RESEARCH ARTICLES

Social Attitudes and Political Debate on Immigration: Spanish Perceptions of Romanian Immigrants

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Abstract. Prior to 2002 the Romanian population in Spain was negligible, yet today it constitutes the largest immigrant population, raising questions of how this country receives and integrates new migrant groups and negotiates perceptions of similarity and difference between natives and foreigners. Using survey data from the Centro de Investigaciones Científicas and political debates from the Congreso de los Diputados this paper asks how perceptions of Romanian immigrants develop over time. The paper finds that social perceptions of Romanian immigration and political debate on the Romanian population in Spain are somewhat disconnected, as social attitudes develop independently of elite-level political discourse. Therefore, just as immigrants are not perceived or presented in the same way in politics and society, or on a national and a local level, neither do the processes based on these perceptions, such as discrimination or exclusion, play out in the same way.

Keywords: *Migration, Romania, Spain, public opinion, social attitudes, identity, political debate*

Over recent decades Spain has rapidly become one of the major receivers of immigration in the European Union (EU): until the 1980s Spain was a country of net emigration, whilst today it contains nearly five million legal foreign residents, in addition to a considerable undocumented population (according to the *Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración* [OPI] and the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* [INE]). The most significant contribution to this figure has in recent years come in the form of Romanian nationals, today constituting the largest group of migrants in the country (INE 2010). Globalisation and the free movement of people between EU member states have enabled the movement of people across borders as never before. In host countries, however, tensions can arise between native and foreign populations and the politicization of immigration can result in

exclusion and discrimination of certain groups according to stigmatized cultural characteristics. Questions are raised as to how immigration is perceived in the host society, how distinct national groups are treated and the impact this has on social cohesion and immigrant integration. The present paper analyses these questions through the prism of the Spanish case study, where the rapidly growing immigrant population causes them to be particularly relevant.

The intention of this study is to explore the ties between migratory flows, social attitudes and political debate in order to assess how political elites present the immigration issue. At the heart of this issue is the negotiation of political and social tensions resulting from large scale immigration in Europe. As migrants enter, settle and integrate in a host country boundaries between social groups of 'natives' and 'foreigners' or 'us' and 'them' are drawn up in public debate and performed in social relations (Fennema 2000, Schierup et al. 2008). Schierup, Hansen and Castles have argued that rising immigration rates have divided society and politics between those who see immigration as a problem and a danger to the identity of the nation, and those who profess the need for workers to fill short-term labour shortages and counteract a long-term demographic deficit (2008). The resultant situation is frequently one in which elites attempt to gain popular and electoral support by presenting immigrants as a cause of social problems and the 'loss' of national identity (D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008). At a social level, the consequence is the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups based on their perceived cultural characteristics, producing the barring of individuals from the rights associated with citizenship and social equality. The study of perceptions of immigration is therefore linked to the moral and ethical issue of protecting the rights of all individuals and reducing xenophobia and racism.

The objective of this article is to firstly, contribute to the migration studies literature by exploring the dynamics influencing the way that different migrant groups are perceived in host societies. I analyse how the presence of a rapidly expanding foreign population of Romanian nationals is perceived by Spanish public opinion and presented in Spanish political debate. In contrast to the assumptions underlying previous empirical studies on perceptions of immigration (e.g. D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008), the results find that there is no clear link between the political salience of a specific migrant population and either the social presence of that group or negative social attitudes towards it. Secondly, by concentrating on the case study of Romanian migrants in Spain I further our knowledge of a national

group which, despite its considerable size, has been relatively unnoticed by politicians and academics. The accession of Romania to the EU has placed a demand on further understanding of the dynamics of emigration from this country and perceptions of Romanian citizens in sites of arrival. This implies that the current study is not only relevant for the specific area of Spanish migration studies, but also for assessment of the development of an inclusive European society.

Empirical data from public opinion surveys and Spanish Congress debates is used to compose a descriptive and analytical contribution to these debates. It looks specifically at the image of the Romanian migrant population in Spain, the largest group of foreign residents in the country yet one of the least-studied. Regarding Romanians, González Aldea has complained that '[in Spain] the worst images of Romania have been projected: criminals specialised in stealing, hold-ups, falsification of documents, begging and prostitution' (2007:132). The reference paints an image of a Spanish society that sees Romanian immigrants as bringers of problems, social tensions and criminal activities. Yet this is simply an anecdotal piece of evidence. This paper contributes to filling this gap in the academic field. Analysis takes political discourse as a window through which to analyse the process by which Spanish elites ascribe an identity to Romanian nationals, questioning whether this process is influenced by the character of the Romanian population in Spain or the social attitudes and perceptions of the Spanish population.

The following section gives a summary of the historical and academic research background to immigration in Spain, with particular reference to the case of Romanian migration since 1990. This illustrates the rapid growth in migratory flows between the Spain and Romania, justifying the need for further academic inquiry. The article then outlines theoretical assumptions on the ties between migration, public opinion and political debate. In the final sections I will present and analyse the evidence in light of these theories, finding that public opinion develops over time and distinguishes between groups in positive and negative ways that political elites do not. I finally conclude that social perceptions of Romanian immigration and political talk on the Romanian population in Spain are somewhat disconnected, as social attitudes can be seen to have developed independently of elite-level political debate on this group.

