such rules, are also key factors in explaining this rise (Threlfall 2007; Mateo-Díaz 2005).

In this regard, gender quotas or gender balance may be seen as an organisational innovation in intra-party democracy (IPD) that, once implemented, may be viewed as an isomorphism with differences due to country, ideology, party traditions, voting systems, etc. (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Three factors can be considered in relation to isomorphism: 1) “coercive” isomorphism, where the State promulgates rules and regulations that force political actors to behave in a particular way (for example, women on electoral lists); 2) normative isomorphism, where professionals (and their organisations) transfer different procedures (innovations) across institutions; and 3) “mimetic” isomorphism, where competitors and rivals attempt to emulate others (especially successful ones) (Collier *et al.*, 2018).

Another issue which has been examined in greater depth is whether the presence of women in government (and in the municipalities) extends beyond the symbolic (mere presence) to entail a change in the type of policies adopted and the inclusion of new priorities in the agenda or budget (Funk and Philips 2019; Holman 2015; Ferreira and Gyourko 2014; Gago-García and Rodríguez-Moya 2014; Tolley 2011; Leader 1977).

Women’s representation at local level is an even more complex phenomenon that can also be influenced by institutional factors, local political, economic and social contexts, the experience of previous officeholders, the political opportunity structure and candidates’ personal traits (Maškarinec 2022; Massolo 2007).

One notable question is the debate on whether female pioneers in local government represent a role model and spur for future generations (Gilardi 2015). In this respect, some studies have shown that the path to equality is not linear (Mateo-Díaz 2005) and that measures seeking to promote it may lead to adverse reactions and unintended effects, such as intensified political violence against female candidates and elected officials, as in Latin America (Freidenberg and del Valle 2017; Albaine 2015). It is also crucial (i) to identify the relevant necessary conditions to encourage women’s presence in town councils (role of mentors, succession strategies in parties and candidates, gender-sensitive policies, validation of female leadership styles; Pini *et al.*, 2005); (ii) to determine the profile of female mayors and their routes to access the post (Bird 2003; Pini *et al.*, 2005; Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015), and (iii) lastly, to elucidate the significant influence of local, social and political contexts on female political leadership (Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015; Ferreira and Gyourko 2014).

Women’s access to political power in Spain since the end of the dictatorship has been a relatively quick process, compared to other European countries, but

has required more explicit interventions than in other spheres of life (Belmonte *et al.*, 2016; Ruiloba 2009; Morales 1999; Astelarra 1990; Martínez 1990) and has generated lively debate in political parties and society since the late 1980s. In this respect, the literature on women’s presence in governments in Spain is diverse, both at State scale (Barberá 2021; Fraile 2018; Espí-Hernández 2017; Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015; Ruiloba 2014, 2009; Threlfall 2007) and at regional, provincial, and local level (Quiles and Téllez 2016; Camas 2013; Casellas *et al.*, 2009).

In the case of Spain –a highly decentralised State– any interpretation of women’s access (as mayors or councillors) to local government as opposed to other forms of political power is rendered more complex by the high number of municipalities and their diversity in demographic and economic terms. The Spanish Constitution defines municipalities as independent entities with full legal personality. Town councils form the tier of government closest to citizens, with powers over matters related to people’s daily lives such as the basic services of lighting, water, cleaning, urban planning, and transport.

The structure of local government in Spain is determined by municipality size. Town councils are run by one mayor and a varying number of councillors, depending on the size of the population. They are elected through free, universal, direct, and secret suffrage using the same electoral system as that applied in general elections, known as the D’Hondt method of proportional representation. Primarily since 1974, Spain has undergone extensive urbanisation, industrialisation, and general modernisation¹, in a process that has favoured voter individualisation and women’s political participation. At the same time, there may also be significant local reasons for differentiation. Under Franco, the country’s economic development was highly unequal, with significant disparities in the agricultural and industrial workforces and in education, urbanisation and income, some of which still persist (Tapiador *et al.*, 2009).

The increasing number of women in the political sphere is partially explained by modernisation of the country. However, from an actor-centred view of such change, the agency of political leaders and of women’s policy advocates –particularly those from the institutionalist socialist-feminist tradition (PSOE, IU)²– carries significant weight in any explanation (Barberá 2021; Lombardo and Verge 2017; Threlfall 2007; Verge 2006). As a result, the role of the main left-wing parties in promoting quota reforms and driving broader institutional change must be regarded as the primary explanatory factor underlying the institutionalisation of gender equality in political office in Spain (Verge 2013).

Aside from the implementation of quota procedures in some left-wing parties in the late 1980s

and early 1990s, the case under consideration must also take into account the entry into force of Organic Law 3/2007 on Effective Equality between Women and Men (Spanish initials: LOIMH). This law's fundamental objectives are established in article 14.1: "The commitment to the effectiveness of the constitutional right to equality between women and men", and article 14.4: "The balanced participation of women and men in electoral candidatures and in decision-making". In particular, the law stipulates that electoral candidatures must present a balanced composition of women and men, so that in the total list of candidates there must be at least 40% representation of each sex. Thus, the electoral lists presented by political parties in municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants must contain an equal proportion of women and men for every five posts to cover. Municipalities and islands with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants are exempt from this rule, and account for just over 6,800 municipalities (84% of the total, with around five million residents).

Despite this law, studies have already observed inertias in Spain that impair its impact. These are related to the internal dynamics of political parties and to male coalitions that prevent women's access to the top of the list (Casas-Arce and Saiz 2015), which are also present in many political parties in many countries and serve as "gate-keepers", hindering women's political participation and access to the exercise of political power (Norris and Krook 2011). As a result, the measures adopted in this law (LOIMH) may fail to bring about substantial change because the lists are closed and blocked, meaning that the position women occupy on them is decided by the political parties. As Spanish voters vote for a political party³ as a whole rather than for a specific candidate, a better alternative for women's representation would have been to use zip lists, where the two sexes alternate, to avoid women always being assigned positions at the bottom of the list (Barberá 2021; Blázquez *et al.*, 2006).

Another aspect to bear in mind in relation to territorial organisation in Spain is that there are significant territorial differences and inequalities. At present, around 1,000 municipalities have fewer than 100 inhabitants, while around 2,800 have a population of between 101 and 500. The well-known coastal-inland dichotomy affects several key aspects such as the process of depopulation, which is particularly severe in the centre of the Peninsula, the Iberian Mountain range and inland Galicia, territories that are also characterised by population ageing, low birth rates, a centuries-old tradition of emigration and very small villages. Thus, Spain contains highly populated, wealthy, and active municipalities in social and economic terms (cities, coastal municipalities and southern and island areas), but also very small, ageing

municipalities doomed to disappear. Because local treasuries are autonomous and have varying budgets, elected officials in small municipalities receive no remuneration for their political functions and must therefore combine these with paid work.

