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HOW TO MEASURE DIASPORAS USING ABSENTEE VOTER CENSUSES

Victoria Prieto Rosas

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How to Measure Diasporas
Using Absentee Voter Censuses

Victoria Prieto Rosas*
European University Institute, Florence, Italy

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European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

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Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and forecast migration in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Countries (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 17 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Palestine, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

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- Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics and between experts and policy makers;
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- Outreach.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: www.carim.org

For more information:

Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)

Convento

Via delle Fontanelle 19

50014 San Domenico di Fiesole

Italy

Tel: +39 055 46 85 878

Fax: + 39 055 46 85 755

Email: carim@eui.eu

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/>

Abstract

Availability of data is probably one of the most important determinants of progress in the social sciences and in demography in particular. Extra-territorial voting introduces a new data source for diaspora studies, a source that opens the way to the analysis of both dispersion over territory and political participation. Here we discuss the advantages and drawbacks of censuses for absentee voters as a data source in the territorial and demographic approach to diasporas, paying special attention to the Spanish Census for absentee voters.

Résumé

La disponibilité de données est probablement un des plus importants facteurs de progrès dans le domaine des sciences sociales et de la démographie en particulier. L'introduction du vote à l'étranger a ouvert de nouvelles perspectives dans le cadre de l'étude des diasporas. Cet article discute les avantages et les inconvénients des recensements des électeurs absents en tant que source de données dans une approche territoriale et démographique des diasporas. Il prête également une attention particulière au recensement espagnol des électeurs absents.

Introduction

It has been stated that in the last decades the social sciences, and demography in particular, are enjoying much greater research production thanks to the development of new statistical methods and the emergence of newly available socio-demographic data sources.

In the diaspora approach the ‘dispersion’ in time and space of a group of people relatively established across a certain territory, sharing different elements is particularly important: be these elements a nationality, a religion, an ethnicity or other forms of self-identification (Safran 1991; Cohen 1999). However, this condition of ‘dispersion’ is difficult to measure, since the most intensive and extensive databases are the ones provided by censuses. Despite its advantages (universality, accurate approach for counting population, data availability for a large number of geographical scales and questions on nationality and country of birth), such data suffers from some weaknesses when it comes to international comparisons (censuses are carried out around every 5 to 10 years, there are different years and dates of data collection, often there is a lack of information concerning year of arrival in the country of residence, etc). Even though some recent Integrated Data Census Projects for different countries (IPUMS or IMILA) have facilitated the measuring of diasporas, it is still not simple to count all the nationals of one country in all the countries of the world.

As a result of diasporas and transnational citizenship institutionalization, alternative databases, like the ones provided by the Absentee Voters Census become of critical importance. These censuses are carried out by countries that have introduced the migrant vote abroad, and need to keep an up-to-date register of their nationals abroad.

In spite of not yet having an exhaustive record of the countries that have data available from their absentee voters register, we can hypothesize about the kind of questions that such data would allow us to address.

Our purpose here is to explore the pros and cons of these data sources by beginning with a short demographic and geographical description of the diaspora for one Euro-Mediterranean country that led the ‘Age of Mass Migration’ (Hatton & Williamson 1998), namely Spain. From this description we will move on to some inferences and warnings that may be useful for further diaspora research based on absentee voters censuses.

1. Diasporas and extra-territorial voting, a good combination to approach the spatial dimension of Diasporas.

1.1 – Diaspora.

Robin Cohen (1996) wisely stated that it is hard to understand the ‘diaspora’ ignoring its victim tradition, particularly the Jewish experience, but also of the experiences of four other groups that suffered massive forced migrations: namely African slaves, Armenian, Irish and Palestinian migrants. Even now when ‘diaspora’ has changed its sense to a more contemporary, comprehensive way of understanding political, ethnic or religious identities linked by a certain sociability and/or extra-territorial citizenship, it is still necessary to understand its original meaning before that meaning can be transcended (Cohen 1996: 507).

‘To sow widely’ was the word’s sense when it was employed for the first time in the Greek translation of the Bible, describing the displacement of Jews to the Mediterranean and Asia Minor between 800 and 600 B.C. It is this sense, the one regarding the dispersal from an original homeland, that is useful for our approach to diasporas.

But, there are many other characteristics that have been stressed by different scholars, most of them coming from the point of view of Transnationalism, which concerns the political participation and cultural expression of diasporas. Authors with a Transnationalist background naturally favour one characteristic over another, but as Vertovec (1999) noted, there are some key features that are common to all definitions of diaspora namely: a) the global dispersion of a collectively self-identified ethnic or national group, and the development of sociability in the form of networks; b) a type of consciousness marked by double identities, with a feeling of being away from 'home', sometimes named 'the transnational imaginary' (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996; In: Vertovec 1999); c) a model for cultural reproduction; d) an avenue for capital, especially in the form of remittances; and e) political participation.

It is fair to say that the above-mentioned attributes of diasporas are of concern for Transnationalists who define Diasporas as relationships that can be developed despite great distances and international borders, passing over the regulations and national narratives they represent, and building networks that assure capital and non-material information flows (Vertovec 1999; Hannerz 1996; Castells 1996).

In spite of being one of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of Diasporas, dispersion over space is little studied due to a lack of good data for describing this feature.

1.2. – Extraterritorial Voting and its main patterns.

Despite the arguments for and against extra-territorial citizenship, migrant voting in its different forms has become increasingly common due to the growing power of emigrants in their communities of origin and destination. A recent study, carried out by Michael Collyer and Zana Vathi (2007), states that contrary to the general belief, extra-territorial voting is usual for 80% of countries considered in their study, including liberal democracies and also newly-established systems in Africa.

