

How to Measure Diasporas Using Absentee Voters' Censuses:

the case of the Spanish Diaspora

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Abstract

Availability of data is probably one of the most important determinants of progress in Social Sciences and the Demographic Discipline in particular. The widespread system of extra-territorial vote introduces a new source of data for diaspora's studies that allows analyzing two of the main dimensions of this category: dispersion over territory and demographic characteristics.

First, we discuss the advantages and drawbacks of the use of the census for absentee voters as a proper data source for the demographic approach to diasporas. Second, paying special attention to the case of the Spanish Census for absentee voters we describe the current geography of Spaniards abroad from a sociodemographic perspective. Differences by place of birth have been specially considered in the study of the geography and the demographic structure of this Diaspora.

Results point to a broad increase in the size of this population, largely explained by the substantial rise in the new generations of Spanish citizens born abroad, and its consequent feminization and rejuvenation. From a spatial perspective, North American and Asian countries report net gains in Spanish-born population, while Europe has experienced a net loss. The great increase in registries from Spanish citizens born abroad is located in Latin America, and has entailed a Latinization of the Diaspora over the last decade.

Key words: International migration, Spanish emigration, Diasporas, Spanish nationality.

Introduction

It has been stated that in the last decades the Social Sciences, and Demography in particular, are living a huge enlargement of research production regarding the development of statistics and the emergence of new available socio-demographic data.

In the diasporas approach one of the most underlined dimensions of this concept is the "dispersion" in time and space of a group of people relatively established in a certain surface, sharing different elements in common: a nationality, a religion, belonging to an ethnic group and other forms of self-identification (Safran 1991, Cohen 1999). However, this condition of "dispersion" is difficult to be measured, since the most intensive and extensive databases are the ones provided by census data. Despite its advantages (universality, accurate approach for

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counting population, data availability for a large number of geographical scales, questions on nationality and country of birth), such data suffers from some weaknesses when it comes to international comparisons (census are carried out every 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 recently some Integrated Data Census Projects for different countries (IPUMS or IMILA) have facilitated the measuring of diasporas, it is still not simple to count up all the nationals of one country in all the countries of the world through these means.

As a result of diasporas and transnational citizenship institutionalization, we could bear for the use of alternative databases, like the ones provided by the Absentee Voters Census. 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 in the world.

In spite of not having yet an exhaustive record of the countries that have available data from their absentee voters register, we may hypothesize on which are the questions that we may be allowed to answer about diasporas by analyzing this kind of data.

Our purpose here is to explore the potential and drawbacks of these data sources by beginning with a short demographic and geographical description of the diaspora for one of the Euro-Mediterranean countries that led the 'Age of Mass Migration' (Hatton & Williamson, 1998) of the last century, like Spain. From this we expect to set some inferences and warnings that may be useful for further research of different diasporas based on census of absentee voters.

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' regardless of its victim tradition, mainly well-known by the Jewish experience, which is also shared by four other groups that suffered massive forced migrations: African slaves, Armenians, Irish and Palestinians. Even now when this victim origin was enriched by the diasporas during the last centuries, and the word changed its original meaning 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 it can be transcended (Cohen 1996: 507).

'To sow widely' was the main idea that this word first held when it was found in the translation to Greek of the Bible naming the displacement of Greeks to the Mediterranean and Asia Minor between 800 and 600 B.C. Is this original dimension, the one regarding the dispersal from an original homeland, the one that call our attention in our approach to diasporas here.

But, there are many other characteristics that have been underlined by different scholars, most of them coming from the point of view of Transnationalism, which mainly concern the political participation and cultural expression of diasporas. Some authors underline with more emphasis some special characteristics than others, but in general, as Vertovec (1999)

summarized, there is a relationship that is present in all definitions and it implies the following key features: a) the global dispersion of a yet collectively self-identified ethnic or national group, and the development of sociability in the form of networks; b) type of consciousness marked by double identities, regarding a feeling of being away from 'home', sometimes named 'the transnational imaginary (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996; In: Vertovec 1999); and c) a mode for cultural reproduction; d) the avenue of capital, especially in the form of remittances; and e) political participation.

It is fair to say that the mentioned attributes of diasporas are of concern for the Transnationalism research perspective, that defines Diasporas as relationships that can be developed despite great distances and international borders, specially trespassing 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 underlined characteristics of Diasporas, the dispersion over the space dimension of the concept is the one that remains more unexplored due to the lack of data good for describing the territorial dispersion of the member of this group.

1.2 – Extraterritorial Voting and its main patterns.

Despite the arguments for and against the extra-territorial citizenship, migrant vote 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 by Michael Collyer and Zana Vathi (2007), states that contrary to the general belief, extra-territorial voting is actually the usual for 80% of the countries considered in their study, including liberal democracies and also newly established systems in Africa.