From a political and economic standpoint, women in rural Spain have traditionally been clearly disadvantaged in comparison to men, with an evident gender gap in political appointments that is especially visible in small villages. In addition, they experience occupational segregation, under-representation in decision-making, higher unemployment, greater job insecurity and lower wages, and women's actions are perceived to be less valid. Due to the dominant patriarchal structure, women have traditionally been restricted to the private and family domains. Much of the research available that focuses on the political realities of women in Spanish rural areas stresses that there is a clear gender gap in political appointments. Women face the dual constraints of being female and living in these environments (Tulla *et al.*, 2018; Pallarès-Blanch *et al.*, 2014; Casellas *et al.*, 2009); furthermore, female officials often shoulder the additional burden of reproductive tasks, and thus have a triple workload which represents an added obstacle to their participation in local politics (Astelarra 2004; Martínez 1990).

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The study of trends in women's presence in local government in Spain must take two dimensions into account: the spatial, or territorial, dimension, by analysing all municipalities, and the temporal dimension (1979-2019), by examining how women's presence has changed since the first democratic elections were held. We identified three key periods: 1979-1983, when the first local elections were held during the transition to democracy following the adoption of the 1978 Constitution; 2007-2011, coinciding with the entry into force of the Law on Effective Equality between Women and Men, which represented a milestone in mandating the equal presence of women on all electoral lists (at least in the case of municipalities with more than 5,000 residents); and 2015-2019, to which can be added—in the case of female mayors—the results of the 2019 elections (for the period 2019-2023).

Our main sources comprised the databases provided by the Sub-directorate General for the Legal System and Local Databases (formerly the Spanish Ministry of Public Administration) and the Local Entities Portal of the Ministry of Finance and Civil Service. It should be noted that these data may be slightly out of date by the end of the corresponding legislature because of changes occurring over its course. Other sources included the databases of the Spanish Institute for Women, the Ministry of the

Interior, the Population and Housing Censuses and the Continuous Resident's Register.

Subsequently, the data were statistically processed to render them homogeneous and comparable between the selected periods (i.e., information on elected councillors was calculated as a percentage of all; some municipalities have vanished over the research period while others have been promoted as autonomous local entities, rendering it difficult to compare periods). In some cases, it was necessary to manually classify the sex of female mayors. Graphs and summary tables are used to provide a first approximation. A local scale territorial analysis enabled us to calculate the % of women councillors at municipal level and map it for the 1978-1983, 2007-2011 and 2015-2019 legislatures, using ArcGIS 10.3 software for data management and analysis.

To complete the analysis, we used statistical spatial analysis techniques to detect spatial structures and verify prior hypotheses (Anselin 1995), in other words, to refute or verify if women's access to local political power in Spain varies widely as a reflection of rural-urban contexts and indirectly, if there is a contiguity logic or, on the contrary, if the process reflects the individual contexts of many municipalities, especially the smaller ones. Related to the previous point, the setting of each municipality or a particular political culture marked by the consolidation of female leadership may play a role in explaining why women are or are not represented equitably in local government in different regions. To elucidate this aspect, we used spatial autocorrelation measures interpreted via the univariate and bivariate Moran's *I*. This determines the extent to which spatial units (municipalities) are spatially associated with each other, which is then reflected in a municipal map and summarised in Moran's scatter plots created using GeoDa software⁴. This enables identification of any basic spatial patterns (clusters, dispersion, randomness). The results of LISA (Local Indicators of Spatial Association) analyses were visualised using cluster mapping, to enable assessment and identification of possible spatial associations, and significance mapping of the spatial correlation. In the first case, we found clusters of high values surrounded by other high values, or clusters of low values surrounded by other low values, as well as spatial outliers, which indicated high values of the variable surrounded by low values or vice versa (Anselin 1995).

For spatial statistics globally and for the significance of values using Moran's *I*, we used a matrix of defined spatial weights, a type of queen contiguity of order 1⁵. To define the parameters of significance used for LISA maps, we set a threshold equal to 0.01. In addition, to define whether a variable showed spatial autocorrelation,

we adopted the value generally recommended in practice, which establishes that Moran's *I* indicates randomness of the phenomenon when the index is in the range $-0.35 \leq I \leq 0.35$ (Siabato and Guzmán-Manrique 2019: 11).

The variables we considered in our analysis were related to the hypothesis and some of the dynamics indicated in the previous section, based on the rural-urban dichotomy. Thus, to assess the spatial relationship between municipalities, i.e., whether there is territorial contiguity in women's access to local government, we performed a univariate analysis (univariate Moran's *I*) for female mayors (2019 elections) and female councillors (2015-2019).

To assess whether there was a relationship between women's presence in town councils and the rural-urban parameters considered, we conducted several bivariate analyses (bivariate Moran's *I*). In this case, we considered the relationship between the degree of rurality of a municipality and the presence of female mayors and councillors (independent variable: demographic size of the municipality; dependent variable: presence of female mayors and/or councillors). Our aim was to determine whether rural municipalities with a demonstrated culture of inertia and resistance towards gender equality (Tulla *et al.*, 2018; Pallarès-Blanch *et al.*, 2014; Casellas *et al.*, 2009) had fewer female councillors and mayors than larger, urban municipalities with higher levels of social innovation and female activity in other public spheres such as the labour market.

Lastly, we conducted two bivariate analyses to determine whether the presence of elected female officials was followed by an increase in women in office (the impact of pioneering female leadership), as has been reported in some previous research (Maškarinec 2020; Crowder-Meyer *et al.*, 2015; Crowder-Meyer 2013). First, our analysis correlated the presence of female councillors in the period 2015-2019 with that of female mayors in the subsequent legislature (2019), in order to determine whether greater access for women to electoral lists paves the way for some of them to become mayors, in other words to occupy the first place on the electoral list. Then, we correlated the percentage of female councillors in 2007 with that in 2015 (legislature 2015-2019). A positive correlation would indicate that the prior presence of women favoured a subsequent increase in women's presence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in Table 1, Figures 1 to 8, and Maps 1 to 18. Table 1, Figures 1 and 2, and the first 6 maps describe historical trends in the presence of female mayors and councillors, from the first elections (1978) until May 2019. Over the period

of more than 40 years covered by our analysis, several trends emerged.