Changes in this direction started in 1985. Then between 1995 and 2007, there is a very dynamic period for the introduction of emigrant voting for a special emigrant representation¹. In Collyer's (2007) study, they recognize the existence of at least three systems allowing expatriate vote: a) 'voting in home district': it means that emigrants can vote in their country's elections but only if they return to vote there; b) 'vote abroad for home district': this is normally implemented by postal or embassy balloting (Grace, 2006); c) 'vote abroad for direct representatives': this allows emigrants to have their own directly elected representatives at legislative elections.

In system (a), votes are cast and counted internally, which implies an extra-territorial regime that is not particularly strict. System (b) is mixed where the casting of vote is external (generally at polling stations abroad) but votes are counted as if they were collected from an electoral district within the country of origin. Finally, system (c) is an ideal type of extraterritorial voting where both counting and casting take place outside the territory.

Unexpectedly there was no clear association between the economic dependence of countries on migrant's remittances or the population size of diasporas and the implementation of extra-territorial voting in the study carried out by Collyer *et al* (2007). Political reasons are still useful here for understanding the timing and reasons for the introduction of these regimes (generally almost immediately before the election campaign).

1.3 - Conceivably measurable dimensions of diasporas

Much progress has been made in the field of methodologies, in adapting them to take into account the multiplicity of links and exchanges within diasporas, and to study their political claims and the means available for political participation. However, little attention has been given over to the study of their dispersion in space.

External voting is far more widespread than has previously been imagined, and it is still causing new interest in different countries as democracy is spreading and become better established. Given this

we might consider that a new line of research could emerge, based on the use of census for absentee voters or registers as long as these are administrated as public databases.

Spain is a good example of available data bases for absentee voters since 2007, when the annually refreshed Census for Absentee Voters became a free-to-use micro-dataset with records from 1997 to the present. Let us consider this case to infer or at least hypothesize what this kind of data source might bring to the study of diasporas.

2 - Exploring the territorial and demographic dimension of diasporas: A study of the Spanish scenario based on the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad.

2.1 - A Diaspora inherited from a long history of emigration and the idea of 'strong citizenship'.

We shall start by assuming that it is possible to talk about *Diaspora* to make reference to the group of Spanish citizens residing abroad. Spain has historically been characterized by a strong tradition of emigration, and from this the country has inherited a wide Diaspora spread around the world.

Thinking of the definition of Cohen (1996), it should be said that the Spanish diaspora is neither a Diaspora related to the “victim tradition of Diasporas”, nor a group connected by ethnic bonds. Rather it is a group sharing nationality and citizenship recognized by the Spanish Government in its Constitution and Electoral Laws.

The emigration history of this country and the latent nature of Spanish nationality established by legislation, are two key ideas for understanding the nature of this Diaspora.

Contemporary Spanish migrations started at the end of the 19th Century. The era of mass migration began with emigration to northern Africa in 1830, and was followed at the end of the 19th Century by an important population flow to the Americas. In the 20th Century departures were mainly directed to Latin America, which became the destination for 85% of the emigrants during the first half of that century, and in the second half of the century the departures headed towards other regions of Europe (Reques Velasco and Cos Guerra 2003). According to the estimations made by Rueda Herranz between the 19th and the 20th Century, there were approximately five million Spanish emigrants. Half of them returned in the same period, leaving 2,800,000 Spanish nationals permanently established in Latin America (Rueda Herranz 2000: 17).

However, a Diaspora is not only formed by a first generation of emigrants, but also by their descendants. In the Spanish case, the attribute that unifies the expatriate-generations is an idea of nationality governed by the principle of *ius sanguinis*: i.e. nationality is transmitted from parents to their children, no matter where these children are born. Under Spanish law nationality is established as follows: a) having been born in Spain with a Spanish parent or two Spanish parents; b) having been born in Spain with foreign parentsⁱⁱ; c) acquisition of Spanish nationality due to residence in Spain, having been born abroad; or d) by having Spanish parents or grandparents, having been born abroadⁱⁱⁱ.

These last two modalities are acquisition modes that correspond to the ‘new’ Spanish nationals, that is to say, those born outside Spain.

This legislation establishes Spanish nationality as a *strong citizenship* that is related to the interest in combining two fundamental principles of Spain's foreign policies. According to Aguilar Benítez (1996), these are: ‘The idea of community beneath the general spirit of the legislation and the idea of protecting the emigrant Spanish worker’ (Aguilar Benítez 1996: 21). This last interest is not the stronger today, since bilateral agreements in the last couple of years have emphasized the children and grandchildren of Spanish citizens abroad rather than Spanish emigrants. For Cano (2006), these agreements, instead of establishing a double nationality regime in a strict sense, integrate a mechanism by which, in order to acquire Spanish nationality the old requirement of renouncing one's prior

nationality is eliminated.^{iv} Rather, an especially favorable way of ‘recovering’ this *latent* nationality is introduced (Cano 2006: 1908).

Traditionally, studies of Spanish emigration have been based on sources which record outflows and inflows to the destination countries. Even though, during the 1990s, comprehensive efforts were made in order to reconcile – at the historical level – the sources which recorded departures from Spain in the twentieth century (Yañez 1994), their scope does not cover all the departures of Spanish citizens but only those whose destination was Latin America. Other authors, have either worked with stocks based on censuses carried out by foreign countries where Spanish nationals now live (Palazón 1995; Izquierdo Escribano 1992), or have become interested in assessing the dimension of migration movements through the study of net migration – understood as the difference between immigrants and emigrants in an area in a given period – mostly approximated as the difference between the total and natural population growth. The biggest weakness of this method is that the final outcomes not only collect migratory movements but also the sum of errors accumulated by the different sources used, which undermines the results (Recaño *et al* 1997). In fact, any of the available sources (net migration, departures by sea, assisted emigration and consular absences) present a high percentage of error, and what is worse, of uncertainty (Blanes *et al* 1996: 45).