Changes in this direction started in 1985. Between 1995 and 2007, it is possible to recognize a very dynamic period for the introduction of one of the most modern modes regarding the emigrant vote in the form of voting for own 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 two dominant modes: postal and embassy balloting (Grace, 2006); c) 'vote abroad for direct representatives': this mode allows emigrants to have their own directly elected representatives at legislative elections.

In the first electoral system, votes are casted and counted internally, which implies a non-strictly extra-territorial regime. The second has a mixed nature where the casting of vote is external (generally at polling stations abroad) but votes are counted as if they were emitted by residents from an electoral district within their country of origin. Finally, only the third one is an ideal type of extraterritorial voting where both counting and casting have territorially external nature.

As opposed to the expected, no clear association among the economic dependence of countries on migrant's remittances or the population size of diasporas and the implementation of extra-territorial voting was observed in the study carried out by Collyer et al (2007). Political reasons are still especially useful here to understand the timing and reasons for the introduction of these regimes (generally immediately before the election's month).

1.3 - Hardly but possibly measureable dimensions of diasporas.

A large progress has been developed in the field of methodologies, trying to adapt them to take account of the multiplicity of links and exchanges within diasporas, and to study their political claims and means for political participation, but in our opinion no large attention was paid to the study of their dispersion on space.

If external voting is far more widespread than has been previously imagined, and is still gaining attention among different countries at the same pace in which democracies are becoming more common and established in the world, is plausible to consider that a new line of research could emerge, based on the use of census for absentee voters or registers as long as those 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. To pursue the aim of this article let us consider this case to infer or at least hypothesize which are the possibilities that this kind of data source brings into 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 emigrational history and the idea of "strong citizenship".

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

Going over the dimensions of the definition introduced by Cohen (1996), it should be said that clearly it is neither a Diaspora related to the "victim tradition of Diasporas", nor a group connected by ethnic bonds, but a group sharing an attribute of nationality and citizenship under the recognition of the Spanish Government in its Constitution and Electoral Laws.

The emigrational history of this country and the latent nature of the Spanish nationality established by legislation, are two key ideas to bear in mind for understanding the nature of this Diaspora.

The beginning of contemporary Spanish migrations started at the end of the 19th Century. The mass migration era initiated with the emigration to the north of Africa in 1830, and followed by the end of the 19th Century by an important population flow moving to America. In the 20th Century the departures were mainly directed into Latin America, which became the

destination for 85% of the emigrants during the first half of the century, and in the second half of the century the departures changed back their direction to Europe (Reques Velasco and Cos Guerra, 2003). According to the estimations made by Rueda Herranz between the 19th and the 20th Century, the number of Spanish emigrants was approximately five millions. Half of them returned in the same period, leaving 2,800,000 Spaniards permanently established in the Latin American countries (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 several generations residing outside Spain is an idea of nationality governed by the principle of *ius sanguinis*, which sustains that the transmission of nationality occurs from the parents to their children, no matter where these are born. The ways of acquiring the Spanish nationality established by Law could be summed up as follows: a) having been born in Spain with a Spanish parent or both Spanish parents; b) having been born in Spain with foreign parents (if at least one of them was also born in Spain, or if none of them had the nationality, or if the legislation of the countries of origin of any of them assigned a nationality to the child; In: Art. 17 of the Civil Code); c) acquisition of the Spanish nationality due to residence in Spanish, having been born abroad; or d) by having Spanish parents or grandparents, having been born abroadⁱⁱ.

These last two modalities are acquisition modes that correspond to the “new” Spaniards, that is to say, those born outside Spain.

Regarding the citizenship, this legislation establishes a configuration of the Spanish nationality of origin 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 nowadays, since the bilateral agreements in the last couple of years have emphasized more on the Spaniards’ children and grandchildren abroad than on Spanish emigrants. For Cano (2006), these agreements, more than establishing a double nationality regime in a strict sense, integrate a mechanism in which in order to acquire Spanish nationality, the old requirement of giving up the previous nationality is eliminatedⁱⁱⁱ, and an especially favorable way of ‘recovering’ this nationality still *latent* is introduced (Cano 2006: 1908).

Traditionally, the studies about Spanish emigration have been based on sources which record outflows and inflows to the destination countries. Even though, during the nineties, comprehensive efforts were made in order to reconcile - at an historical level - the sources which informed about the amount of departures from Spain along the 20th Century (Yañez, 1994), their scope does not cover all the departures of Spaniards but only those whose destination was Latin America. The rest of the authors, either have worked with stocks based on censuses carried out by foreign countries where Spaniards 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 and period time- mostly approximated as the difference between the total and the 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 questions the validity of the obtained results

(Recaño et al. 1997). Actually, any of the available sources (net migration, departures by sea, assisted emigration and consular absences) present a high percentage of error, and which is worse, of uncertainty (Blanes et al, 1996: 45).

2.2 - Extra-territorial vote of Spaniards.

Since 1985, Spaniards living abroad fully obtained their right to vote with the Organic Law 5/1985 established on the General Electoral Regime. It is there established that the right to vote of emigrants shall be exercised within the “vote abroad for home district” system (Collyer, 2007) through two modalities: postal vote and embassy balloting.