- First, the presence of women in the most important local political office (mayor) rose from 1.23% at the beginning of the democratic period to 27.7% at the time of writing (Maps 1 to 3). This indicates significant growth, but the figure still far from reflects gender parity. Indeed, of all the different political posts in Spain, that of mayor is one of the least equitable in terms of gender. Only a few other areas present a similarly low presence of women, such as Supreme Court judges (14.12%), category one prosecutors (22.58%), Constitutional Court judges (10%) and the diplomatic corps⁶ (18.26%)⁷.
- As shown in Maps 4 to 6, there was also a significant increase in the presence of female councillors, and parity has now practically been achieved throughout almost all of the territory. The exceptions were the territories of north-central Spain (Castile-León), inland Galicia, the Iberian Mountain range, and some municipalities in the Pyrenees. These regions are all characterised by a low population density, a highly rural nature and severe population ageing. Combined with the fact that parity is not mandatory for lists in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, this explains the variation in women's presence in local government with respect to the other territories studied.
- It is worth noting that the greatest progress was not made following adoption of the 2007 Law on Effective Equality between Women and Men (Table 1). Instead, the period of greatest growth in the case of female mayors occurred

eight years earlier, in the 1999 elections, which coincided in Spain with a lively debate on the application of quotas in electoral lists, a measure adopted by some left-wing parties (PSC⁸, 1982; PSOE, 1988; PCE-IU, 1989) (Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015). In the case of female councillors, parity was achieved in the 2015 elections (for the period 2015-2019) and this was also when the greatest increase occurred, indicating a delay of almost 12 years before the Equality Law began to exert any real effect. With regard to this law, future political action should be directed towards reforms that enable greater access for women in the smaller municipalities, which are exempt from the stipulations of the law, as it is these that show the greatest gender gaps.

The process observed thus encompasses several phenomena acting in combination: i) an evident glass ceiling in the case of female mayors, which studies have also shown to exist in other countries (Folke and Rickne 2016; Bochel and Bochel 2008); ii) the application of quotas in the lists of some parties, mainly the left-wing ones (in the 1990s) as part of the active implementation of Spanish feminist institutionalism (Barberá 2021; Threlfall 2007); iii) current legislation stipulating the use of parity lists (the 2007 Law on Effective Equality between Women and Men) has favoured a higher proportion of women as councillors, as reported in previous studies (Lombardo and Verge 2017; Threlfall 2007); iv) some studies have found that proportional representation and closed lists, as used in Spain, are likely to boost the number of female councillors (Matland and Studlar 1996); and v) the process of social and political modernisation in Spain that began with the transition to democracy. Lombardo (2004) has also observed that in the 1970s and 1980s, sociological changes in Spain

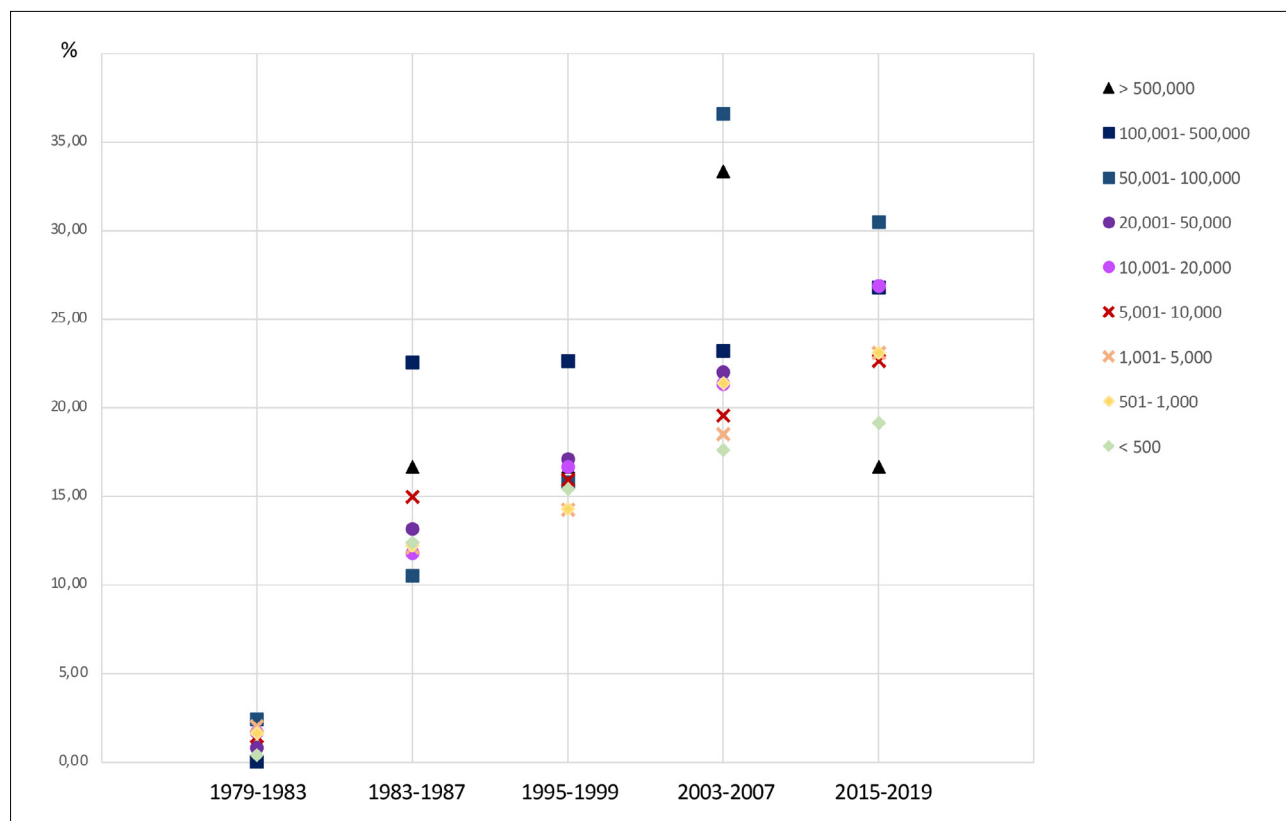
Table 1.

Trends in the number of female mayors and councillors in Spain (% of the total). Source: by the authors based on data from the Spanish Ministry of Public Administration and the Spanish Institute for Women (Mujeres en Cifras -Poder y Toma de Decisiones⁹).