2.2 - *Extra-territorial vote of Spanish Nationals.*

Since 1985, Spanish nationals living abroad have enjoyed the right to vote with the Organic Law 5/1985 established within the General Electoral Regime. It is there noted that the right of emigrants to vote shall be exercised within the ‘vote abroad for home district’ system (Collyer, 2007) through either postal vote or embassy balloting.

The requirements determined by this Organic Law, establish that Spanish nationals living abroad must be registered in CERA (the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad) for which each resident (those who declare that they have been abroad for at least one year) or non-resident (those who declare that they have been abroad for less than a year) shall have registered as residing abroad in the Register of Consular Registration at the Consulate of Spain corresponding to their domicile. At the moment of each election the voting procedure establishes that the Provincial Delegation of the Electoral Census Office is in charge of sending the necessary documentation to those who are 18 years of age or older and who are registered in the Register of Consular Inscription. Also the Consulate is responsible for returning the votes to the elections board in the diplomatic pouch or by urgent mail.

The systematization of the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad corresponds to the Electoral Census Office which depends on the National Institute of Statistics. There, the information, sent by each Consulate of Spain abroad, is centralized.

When registering in the Census Service of the Consulate one should provide the following information: the province and city council where one wants to be registered, data concerning residence abroad, ID card number or passport number, date and place of birth (the province for those born in Spain and the country for those born abroad), gender, age, and level of schooling. These, except for name and passport, are available on the dataset from the National Institute of Statistics in Spain

It is true that this source does not include those younger than 18 and also that it is made up of emigrants who left Spain from the early twentieth century to the present time. However, this source reveals a country by country picture of residence for all Spanish citizens: those born in Spain or abroad and those who have acquired Spanish nationality due to birth, residence in Spain, marriage to a Spanish person or from their parents or grandparents.

The use of this register for the provincial elections ensures information availability with a high level of disaggregation (at provincial and regional level) which none of the other stock statistics have, not even the censuses of the countries where Spanish people currently live. Besides, it is a continuous

register that is updated on a monthly basis, with a closing date for the first day of each month and an annual closing date on 1st May.

From this perspective the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad seems, at first, an appropriate source for the study of the Spanish Diaspora, or at least might seem a good data source to balance the classical sources and their limitations.

As already mentioned in our introduction, a more accurate source for the Spanish population living abroad would be the censuses of each one of the countries where Spanish people presently reside. However, attaining this information would involve a number of countries and corresponding censuses with consequential difficulties (e.g. different dates for different countries).

Despite all these advantages over other censuses sources, the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad has two limitations in statistical terms. The first of these is that, as has already been noted, there is no register of those younger than 18 years old as it is an Electoral Census. The second restriction is that the inscription in the Register of Consular Inscription, from which the inscription in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad is derived, is voluntary as is the vote, and for this reason not all Spanish Nationals are registered there.

2.3 - Considerations about the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad for Demographic Research purposes.

As mentioned before, it is important to go into the possible estimation errors of the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. However, official information about the level of omission of this register is not available and it has not been possible to estimate the degree of error either by country or by year. It would be opportune to have a quantification of the error, but for the time being we will limit ourselves to noting some possible problems. We suspect that these observations may be extended to other censuses of absentee voters and it would be important that researchers planning to use similar data bear these in mind.

- Over-counting

Over-counting is a potential bias of the CERA and other similar data sources. Individuals can be double-counted in the case of death or those returning to Spain between elections. Even if the census has a monthly update, and the Electoral Census Office attempts to eliminate double registrations, it is possible that demographic events, such as death or change of residence, will not be registered.

- Under-counting

As in any census or voluntary register, some individuals will not be counted. This is likely to be the most common bias for the Spanish residents in countries neighbouring Spain or among temporary or seasonal emigrants. In these cases the motivation to register in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad will be low for the following reasons.

- The vote in Spain is not compulsory, so registration is left up to the voter.
- Those who leave the country for short periods of time, knowing the date of return, especially if no elections will be held in their period away from home, will likely not be interested in registering for the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. They may even be quite ignorant of the same.
- Also those who are in a neighbouring country such as Portugal or Andorra, do not necessarily consider the extra-territorial vote and these may simply travel back to Spain for elections. If we compare the number of people who are aged over 18, born in Spain with Spanish nationality and residing in Portugal according to the Portuguese 2001 census, with the figures for the same group provided by the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, we find that the Census has an omission of 27.8%.

- Some people may feel discouraged to register if they lose certain rights from no longer being registered in their City Council, as happens, for example when one registers oneself in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. There is, for example, the right to collect unemployment insurance. Another issue is the loss of seniority for continued residence in the same city council, which is necessary for access to certain social benefits from municipality or regional government including the possibility of renting a flat from the state.

2.4 - Spanish Diaspora. Some results using the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad.

Some of the results obtained from the spatial and demographic analysis of the Spanish Diaspora from the Census of Absentee Residents will be presented here. The analyzed period corresponds to the years 1997 to 2007, for which we present the main characteristics of Spanish citizens born in Spain and those born abroad.

2.4.1 - A growing Diaspora.

Numbers of Spanish nationals increase from 794,366 in 1997 to 1,162,427 in 2007, with important annual absolute increases, over 70,000 in 1997 and 2001. From 2002, the Diaspora has numbered more than one million members. Its growth though is less dramatic now than in the past.

Table 1.- Spanish population abroad by regions of residence, 2007.

Regions	1997		2007	
	Spanish population abroad	Percentage Distribution	Spanish population abroad	Percentage Distribution
Europe	427,425	53.8%	466,439	40.1%
Africa	9,152	1.2%	8,367	0.7%
Latin America	292,612	36.8%	563,719	48.5%
North America	52,821	6.6%	103,125	8.9%
Asia	3,921	0.5%	8,378	0.7%
Oceania	8,435	1.1%	12,399	1.1%
Total	794,366	100.0%	1,162,427	100.0%

Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 and 2007. Own elaboration.