The requirements determined by this Organic Law, establish that Spaniards living abroad must be registered in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad (CERA, for its Spanish acronym) for which each residents (those who declare to be abroad for at least one year) or non residents (those who declare to be abroad for less than a year) shall previously register as residing abroad in the Register of Consular Inscription at their corresponding Consulate of Spain according 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 vote from abroad to those that are over the age of 18 and are registered in the Register of Consular Inscription. Also the Consulate is in charge of taking the corresponding votes through diplomatic pouch or urgent mail to the Elections Board.

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 to which one wants to be registered in, data of the residence abroad, ID card number or passport number, date and place of birth (the province for those born in Spain and the country in the case of those born abroad), gender, age, and level of schooling. These, except for the name, passport number and birthplace, are also the available variables for the dataset that is possible to get from the National Institute of Statistics in Spain

Except for those aged under 18 who are not registered in this electoral census and knowing that this group is formed by people who emigrated between the beginning of the 20th Century and present time, this source reveals a picture per country of residence of all Spanish citizens, born either in Spain or abroad, who have acquired the Spanish nationality due to birth, sustained residence in Spain, marriage to a Spanish person or by inheriting it from their grandparents or parents.

The use of this register for the exercise of the provincial elections ensures the availability of information with a high level of disaggregation (provincial and regional level) which none of the rest stock statistics, not even the censuses of the countries where Spanish people live currently, have. Besides, it is a continuous register that is updated on a monthly basis, with a closing date set on the 1st day of each month and an annual closing corresponding to May, 1st of each year.

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 could be thought as a good data source to balance the disadvantages of the classical sources.

As already mentioned in the introduction of this text, a more accurate source to analyze the characteristics of the Spanish population living abroad would be the censuses of each one of the countries where Spanish people reside. However, having this information may be rather difficult as it implies a very large number of countries and several different censuses dates.

On the other hand, in the censuses of each country the origin of those born abroad at lower levels from those of the country it is not questioned and not all of them collect information on the nationality of the interviewed ones (even though they do ask the country of birth), so the “Spaniards” universe should be narrowed down to absolute Spanish emigrants missing their descendants.

Despite all these advantages over other censuses sources, the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad has two limitations for statistics purposes in studies that attempt to analyze the Diaspora in its totality. The first of them, as it has already been said, is related to the fact that it does not have a register of those aged under 18 years old as it is an Electoral Census. The second restriction refers to the fact 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 the vote, and for such reason not all Spaniards 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 deep into the possible twists or in the 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 neither for each one of the countries of residence of Spaniards abroad nor for all the years of our series. It would be opportune to have a quantification of the error, but taking into account the restrictions found to do it, by the time being we will limit ourselves to explicit the possible twists that this census may contain and the direction in which these could operate. We seriously believe that these observations may be extended to other census of absentee voters and it would be important to bear them in mind for researchers planning to use similar data.

- Over-enumeration errors

Among the possible errors or bias Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad may suffer, population is inaccurately counted (in excess). Population is counted twice in those cases that correspond to those who are out of the register because of death or because they return to Spain between two elections dates. Even if the census has a monthly update, and the Electoral Census Office attempts to eliminate double registrations, it is possible that each one of those registered is not really covered and that the demographic events which may occur to them (death or change in their residence place) are not assiduously informed.

- *Sub-enumeration errors*

Like in any census and voluntary registers, it is possible that some individuals are not counted within the census source. In this particular case, this is likely to be the most common bias in Spain's neighbor countries or among temporary or seasonal emigrants. In these cases the motivation to register in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad may be low due to the following reasons.

- The vote in Spain is not compulsory, so the registration is left up to the voter.
- The ones who leave the country for short periods of time, in which the date of return is known, and know that no elections will be held in such period, may not be interested in registering or even ignore the existence of the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad.
- Also those who leave for a neighbor country such as Portugal or Andorra, do not necessarily consider the extra- territorial vote and may prefer travelling back for the elections. If we compare the number of people who are aged over 18, born in Spain with Spanish nationality, that resided - according to the 2001 census - in Portugal with Spanish people, born in Spain based on the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, the difference of both stocks reveals an omission of 27.8%.
- Some people may feel discouraged to register if they consider that they lose the right to exercise certain rights since they are no longer registered in their City Council as it happens when one registers oneself in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. As an example we may mention the case of the right to collect the unemployment insurance or the loss of their seniority of continued residence in the same city council, which is necessary when having access to certain social policies benefits from municipality or autonomic government (for instance, the possibility of requesting a flat to be rented from the state).

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

Some of the results which may be obtained from the spatial and demographic analysis of the Spanish Diaspora from the Census of Absentee Residents will be presented hereby as an example. The analyzed period corresponds to the years 1997 to 2007, for which we present a characterization, where we distinguish the main demographic features of Spaniards who have been born in Spain and those who have been born abroad.

2.4.1 - A growing Diaspora.