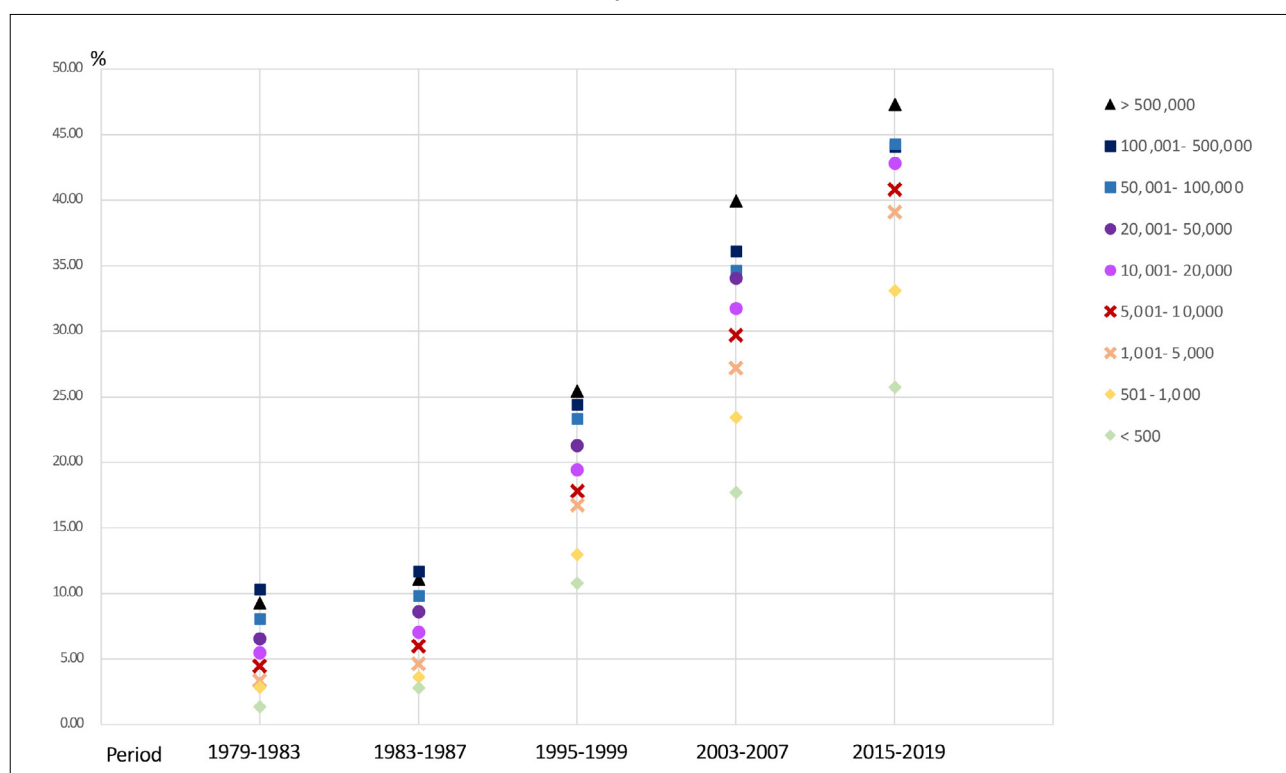
Period	Female mayors %	Female town councillors %	Growth period	Annual growth (%) female mayors	Annual growth (%) female town councillors
1979-1983	1.23	3.33			
1983-1987	2.04	4.70	1979-1983	0.20	0.34
1987-1991	3.22	No data	1983-1987	0.30	0.98
1991-1995	4.86	No data	1987-1991	0.41	
1995-1999	6.90	16.45	1991-1995	0.51	
1999-2003	9.61	21.10	1995-1999	0.68	1.16
2003-2007	12.56	25.58	1999-2003	0.74	1.12
2007-2011	14.60	30.09	2003-2007	0.51	1.13
2011-2015	16.77	34.95	2007-2011	0.54	1.22
2015-2019	19.09	35.92	2011-2015	0.58	0.24
May-19	21.7	40.82	2015-2019	0.65	1.23

Figure 1.

Percentage of female mayors by municipality size (no. inhabitants). Spain-Trends. Legislatures. Source: by the authors based on data from the Spanish Ministry of Public Administration and the Local Government Portal, Spanish Ministry of Finance.

**Figure 2.**

Percentage of female councillors by municipality size (no. inhabitants). Spain-Trends. Source: by the authors based on data from the Spanish Ministry of Public Administration and the Local Government Portal, Spanish Ministry of Finance.



coincided with implementation of the first equality policies and Spain's entry into the European Union, some of whose policies incorporated a very marked gender perspective. All this was reflected in a greater female presence in all spheres of public life and in local government, as demonstrated here.

A second goal of our study was to assess the influence of territorial inertia on women's access to local government. Our results are shown in the remaining figures and maps (Maps 7 to 18). When disaggregated by municipality size (Figures 1 and 2), our data indicated that although there have been increases in all the groups of municipalities considered, the highest increases in both female mayors and councillors alike occurred in those groups with populations of over 20,000 inhabitants. This strongly suggests that the rural-urban dichotomy and the social and cultural characteristics associated with each setting have exerted an influence on trends in female participation (Tulla *et al.*, 2018; Pallarès-Blanch *et al.*, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2012; Casellas *et al.*, 2009). Meanwhile, an assessment of the global data revealed much more variation in the case of female mayors, a steadier increase in the number of female councillors and marked differences between municipalities according to size. Thus, in the first period considered, 1979-1983, there was a 10% difference between smaller municipalities (fewer than 500 inhabitants) and larger ones (between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants). By the final period, 2015-2019, this difference had increased to 22%. The reasons for this divergence have already been noted: the socio-cultural differences between rural and urban environments in Spain and the muted impact of the Equality Law on smaller municipalities.

Our calculations using Moran's *I* were intended to explore some of these factors. However, the results obtained in the analyses as a whole (univariate and bivariate Moran's *I*; Figures 3 to 8) showed a low level of significance, indicating a weak association between the presence of female mayors and councillors and territorial settings in Spain, although some nuances should be noted in relation to the variables considered.

Application of the univariate Moran's *I* to the presence of female mayors and councillors in Spanish municipalities yielded the following findings. First, the data presented a low spatial correlation, with the highest value being obtained for female councillors (0.201086). In contrast, we obtained a low level of significance for female mayors, as shown in the cluster map (Map 7) and in the significance map (Map 8), with a spatial correlation of only 0.0012. The findings for Spain follow a similar pattern to those reported in a recent study on the Czech Republic (Maškarinec 2020; 2022), and our research also has policy implications since it demonstrates that the

degree of women's political representation is a highly endogenous phenomenon whose reproduction depends on the particular actors and factors that exist within the space of individual municipalities.

In the case of female councillors (2015-2019), the results showed the following: i) there was a generally high presence of female councillors in the southern half of Spain (mainly in central and western Andalusia), the metropolitan areas of Madrid, Valencia and Asturias, the major Basque cities (Bilbao, San Sebastian, Vitoria-Gasteiz) and the metropolitan areas of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Canary Islands) and Palma de Mallorca; ii) in contrast, areas with a low presence were clustered around the Iberian Mountain Range and the region of Castile-León (northern part of the provinces of Burgos and Palencia and municipalities in the west, bordering Portugal).