Latin America and Europe were both preferred-destinations in the 20th Century. Latin America was the main migratory destination from the 19th Century until the middle of the 20th Century. But, from the 1960s onwards, Europe became the main Spanish emigrant-receiving region. However, the number of Spanish nationals in Latin America have exceeded those in Europe outside of Spain, since 2004 in terms of subscription in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. In 2007, Spanish nationals in Latin America represented almost half of the total amount of Spanish nationals abroad (48,5%), while Spanish residents in Europe – despite having increased in number – lost importance because of the increase in registration in other regions between 1997 and 2007 (Table 1).

Undoubtedly, Latin America has been the driving force behind most of this positive growth, since its growth rates shows higher values than the one observed for the Diaspora as a whole. In strong contrast, Europe decreased in two periods, going from almost 6% annual growth rate in 1998 to -1.6% in 2007. In 2001 and 2002 the subscription growth rate recovered, exceeding the value of the growth rate for Latin America in that year. But these values were not sustained and the following year subscriptions fell again, reaching a value of -1.9% in 2007. What we are probably seeing here is the end of the active age of the Spanish population who emigrated during the sixties for occupational

reasons and who are now returning to Spain: in this sense, the stock of those born in Spain has decreased. Asia displays the highest sustained annual growth during the whole period. Economic development in this region — especially in the “Asian Tigers”, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea – may partially explain why they have become such an attractive area for Spanish nationals. The economic growth of Spain during the nineties, as well as the internationalization of their enterprises and capital, also explains the Spanish interest in the most dynamic Asian countries. Undoubtedly, Africa has had the biggest loss of Spanish population in these years, and this has happened in an accelerated and sustained manner since 2002.

2.4.2 - Recent Geography of the Spanish Diaspora.

80% of Spanish residents abroad were concentrated in only ten countries in 2007: Argentina (22%), France (13.6%), Venezuela (10%), Germany (7.2%), Switzerland (6.2%), Brazil (5.3%), Mexico (4.3%), the United Kingdom (3.8%), the U.S. (3.8%) and Uruguay (3.5%).

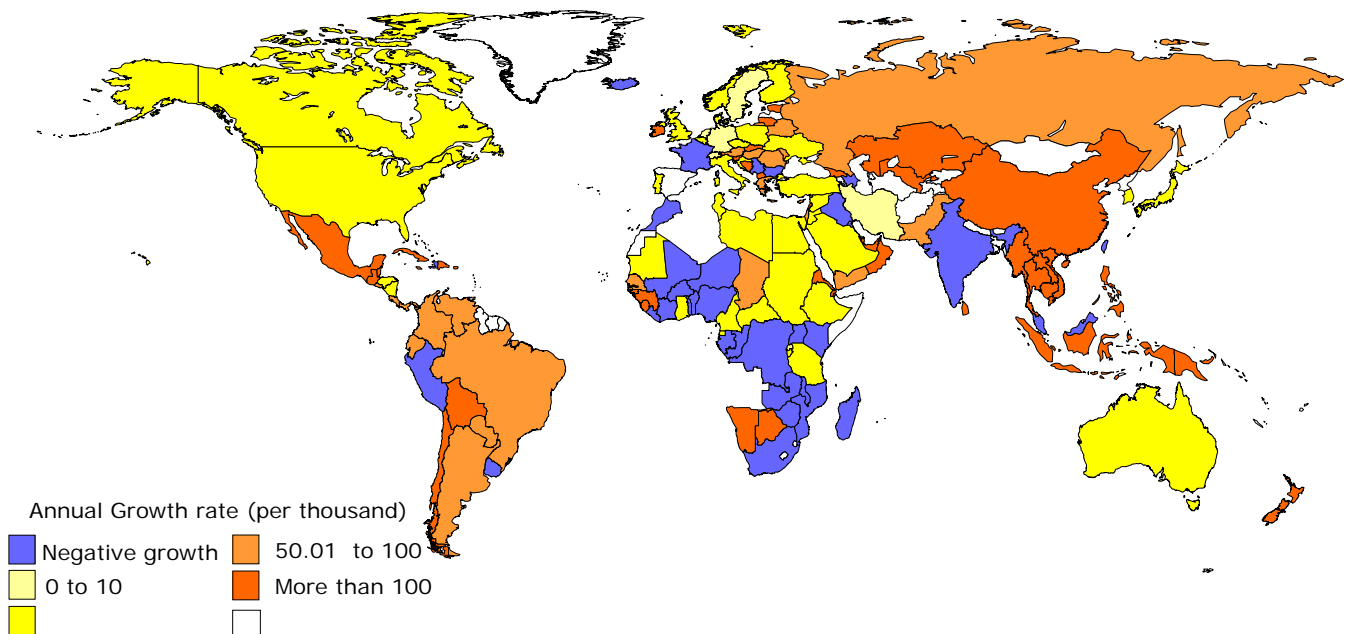
In 1997, France was the main country of residence for Spanish citizens abroad with 20.6%, followed by Argentina where 15.2% resided and by Germany with 10%. From 2000 to 2007, the most important country in terms of reception was Argentina. Venezuela is placed third within the main countries of residence, from 2002, when it overtook Argentina for the first time.

From the map in figure 1 it is possible to see the countries where the Spanish presence has decreased (in blue), and the countries where it has increased (in yellow and orange shades).

Brazil and Mexico have increased their relative weight together with Chile and Cuba. Europe, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium have lost importance in relation to other countries. The United States, Australia and Uruguay slightly lost importance, but they remain within the main group of countries.

The highest growth rates correspond to the countries located in Southeastern Asia, the Persian Gulf, Mongolia and some small islands in Oceania. Latin America has also seen the number of Spanish nationals registered in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad increase: Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, and the Caribbean countries such as Costa Rica, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, or those located in the Andean region such as Bolivia and Chile. In some Latin American countries where the Spanish population has traditionally settled, this group has reached historical highs: Venezuela, Argentina or Brazil, growing at a rate of more than 50 per thousand annually (figure 1).