Spaniards have kept an increasing tendency, going from 794,366 in 1997 to 1,162,427, with important annual absolute increases, over 70,000 between 1997-1998 and 2001-2002. As from 2002, the Diaspora has outnumbered one million members and even though it is still growing, it has done it so in a less accelerated way since then.

Latin America and Europe have both held the title of *preferred-destinations* along the 20th Century. Latin America has been the main migratory destination by the Spaniards during the 19th Century until the middle of the 20th Century, but from then on Europe became the main region receiving emigrants since the sixties. However, recently the Spaniards in Latin America

have exceeded those in Europe, since 2004 in terms of inscription in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad. In 2007, Spaniards in Latin America represented almost half of the total amount of Spaniards abroad (48,5%), while the residents in Europe - despite having increased in number – dramatically lost importance in virtue of the increase of other regions between 1997 and 2007 (Table 1).

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

Regions	1997		2007	
	Spaniards abroad	Percentage Distribution	Spaniards 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.

Undoubtedly, Latin America has been the one energizing this evolution, with a positive growth rate highly faster to the one of the total Diaspora. On the other hand, Europe has strongly decreased in two periods, going from almost 6% of annual growth rate in 1998 to -1.6% in 2007. Between 2001 and 2002 the inscriptions growth rate was recovered, exceeding the value of the growth rate for Latin America in that year. But these values were not sustained in time and the following year the inscription started to go down rapidly, reaching a value of -1.9% in 2007. It is presumable that the end of the active age of Spaniards who emigrated during the sixties for occupational reasons, has encouraged the return of Spaniards from Europe, and in this sense, the decrease of the stock of those born in Spain has decreased.

Asia displays the highest rhythm of sustained annual growth during the whole period. The economic development of the last years in this region- especially in those countries called “Asian Tigers” - Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea - may partially explain why they have become a new attractive area for the Spanish people. The economic growth of Spain during the nineties, as well as the internationalization of their enterprises and capital, also explains the Spanish interest to go to 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 the 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%), United Kingdom (3.8%), U.S.A. (3.8%) and Uruguay (3.5%).

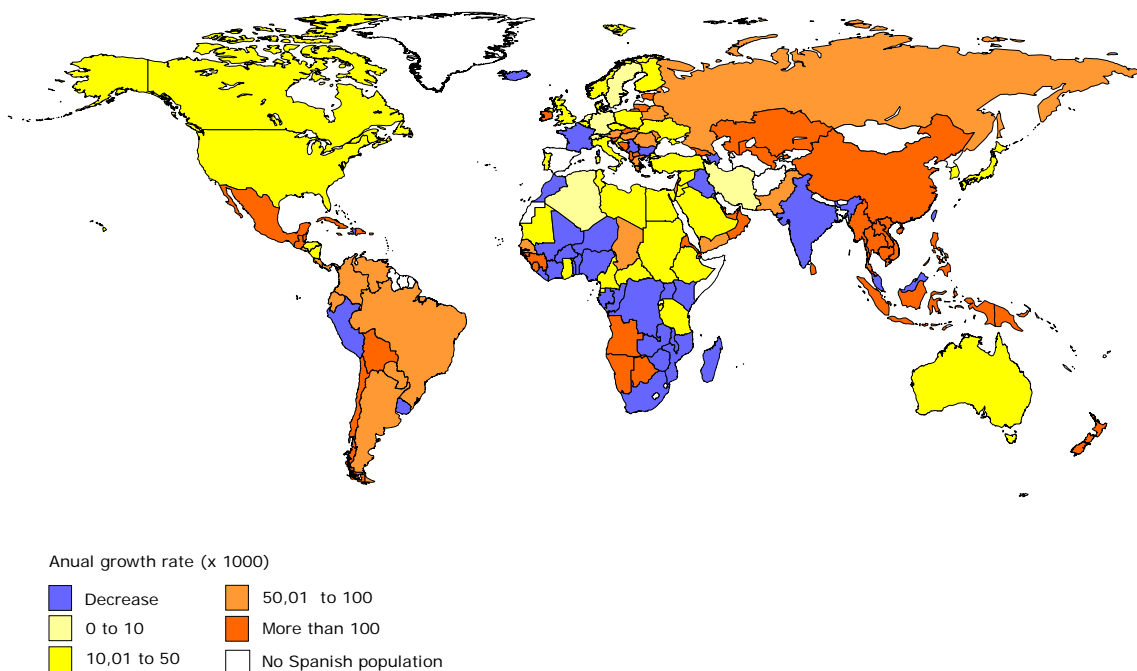
In 1997, France was the main country of residence of Spaniards abroad with 20.6%, followed by Argentina where 15.2 % resided and by Germany with 10 %. In 2007, the most important

country in terms of reception was Argentina (as from 2000). Venezuela is placed third within the main countries of residence, from 2002, when it surpassed Argentina for the first time.