These findings can again be related to municipality size. Certain similarities appeared with the maps obtained from the bivariate Moran's *I* considering demographic size as an independent variable and percentage of female councillors as a dependent variable (Maps 13 and 14). Thus, although the spatial correlation was very low (Figure 6), some correspondence was evident in relation to the distribution of the spatial association results. This suggests some partial conclusions: the high spatial association observed in the case of female councillors in the south of the country (western Andalusia and the region of Murcia) and the metropolitan areas of Madrid, Valencia, and Asturias (Maps 13 and 14; Figure 6) coincided with municipalities with a high population density. Meanwhile, the Iberian Mountain range and central-west Spain (provinces of León, Salamanca and Zamora, in municipalities close to Portugal) presented low-low association values (i.e., low population density and low percentage of female councillors). This is partly explained by historical factors such as the municipal fragmentation that has persisted since the Reconquista and the economic model implemented during the period of rapid development (1960-1974), which together have influenced municipality size, and also by the legal obligation of presenting parity lists in municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants. These reasons undoubtedly explain some of the territorial distribution observed.

Our analysis concluded with the application of Moran's *I* to explore two other variables. As explained in the methods section, both were intended to assess the influence of previous female leadership, a factor that has become consolidated in the territories as an element that favours greater female access to local government. The results of our analysis were once again negative, in contrast to comparable studies (Maškarinec 2022; Crowder- Meyer *et al.*, 2015), since neither of the two bivariate spatial

correlations carried out (female councillors 2007/ female councillors 2015; % female councillors 2015/ presence of female mayors 2019) yielded significant data (Maps 15 to 18; Figures 7 and 8). Several studies have also reported significant regional variation in other countries, evidence that may prompt scholars to explore the implications of local non-partisanship (Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Hence, we found few territorial patterns, in agreement with other studies which have concluded that women's access to political power is heavily influenced by the local, social, and political context of each municipality (Ferreira and Gyourko 2014; Gagliarducci and Paserman 2012). Future research should therefore focus on case studies assessing specific territories and the personal profile (professional and leadership) of the women entering these positions. This is especially important in small municipalities where all residents tend to know the candidates and where the options are limited due to an ageing population, little demographic growth and low educational levels, particularly in the case of older women (Rodríguez-Moya and Gago-García 2015). Other factors that should be considered include the role played by political parties and their strategies when drawing up the lists, as well as psychological and cognitive factors (Weyland 2005) such as the different conception of power and ambition presented by men and women in politics (Constantini 1990).

CONCLUSIONS

In order to analyse trends in women's presence in local government in Spain, we performed massive processing of data on more than 8,100 municipalities and considered different time periods and explanatory variables. To the best of our knowledge, only few similar studies exist in other territorial settings either in Spanish or in international contexts (i.e., Maškarinec, 2022). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Spain is highly unusual among Western European countries in having undergone a transition to democracy in recent times, comparable only to similar transitions in Portugal and Greece, and in having a highly diverse territory characterised by administrative fragmentation, significant devolution of powers, depopulation and population ageing in some regions.

What does the research tell us about the obstacles and barriers that women face in accessing local politics in Spain? In general, good progress has been made, in line with similar trends in neighbouring countries, with an increase in women's access to all levels of political power. However, in the office of mayor, the highest position in local government, women's presence is much lower than in other positions, whether elected (councillors, members of national and regional parliaments) or executive

(ministers, councillors, secretaries of state, etc.). This evidences a glass ceiling linked to the precedence awarded by political parties to males, placing them at the top of electoral lists, and the uneven effects of the Organic Law on Effective Equality (LOIMH). Various reasons have been adduced in academic debate, including the questioned effectiveness of quotas and women's different conception of political engagement, which distances them from the internal power struggles of political parties. In the specific case of local government, women's reproductive roles may also prevent access on equal terms.

The constant progress that has been attained since 1979 is much more visible in the case of female councillors and much less so in the case of female mayors, who at the time of writing (June 2020) only account for 3 out of every 10 mayors (27.7%). Considerable equality has been achieved as regards the proportion of female councillors (at least 40% representation of each sex) in municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants, but there is more divergence in the smaller ones, suggesting the future need for qualitative research on these latter, an approach not employed here.

As for our most outstanding findings, application of the univariate and bivariate Moran's *I* to different variables revealed a low territorial association and a weak correlation with some of the independent variables such as territorial size (in reference to the degree of rurality of the municipality) or the presence of pioneering women in local government. Although not relevant on a national scale, our most positive results were obtained when applying the univariate Moran's *I* to the presence of female councillors, yielding significant results for some major metropolitan areas (Madrid, the Basque Country, Valencia and cities in the southern half of Spain) and for the southern half of the country.

Despite attaining low significance, these results pave the way for new studies that may reveal clearer territorial patterns. In this regard, more in-depth research is required to determine whether, in agreement with studies conducted in other countries (Matland and Studlar 1996), areas with traditional support for left-wing parties, such as Andalusia, Extremadura and Castile-La Mancha (southern half of the country), and working-class municipalities in the metropolitan areas of the major Spanish cities, have offered more favourable conditions for the presence of elected women in the municipal arena; or whether women's likelihood of entering politics has been much lower in politically conservative regions. Another possibility would be to reduce the territorial scale, segregating municipalities according to different characteristics and to autonomous regions and provinces. Any analysis based on big data must always be complemented with qualitative approaches,

which in the present case proved indispensable. In order to provide a more in-depth explanation, future studies should explore the personal profile of women in relation to their training and qualifications, the gender roles they assume in their private lives and the socio-economic and cultural factors that favour or impede their access on an equal footing with men.

We have highlighted the progress achieved but also the remaining differences and inequalities, which have marked the paths of women and men, as well as the need to promote equal opportunities wherever necessary in all public and private spheres of life. Our study shows that resistance to change may persist in some territories due to their particular characteristics, and these must be taken into account when attempting to elucidate processes.