Figure 1.- Annual growth of the Spanish population per countries of residence, 1997 – 2007.



The central and western region of Sub-Saharan Africa has lost its Spanish populations, especially Niger and – to a lesser extent – Mali and Nigeria. In the southeast – Madagascar and the Central Republic of Congo – have registered important decreases, at a rate of more than 50 per thousand annually. However, there are areas in Africa, such as Angola and Namibia, where the presence of Spanish citizens increased. In countries like Botswana where it rapidly decreased or in Burkina Faso and Guinea (former Spanish colony) where on the contrary it increased rapidly, this variation, which is apparently important, is related to the fact that the initial population in 1997 was practically inexistent and the growth rates are particularly sensitive then to small changes in populations. The same happens in Eastern Europe countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Slovakia, Macedonia and Albania, where the presence of Spanish populations at the beginning of the period was much reduced.

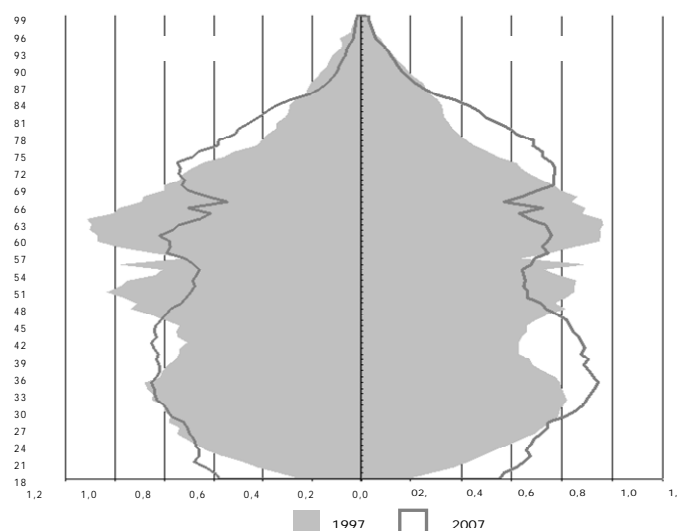
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2.4.3 - Socio-demographic characterization of the Spanish Diaspora.

We have considered the population at the beginning and the end of the study period (1997-2007) and we observed important transformations in the gender and age structures of the Spanish population abroad in young and adult ages.

Results point to a feminization of the Spanish population residing abroad, as indicated by the sex ratio going from 108.5 to 95.3 males per 100 females, between 1997 and 2007. The age specific sex ratio in 1997 indicated a preeminence of males between 30 and 74 years of age and preeminence in women at older ages.

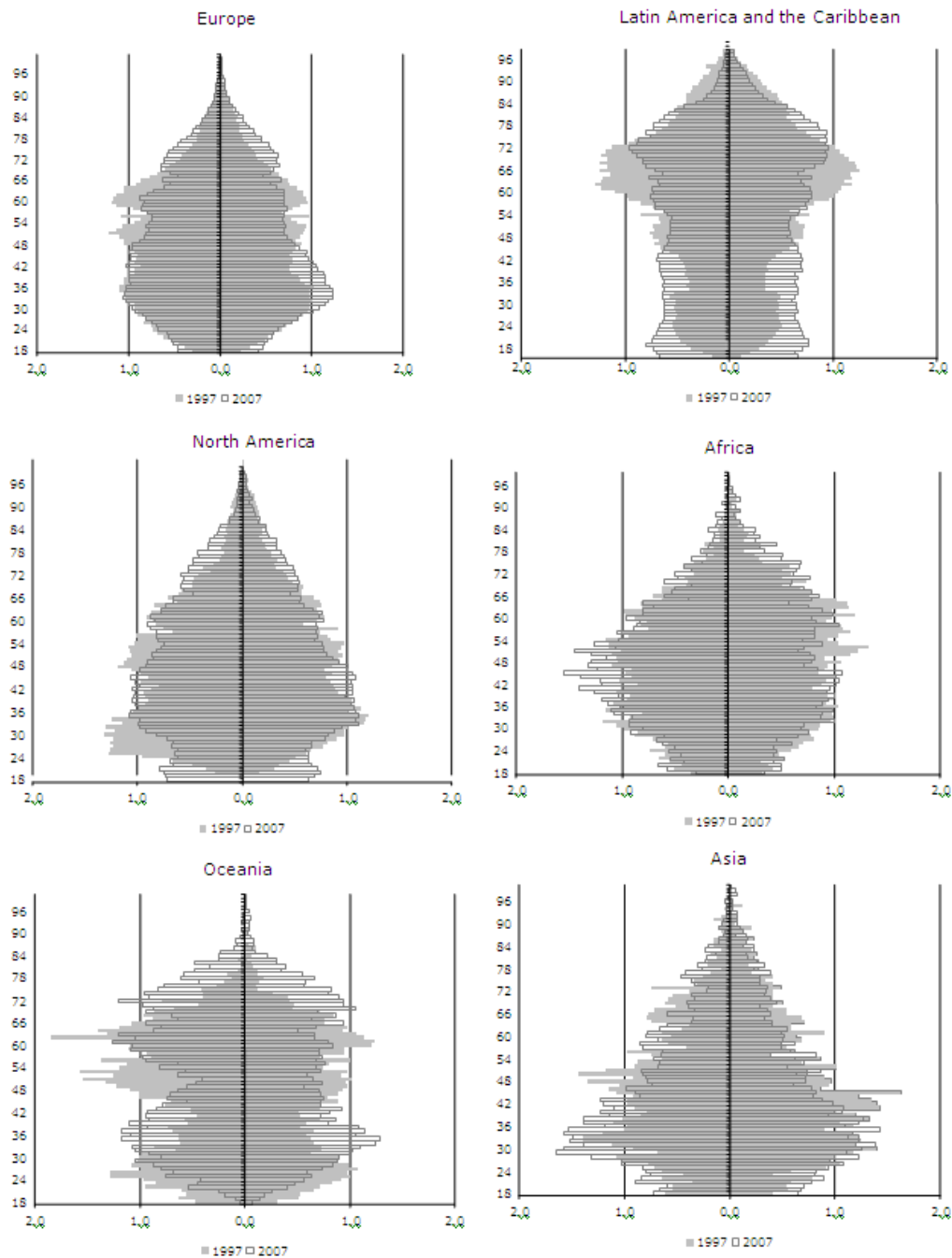
Figure 2. – Population Pyramids of the total number of Spanish people residing abroad. 1997 and 2007.



Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 - 2007. Own elaboration

In 2007, the structure of ages and gender (figure 2) presents a wider base than the equivalent in 1997, which indicates an increase in the number of registrations of young people between 18 and 25 years old. The age groups between 18 and 45 years old grow intensively for both sexes. Finally, the population pyramid corresponding to 2007 clearly shows an increase in the female population, particularly between 29 and 50 years old.

Figure 3.- Population Pyramids representing Spanish people abroad according to regions of residence, 1997 and 2007.



Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 and 2007. Own elaboration

Despite the cessation of the Spanish migratory flow, the population pyramid keeps on renewing itself in younger ages where the number of registrations increases. A feminization process is also observed as a result of the recent increase in the number of women and because of their improved survival at old ages.

With regards to the population structures seen in each region, important differences are observed (figure 3). Europe stands out due to an aged structure in which people over 65 years of age represent more than 20% of the population, and because of a certain growth in the female population in middle age (30 to 50 years old). In Latin America, we find one of the biggest transformations in the Spanish population abroad, the 'reversion' of the aging process: people over 65 years old, who used to be 46.2% of the population in 1997, represented 37.5% in 2007.

In figure 3 it is possible to observe an increase in the number of young people residing in North America, likely the children of those who in 2007 were between 40 and 55 years old. However, this did not inhibit the expected increase in the average age that went from 46.7 to 48 years old, and the increase in the proportion of people over 65 years old which went from 16% to 20%.

In the same figure, it is observed that Spanish residents in Asia are mostly young people between 25 and 50 years old, with a gender distribution which indicates a male predominance in working ages (85.5% of people under 65 years old). There is no young population since Asia is a recently chosen destination by emigrants (in the nineties) it is still too early to find the offspring of this population. The proportion of people over 65 years old in this region is the lowest of all those found among the Spanish residing abroad, only 14.5% in 2007, even lower than the percentage observed in 1997 which was 16.5%. It may also be the destination of temporary emigration, and entrepreneurs and young professionals, who do not intend to settle for a long period.

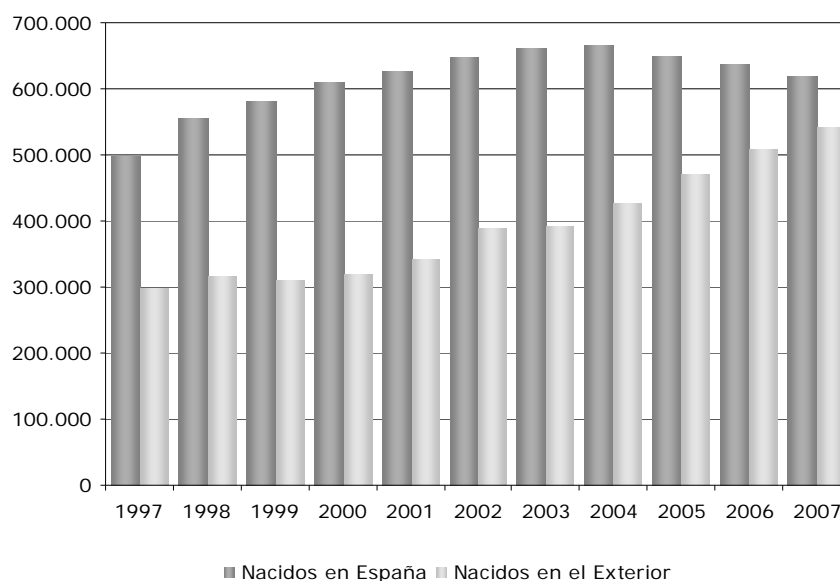
Spanish populations abroad have lost more than 5 years in average age (59.8 in 1997 but 54.4 in 2007), due to the recent registration of young people between 18 and 25 years old and adults between 30 and 50 years old. Both groups are of age to migrate and there may be too a population that acquires Spanish citizenship while considering a migratory project.

2.4.4 – Spanish nationals born in Spain and abroad: Territorial and demographic analysis considering the place of birth.

Here we will observe how the main characteristics of the Spanish living abroad have changed dramatically between 1997-2007 among those who were born in Spain and those who were born abroad.

In 2007 the Spanish born persons continued to be the majority of residents abroad, at 619,289 people, while those born abroad amounted to 543,141 in the same year. However, despite the fact that those born in Spain retain their predominance, the number of people born abroad increased considerably in ten years, from 296,437 in 1997 to over 500,000 in 2007 (figure 4). Its relative weight within the group of Spanish people abroad went from 37.3% to 46.7% in the same period. Correlatively, despite its growth in absolute terms, those born in Spain lost representation, dropping from 62.7% to 52.3% in this same period. This change in the composition of the Diaspora has been observable since 2002.

Figure 4. - Evolution of the number of Spanish Nationals born in Spain and those born abroad. 1997 - 2007.



Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 - 2007. Own elaboration.

In the following table, important changes in the observation period related to the territorial distribution of both groups are displayed.

Table 2. – Percentage distribution of Spanish Nationals born in Spain and abroad according to regions of residence, 1997 and 2007.