From the map in figure 1 it is possible to have a view of which have been the countries where the Spanish presence has intensely decreased (in blue), and which are those countries where it has increased (in yellow and orange shades).

Brazil and Mexico increase its relative weight together with Chile and Cuba. In the meanwhile, Europe, United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium have lost importance before other countries. United States, Australia and Uruguay slightly lost their weight but they remain to be within the group of main countries.

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



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

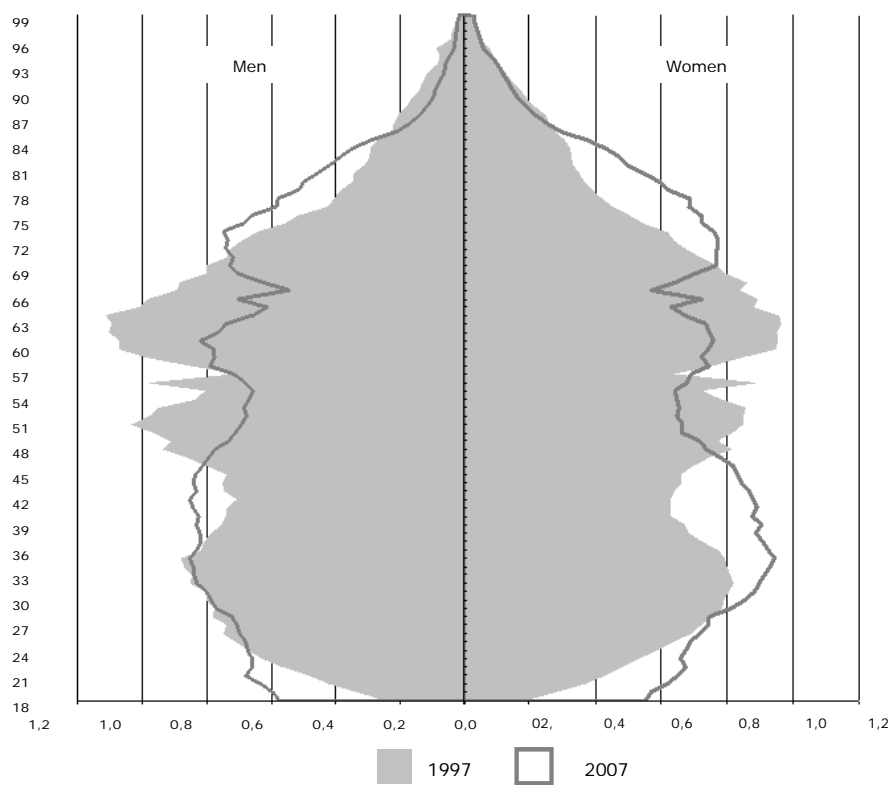
The highest growth rates correspond to the countries located in Southeastern Asia, Mongolia, some small islands in Oceania and the Persian Gulf. Latin America is also a place where the amount of Spanish people who are registered in the Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad has increased, in countries like: Mexico, Bolivia and Chile, and the Caribbean countries such as Costa Rica, Cuba and Dominican Republic, or those located in the Andean region such as Bolivia and Chile. In the Latin American countries where the Spanish population has traditionally settled, this group reaches historical maximums in its volume, such as in Venezuela, Argentina or Brazil, growing in an accelerated manner, at a rate of more than 50 per thousand annually (figure 1).

The central and western region of the sub-Saharan Africa has lost Spanish population more intensively, especially Niger and - to a lesser extent - Mali and Nigeria. In the southeast - Madagascar and Central Republic of Congo - an important decrease is observed, 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 decreases or in Burkina Faso and Guinea (former Spanish colony) where on the contrary it intensively increases, this variation, which is apparently important, is related to the fact that the initial amount of population in 1997 was practically inexistent and the growth rates are sensitive to changes in populations. The same happens in countries of Eastern Europe, such as: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Slovakia, Macedonia and Albania, where the presence of Spanish people at the beginning of the period was much reduced.

2.4.3 - Socio-demographic characterization of the Spanish Diaspora.

Figure 2. – Population Pyramids of the total amount of Spanish people residing abroad.

1997 and 2007.