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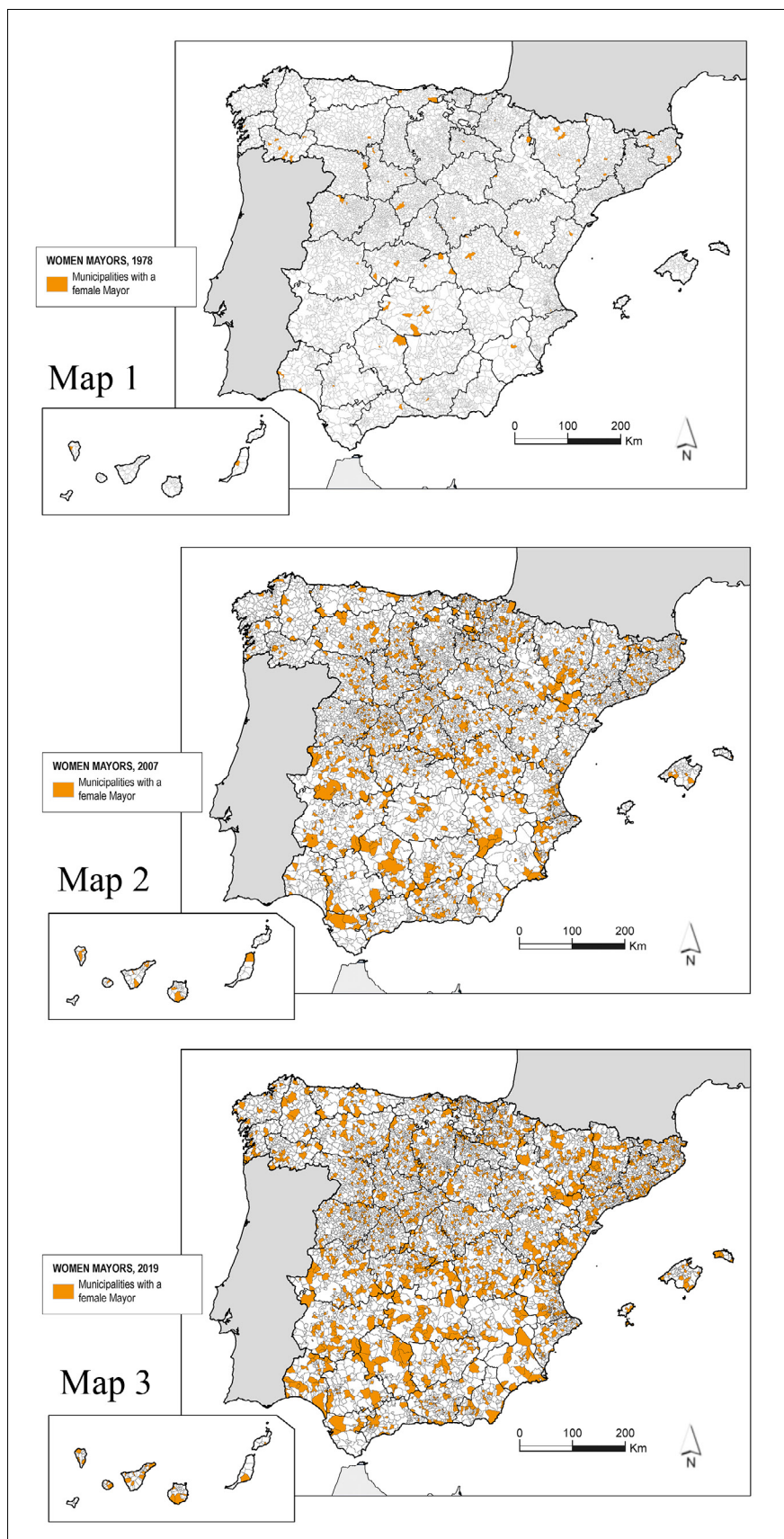
NOTES

- [1] Of the social changes involved in the phenomenon it is worth mentioning: occupational structure and the marked economic shift towards the service sector, the increase in geographical and social mobility, rising numbers in key sectors such as students and/or intellectuals, a significant increase in the educational level of the workforce, women's entry into the labour market, changes in family structure, the development of welfare institutions and social secularisation (González and Requena 2005; Tezanos 1984).
- [2] PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party]; IU: Izquierda Unida [United Left].
- [3] The Spanish electoral system uses proportional representation. Councillors are elected using a single closed list for each party, and parties gaining more votes receive a higher number of councillors, appointed from the top of the list down. It is assumed that the person heading the list of the most voted party will be chosen as mayor, but in the end, it is the total number of councillors belonging to a party or coalition that determines who will hold this post. The number of councillors depends on the demographic size of the municipality.
A mayor in Spain is the highest-ranking official in a municipal government. Councillors from the different parties are members of the collegiate governing body of the municipality, which is chaired by the mayor. Some councillors can also head municipal departments of agriculture, industry, economy, culture, youth, parks and gardens, city cleaning, etc.
- [4] 1. For more information on this software, go to: <https://geodacenter.github.io>. GeoDa.
- [5] Type of weight = contiguity weight; method: queen contiguity; median neighbours: 6; % of non-zero: 0.06%.
- [6] Accredited ambassadors to foreign governments.
- [7] Source: The Spanish Institute for Women. *Mujeres en Cifras - Poder y Toma de Decisiones* [Women in Figures - Power and Decision-Making].
- [8] PSC: Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya [Catalonian Socialist Party]; PCE-IU: Partido Comunista de España-Izquierda Unida [Communist Party of Spain-United Left].
- [9] <http://www.inmujer.gob.es/MujerCifras/PoderDecisiones/AdmonLocal.htm>

CÁNDIDA GAGO GARCÍA es Catedrática de Análisis Geográfico Regional en la Universidad Complutense. Su interés científico se centra, por un lado, en la geografía del género, con especial interés en las dimensiones territoriales de la desigualdad entre hombres y mujeres en los distintos niveles escalares; por otro, en las repercusiones territoriales de la Globalización y de las movilidades globales (ciudades mundiales, turismo, transporte aéreo). Autora de numerosos artículos nacionales e internacionales en revistas de temática relacionada con la geografía y con la ciencia social en general y también de más de una decena de atlas.