Regions of residence	Born in Spain			
	1997	Percentage Distribution	2007	Percentage Distribution
Europe	274,930	55.2%	328,003	53.0%
Africa	4,375	0.9%	5,303	0.9%
Latin America	179,874	36.1%	219,266	35.4%
North America	31,672	6.4%	53,205	8.6%
Asia	1,739	0.3%	4,854	0.8%
Oceania	5,357	1.1%	8,655	1.4%
Total	497,947	100.0%	619,286	100.0%
Regions of residence	Born Abroad			
	1997	Percentage Distribution	2007	Percentage Distribution
Europe	152,513	51.4%	138,414	25.5%
Africa	4,777	1.6%	3,064	0.6%
Latin America	112,738	38.0%	344,475	63.4%
North America	21,149	7.1%	49,920	9.2%
Asia	2,182	0.7%	3,524	0.6%
Oceania	3,078	1.0%	3,744	0.7%
Total	296,437	100.0%	543,141	100.0%

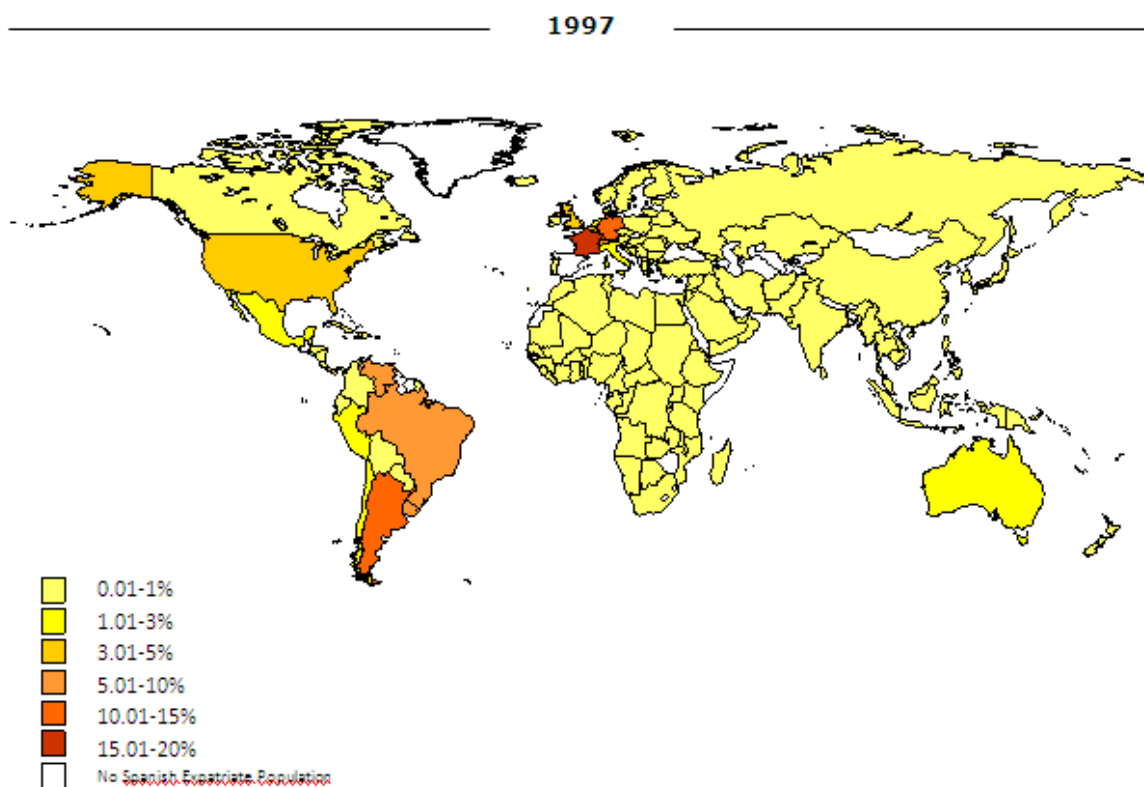
Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 and 2007. Own elaboration.

Those Spanish nationals born in Spain have remained dominant in Europe, while Spanish nationals born abroad have dramatically modified their territorial distribution. These have lost their European predominance, 51.4% of those born abroad in 1997 changed to 25.5% of Spanish people in this region in 2007. This very same year 63.4% of Spanish nationals born abroad lived in Latin America, while at the beginning of the period this group only represented 38% of the total.

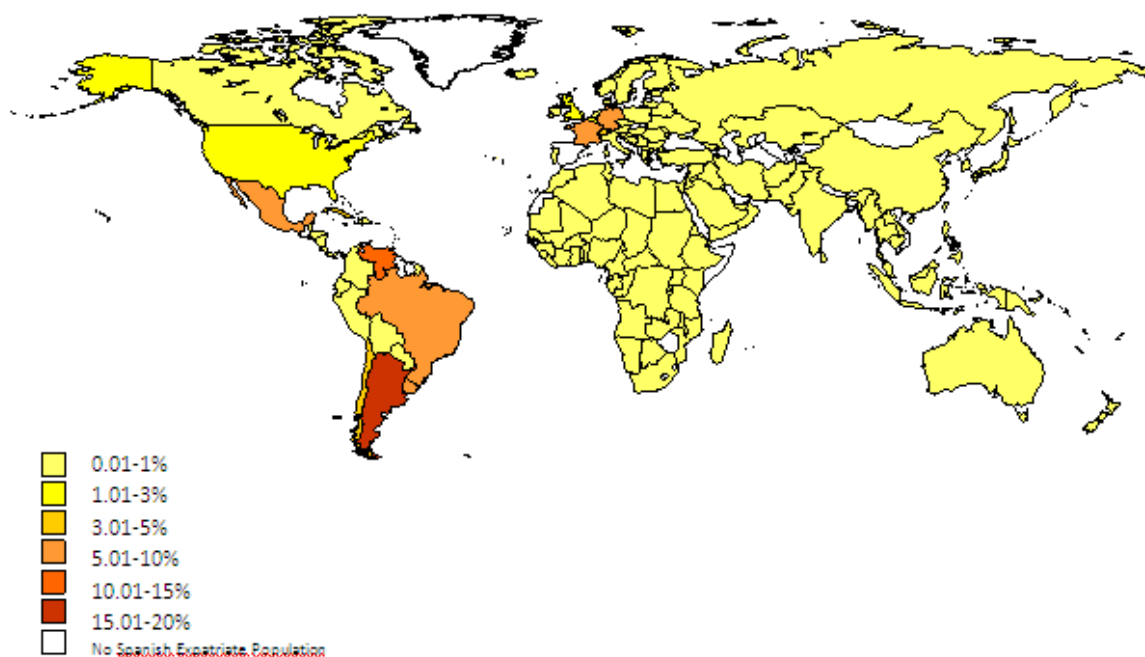
Among those born in Spain, the proportion of residents in Latin America has also decreased from 36.1% to 35.4%, even though an absolute growth in registrations is observed. In this group, on the other hand, the percentage of those in Asia and Oceania has increased. A small increase of more than two points in the Spanish presence for both groups according to place of birth (table 2) in North America is observed.