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

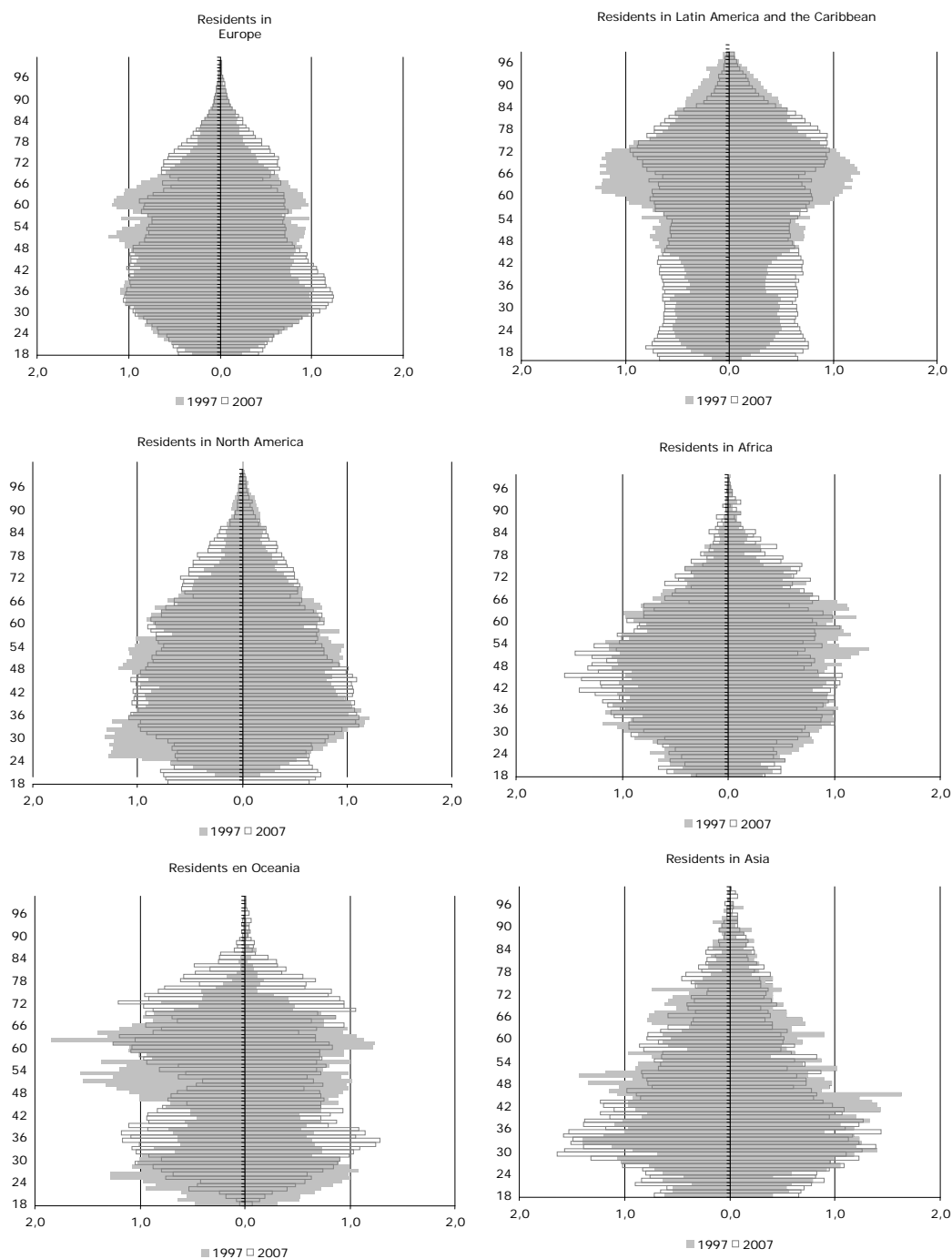
We have considered the population at the beginning and the end of the study period (1997-2007) and we observed important transformations in the gender and age structures of the group of Spanish population abroad in young and adult ages.

Results point to a feminization of Spanish population residing abroad, as indicated by the change in 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 general preeminence of males, concentrated between ages going from 30 to 74 years old and women over 65 years old.

In 2007, the structure of ages and gender (figure 2) presents a wider base than the one seeable 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, especially among women between 29 and 50 years old. Finally, the population pyramid corresponding to 2007 clearly shows the increase of 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 keep 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 survival in elderly ages.

With regards to the population structures seen in each region, important differences are observed according to the scenario (figure3). Europe stands out due to an aged structure in which people over 65 years old represent more than 20% of the population, and because of a certain renovation of the female population in the central ages (30 to 50 years old). Among the residents in Latin America, we find one of the biggest transformations of Spaniards 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.

Spanish population has lost more than 5 years in the average age (59.8 in 1997 to 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 in age to migrate and it may be the case of the population that acquires the Spanish citizenship while considering a migratory project.