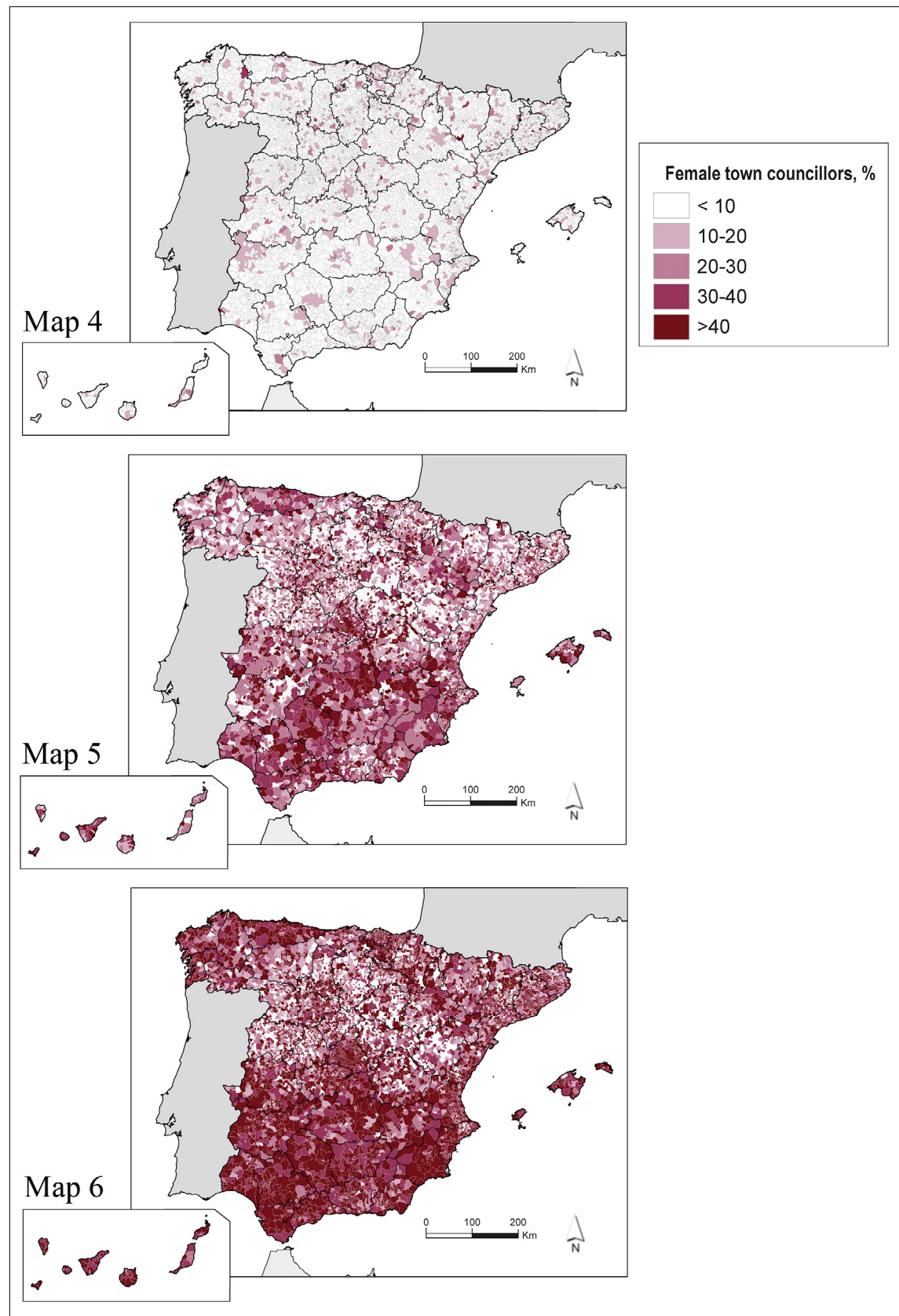
JUANA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ MOYA es Profesora Titular de Geografía Humana en la Universidad Complutense, en activo hasta el año 2020. Su investigación se desarrolla en relación a dos grandes líneas: la geografía del género, con especial interés en las diferencias espaciales de la desigualdad entre hombres y mujeres en el mercado de trabajo y en la movilidad cotidiana; por otro, en las transformaciones económicas y sociales de los territorios (población, industria, logística). Autora de numerosos artículos nacionales e internacionales en revistas de temática relacionada con la geografía, la demografía y con la ciencia social en general.

ANNEX



Maps 1 to 3. Trends in the presence of female mayors in Spain, 1979-2019.

Map 1: 1979-1983: first democratic municipal elections. Map 2: 2007- 2011: results following adoption of the Law on effective equality between women and men, 2007. Map 3: municipal elections, May 2019. Source: by the authors, based on data from the Ministry of Public Administration.



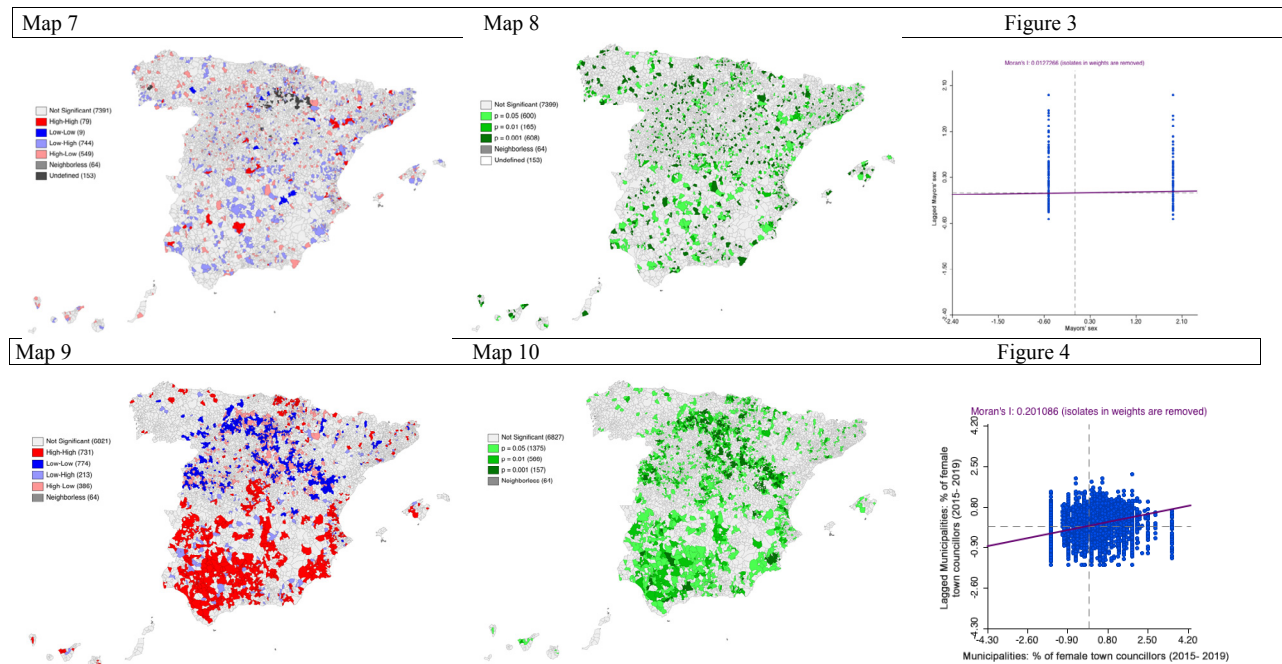
Maps 4 to 6. Trends in the presence of female councillors, 1979-2019.

% of female councillors with respect to the total.