Important observations were not noticed in the territorial distribution of those born in Spain at a country level. Those born in Spain maintained their predominance between 1997 and 2007 in countries like France and Argentina. In 2007, 18% and 15% of those born in Spain and abroad, respectively, resided in the countries mentioned, followed by Germany (8%) and Venezuela (7%). The United Kingdom (5.6%) and Uruguay (2%) lost their predominance, despite the fact that both countries represent historical destinations for Spanish emigration.

Figure 5.- Percentage distribution of Spanish people born abroad by country of residence. Years 1997 and 2007.



2007



Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 and 2007. Own elaboration

When contrasting the territorial distribution by country of those born abroad, there are also other important changes. In 2007, France ceased to be the main country of residence for Spanish nationals born abroad to be replaced by Argentina where 28.7% of those born abroad reside. The proportion of residents in all European countries lost ground to those living in Latin America.

It is within the main residence countries preferred by the Spanish population that these changes in the composition of the Diaspora by birthplace occurred. Among the first ten residence countries of those born in Spain, the increase in the proportion of those born in the current countries of residence is observed among Latin American countries, especially in Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil. In European countries like France or the United Kingdom, the increase in descendants has been low or even lower than those observed in other European countries such as Switzerland, Germany or Belgium, where the percentage of those born there has strongly increased, especially since 1999.

3 – Discussion

This paper showed that the Spanish Census of Absentee Voters is an extraordinarily useful tool for describing the geography and the main demographic transformations of the Spanish diaspora in terms of cross-sectional analysis, while also setting out some of the problems involved in using this administrative record of data originally collected for non-research purposes.

Being aware of the future emergence of similar datasets given the trend in extra-territorial voting, we would like to finish by pointing out the advantages and drawbacks of the use of this kind of data for the general study of diasporas.

The advantages of census of absentee voters

A demographic description of Diasporas can be made taking a 'nationality' criterion. This concept of citizenship includes migrants and their second or even third generation descendants, and not merely those who once left their country of origin.

The presence of some core demographic variables could help in establishing the demographic characteristics of the diaspora (ageing, changes in sex ratio, differences in demographic structure by country of birth, etc.). Quite interesting work might be developed in the geography of diasporas, looking for clusters of countries that represent the main destination of migration waves, as well as for the migrants' sex and age profile using data sets that might include the year of arrival or departure. Also, it might be possible to think of different geographies within each Diaspora, distinguishing those born in the country of origin from those born abroad (second and third generation).

Drawbacks of Census of Absentee Voters

The accuracy of the data determines the whole scope of research opportunities. For countries where voting might not be mandatory this kind of data will suffer from several biases of underestimation. Stimulus for registration in the country of arrival might be required if all the citizens of a country that were living abroad were expected to be counted in these kinds of registers

These sources of bias do not hinder further research, but caution is needed when interpreting the results and inferring from them.

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- ⁱ The Countries that introduced the vote abroad for emigrant representatives are: Italy, France, Croatia, Portugal, Morocco, Mozambique, Haiti, Guinea Bissau, Cook Islands, Colombia, Cape Verde, Angola and Algeria (Collyer, 2007: 17).
- ii By 3 different means, namely: i) if at least one of the parents was also born in Spain; ii) if none of them had the Spanish nationality; and iii) if the legislation of the countries of origin of any of them assigned a nationality to the child (Art. 17 of the Spanish Civil Code)
- iii Regarding the last one (d), before 2002 there was an age limit to exercise the right of applying for nationality (18 years old), but since then said age limit has been eliminated and any son or daughter of a Spanish national may apply for nationality at any age (Law 36/2002). Grandchildren can also have access to Spanish nationality after having resided legally and continuously for at least one year in Spain. In December 2006, the Statute of Spanish Citizenship Abroad (Law 40/2006) was passed, allowing access to Spanish nationality to all the grandchildren of Spanish nationals, with no age limit, even though none of the parents was born in Spain and without any residence requirement in said country. From the beginning of 2009, the recently approved “Historical Memory Law” recognizes the right of grandchildren of Spanish nationals to acquire Spanish nationality if their grandparents were economic or political refugees who left the country between 1936 and 1955.
- iv Spain has signed Double Nationality Agreements with: Argentina April 1969; Bolivia October 1961; Chile May 1958; Colombia 1980; Costa Rica June 1964; Ecuador March 1964; Honduras June 1966; Nicaragua July 1961; Paraguay June 1959; Peru May 1959; Dominican Republic March 1968 (BOE, In: Website of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, 2008). Other countries in Latin America, such as Brazil, Uruguay or Venezuela, do not have double nationality agreements since their constitutions do not consider dual nationality.