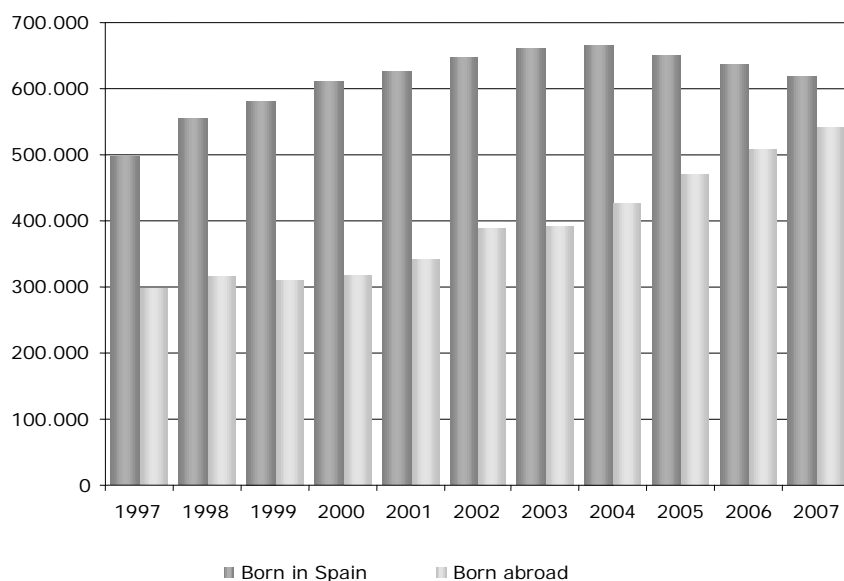
Among the residents of North America (figure 3), an increase in the number of young people is observed, among those who seem to be the children of the people who in 2007 are between 40 and 55 years old. However, this has not inhibited the expected increase of the average age that went from 46.7 to 48 years old, and the increase of the proportion of people over 65 years old which goes from 16% to 20 %. In the same figure, it is observed that the Spaniards living in Asia are mostly young people between 25 and 50 years old, with a distribution of gender which indicates a male predominance in working ages (85.5% of people under 65 years old). Young population is not observed since as Asia is a recently chosen destination by emigrants (in the nineties) and it may be still very early to find people who could represent the offspring of such population. The proportion of people over 65 years old from this region is the lowest of all those found per residence regions for the group of Spanish people residing abroad, only 14.5% in 2007, being even lower than the percentage observed in 1997 which was 16.5%. It may also be a destination of temporary emigration, and a kind of emigration mostly formed by entrepreneurs and young professionals, who do not intend to settle for a long period.

2.4.4 - Spaniards born in Spain and abroad: Territorial and demographic analysis considering the place of birth.

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

In 2007 the Spaniards born in Spain continued to be the majority group of residents abroad, formed by 619,289 people, while those born abroad amount to 543,141 in the same year. However, despite the fact that the ones born in Spain keep their predominance, the amount of people born abroad has increased considerably during these last ten years, from 296,437 in 1997 going beyond five hundred thousand in 2007 (figure 4). Its relative weight within the group of Spanish people abroad has gone from 37.3% to 46.7% in the same period. Correlatively, despite its growth in absolute terms, the group of those born in Spain loses representation, dropping from 62.7% to 52.3% along this period. This change in the composition of the Diaspora has been perfectly observed since 2002.

**Figure 4. - Evolution of the number of Spaniards 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 related to the territorial distribution of both groups for the observation period are displayed.

Table 2. – Percentage distribution of Spaniards 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%

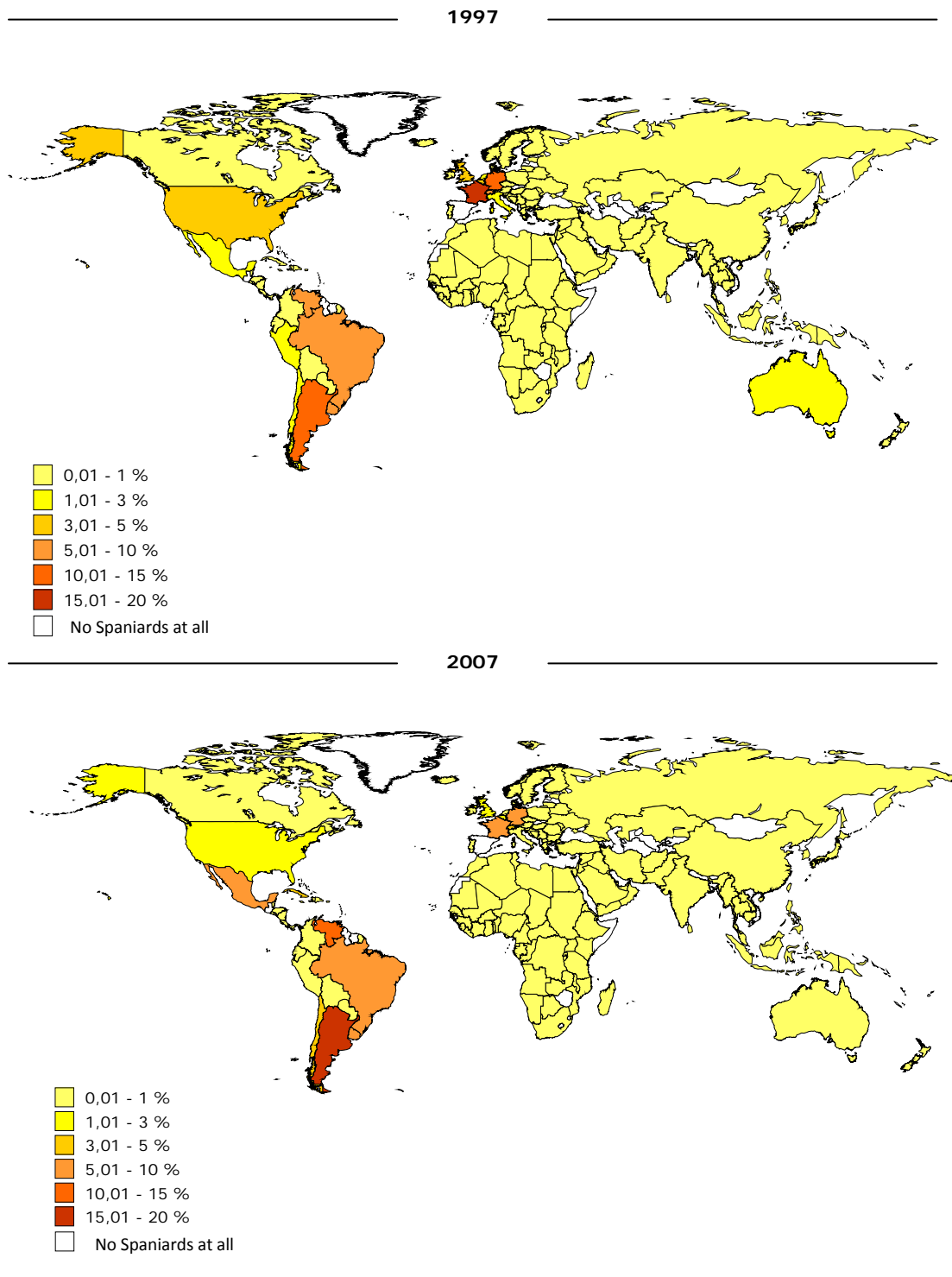
Source: Census of Absentee Voters Residing Abroad, 1997 and 2007. Own elaboration.