Map 4: 1979-1983; Map 5: 2007;

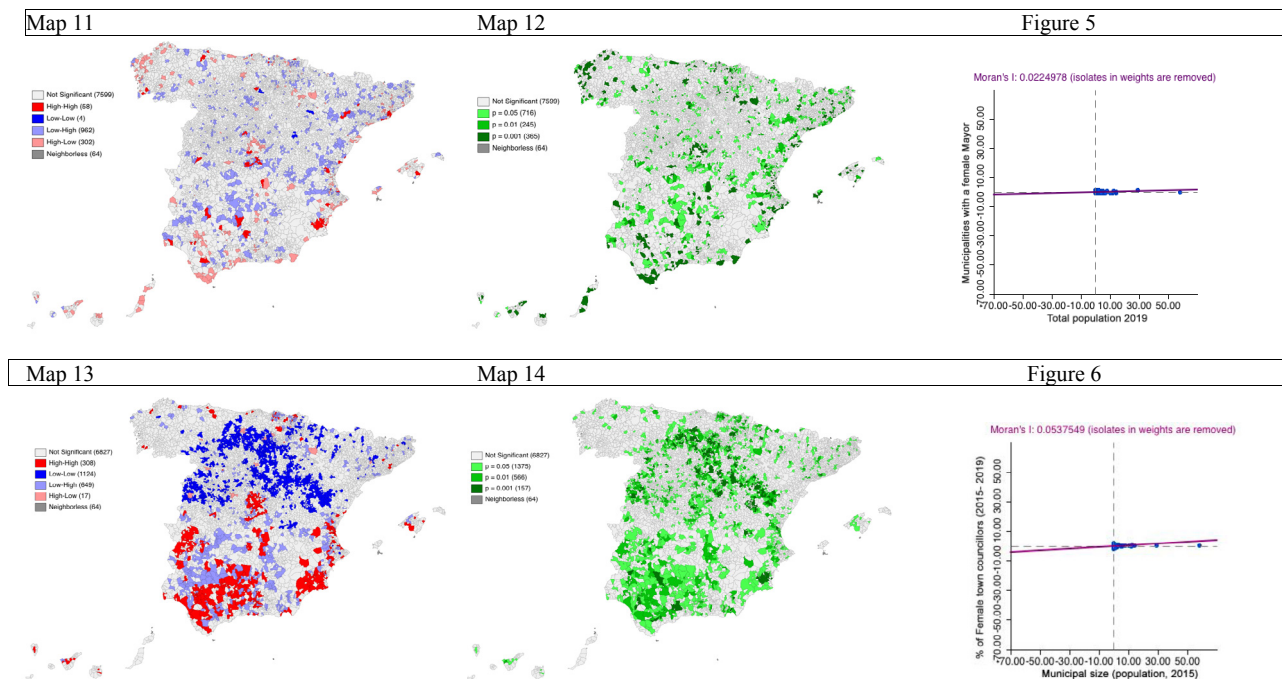
Map 6: 2015- 2019.

Source: by the authors, based on data from the Ministry of Public Administration



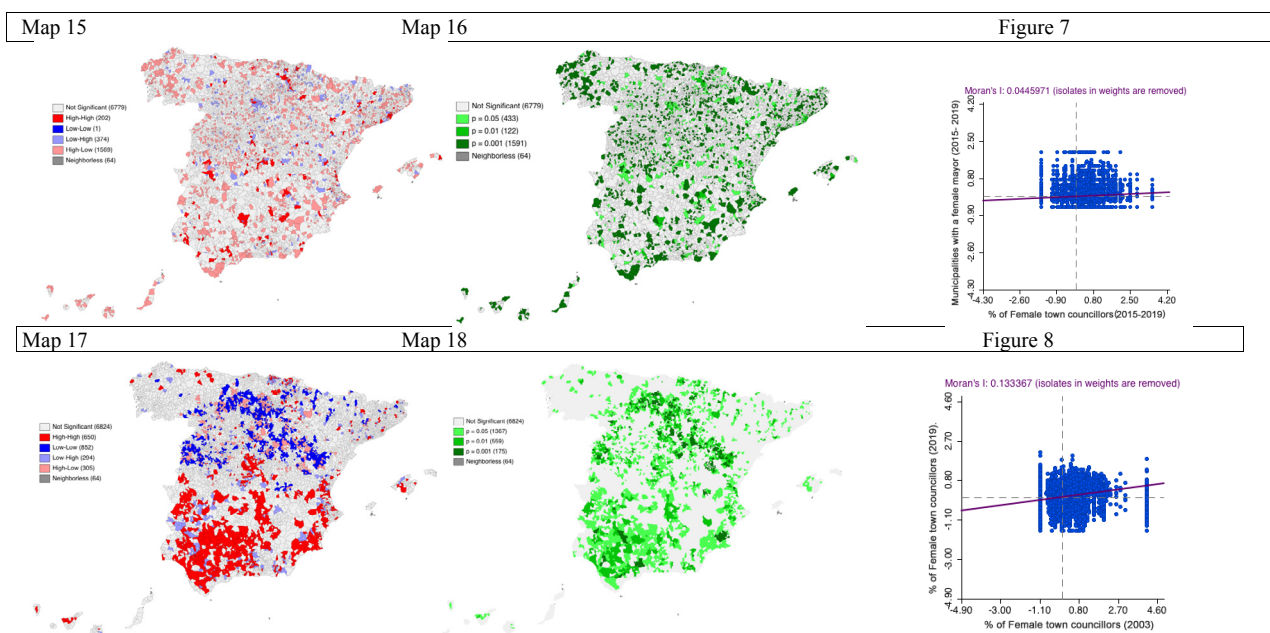
Maps 7-10. Figures 3-4. Univariate Moran's I .

Top, Moran's I for town councils with a female mayor, 2019. Map 7: Cluster map; Map 8: Significance map; Figure 3: Scatter plot. Bottom, Moran's I for % of female councillors per municipality, 2015-2019. Map 9: Cluster map. 10: Significance map; Figure 4: Scatter plot. Software: GeoDa. Source: by the authors.



Maps 11-14. Figures 5- 6. Bivariate Moran's I .

Top, bivariate Moran's I for municipality size 2019 / town councils with a female mayor 2019. Map 11: Cluster map; Map 12: Significance map; Figure 5: Scatter plot. Bottom, bivariate Moran's I for municipality size 2019 / percentage of female councillors 2019. Map 13: Cluster map; Map 14: Significance map; Figure 6: Scatter plot. Software: GeoDa. Source: by the authors.



Maps 15-18. Figures 7-8. Bivariate Moran's I .

Top, bivariate Moran's I for % female councillors 2015-2019 / town councils with a female mayor 2019. Map 15: Cluster map; Map 16: Significance map; Figure 7: Scatter plot. Bottom, bivariate Moran's I for female councillors 2003-2007 / female councillors 2015-2019. Map 17: cluster map; Map 18: Significance map; Figure 8: Scatter plot. Software: GeoDa. Source: by the authors.