The ones born in Spain keep an important percentage of their residents in Europe along the whole period, while the ones born abroad have dramatically modified the territorial distribution of their registrations. 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 Spaniards born abroad lived in Latin America, when 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 of registrations is observed. In this group, on the other hand, the percentage of those who are 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 maintain 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%). United Kingdom (5.6%) and Uruguay (2%) lost certain predominance, despite the fact that both countries represent historical destinations of Spanish emigration.

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



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

On the contrary, when contrasting the territorial distribution per country of those born abroad, more noticeable changes are observed. In 2007, France ceased to be the main country of residence of Spaniards born abroad, Argentina is the one which gets that position where

28.7% of those born abroad reside. Generally, all European countries lost importance regarding the growth of the volume of population born abroad which mainly resides in Latin America where, as we have seen, the amount of registrations of this group has strongly increased.

It is within the main residence countries preferred by the Spanish population where these changes in the composition of 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 more observed among Latin American countries, especially in Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil. In European countries like France or the United Kingdom, the increase of the group of descendants has been lesser or even lower than the one observed in other European countries such as Switzerland, Germany or Belgium, where the percentage of those born in each one of them has strongly increased, especially since 1999.

3 - Discussion

This paper showed that the Spanish Census of Absentee Voters is a very useful tool to describe the geography and the main demographic transformations of this diaspora in terms of cross sectional analysis, but it has also discussed 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 that will be brought about by the spread of the flourishing trend of 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 considering a “nationality” criterion to speak about Diaspora. This concept of citizenship includes migrants and their second or even third generations, and not merely those who once left their country of origin.

The presence of some core demographic variables could help establishing the demographic characteristics of the diaspora (ageing, changes in sex ratio, differences in demographic structure by country of birth, etc.). Quite interesting work may be developed in the geography of diasporas, looking for clusters of the countries that represent the main destination of migration waves, as well as for the migrants’ sex and age profile using data sets that may include the year of arrival or departure. Also, it may be possible to think of different geographies within each Diaspora, distinguishing among those born in the country of origin and 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 the voting might not be mandatory this kind of data may suffer from several bias or underestimation. Stimulus for the registration at the country of arrival might be required if all

the citizens of a country that were living abroad were expected to be counted in this kind of registers

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

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NOTES

ⁱ The Countries that had introduced the vote abroad for own representations of emigrants are: Italy, France, Croatia, Portugal, Morocco, Mozambique, Haiti, Guinea Bissau, Cook Islands, Colombia, Cape Verde, Angola and Algeria (Collyer, 2007: 17).

ⁱⁱ 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 was eliminated and any son or daughter of a Spaniard 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 the access to Spanish nationality to all the grandchildren of Spaniards of origin, 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 Spaniards of origin to acquire the Spanish nationality if their grandparents were economy or political refugees who left the country between 1936 and 1955.

ⁱⁱⁱ Spain has signed Double Nationality Agreements with: Argentina since April, 1969; Bolivia since October, 1961; Chile since May, 1958; Colombia since 1980; Costa Rica since June, 1964; Ecuador since March, 1964; Honduras since June, 1966; Nicaragua since July, 1961; Paraguay since June, 1959; Peru since May, 1959; Dominican Republic since 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 it incompatible to have both nationalities, so they do not need to have an exceptional agreement like the ones mentioned before.