Background: Immigration to Spain and arrivals from the East

Historically, Spain has constituted a site of population movement and migratory flow on national and international scales (McMillion 1981, Ringrose 1998). In addition to these internal migrations, a long tradition of pan-Mediterranean mobility was epitomized by cities such as Barcelona (King 2001). Such was the mobility from inside and outside Spain that by 1970 some 38% of the population of Catalonia, and 47% of the population of Barcelona, were born outside the region (Calavita 1998:534). However, until the late 1980s, Spain was unknown as a destination for large-scale immigration. Since then, however, this pattern has transformed dramatically as numbers have increased and the composition of the immigrant population has changed. The increased wealth and stability of Spain's economy since joining the European Economic Community in 1986, and above all since replacing the national currency (the Peseta) with the Euro in 2002 has acted as a shop window to attract foreign goods, capital and workers. From 2003 to 2007 annual GDP growth for the country was above the average of the Eurozone with a maintained rate of between 3 and 4% from 2003 to 2007 (according to statistics from the INE). Legal and undocumented migration increased rapidly, this latter due to the extensive, unobserved coastlines for undocumented boats to land on, an open borders policy to tourists, and the availability of work opportunities in an expansive informal sector (Elrick & Ciobanu 2009, Viruela Martínez 2002). The impact of these pull factors is reflected in statistics illustrating both a rapid growth in the size of migratory flows to Spain and a broad diversification of the character and origins of migrant groups (see table 6).

The evolution of migratory flows to Spain has seen the arrival of a diverse range of population groups settle in the country. European migrants to Spain from Britain, Germany and France during the 1980s and 1990s settled in coastal areas of tourism, welcomed by the opening of Spain to mass package tourism and the establishment of low cost travel (O'Reilly 2002). At the same time migratory flows from the countries of north and sub-Saharan Africa increased (Pajares 1998). On the one hand, the geographical proximity of the Maghreb to Southern Spain facilitated movement from one country to another. On the other hand, these migrants were able to follow historical lines of Mediterranean transit, trade and semi-permanent settlement between the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula (Ibid.). Historical cultural ties between the Maghreb and the cities of southern Spain, as well as the fact that between four and seven million Moroccans also speak, understand and use the Spanish language, further facilitated movement

(Roldán 2005). During the late 1990s, transatlantic migration also grew significantly, coined the 'new' Latin American migration and facilitated by increasing intercontinental air travel, as well as linguistic and cultural ties between Madrid and these ex-colonies (Pajares 1998).

However, the Romanian population has more recently arrived under quite different circumstances. Indeed, according to measurements of legal residents by the OPI (see Table 1); the Romanian population was the second largest in Spain by 2009. Furthermore, statistics from the INE show that Romanian nationals to constitute the largest of all nationalities registered on the municipal *Padrón*, a register that all must sign regardless of their legal status (see Table 2). The first Romanian pioneers to Spain arrived in 1990 following the fall of the Communist Party regime in 1989 (Sandu et al 2004, Viruela Martínez 2002). They crossed the border as tourists, as migrants with bought Schengen visas prior to departure, or by applying for asylum, and their migration was largely permanent (Sandu et al 2004, Viruela Martínez 2002). The boundaries between legality and illegality were fluid and porous: settlement frequently entailed a period of invisibility from the state, of informal labour and undocumented residence whilst waiting for a regularisation amnesty or the release of quotas to fill Spanish jobs with foreign labour. However, only 3,543 Romanians were registered in Spain by 1998 (Viruela Martínez 2002). It is the most recent wave of Romanian emigration, from 2002 to the present day that has established Spain as a major destination for this population (Ban 2009, Sandu et al 2004).

As noted above, economic conditions in Spain have acted as a clear pull factor, but institutional developments have also facilitated movement. Firstly, the possibility of gaining legal resident status through repeated mass legalisation procedures encouraged many to reside permanently. The size of this hidden population is only revealed in statistics at points such as the sudden increase in the Romanian population figures in 2006, following the mass amnesty of the previous year (see Figures 2 and 3). Secondly, visa requirements for Romanian citizens visiting EU member states were lifted on 1st January 2002. Nationals from this country would subsequently only have to demonstrate possession of economic resources, an invitation from a European citizen or institution willing to vouch for them, a hotel reservation and a return ticket in order enter all countries of the Schengen space for a period of up to three months (Elrick & Ciobanu 2009).

Table 1. Migrant populations in Spain 1998 – 2009

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Morocco	140,896	161,870	199,782	234,937	282,432	333,770	386,958	493,114	543,721	648,735	717,416	767,784
Romania	3,543	5,082	10,983	24,856	33,705	54,688	83,372	192,134	211,325	603,889	718,844	751,688
Ecuador	7,046	12,933	30,878	84,699	115,301	174,289	221,549	357,065	376,233	395,808	421,527	440,304
Colombia	10,412	13,627	24,702	48,710	71,238	107,459	137,369	204,348	225,504	254,301	274,832	287,205
UK	74,419	76,402	73,983	80,183	90,091	105,479	128,283	149,071	175,870	198,638	219,738	222,039
China	20,695	24,701	28,710	36,161	45,837	56,119	71,928	85,745	99,526	119,859	138,558	151,547
Italy	26,514	29,871	30,862	35,647	45,236	59,745	72,032	84,853	98,481	124,936	139,132	150,667
Bulgaria	2,336	3,013	5,244	9,953	15,495	24,369	32,244	56,329	60,174	127,058	144,401	147,080
TOTAL:	719,647	801,329	895,720	1,109,060	1,324,001	1,647,011	1,977,291	2,738,932	3,021,808	3,979,014	4,473,499	4,791,232

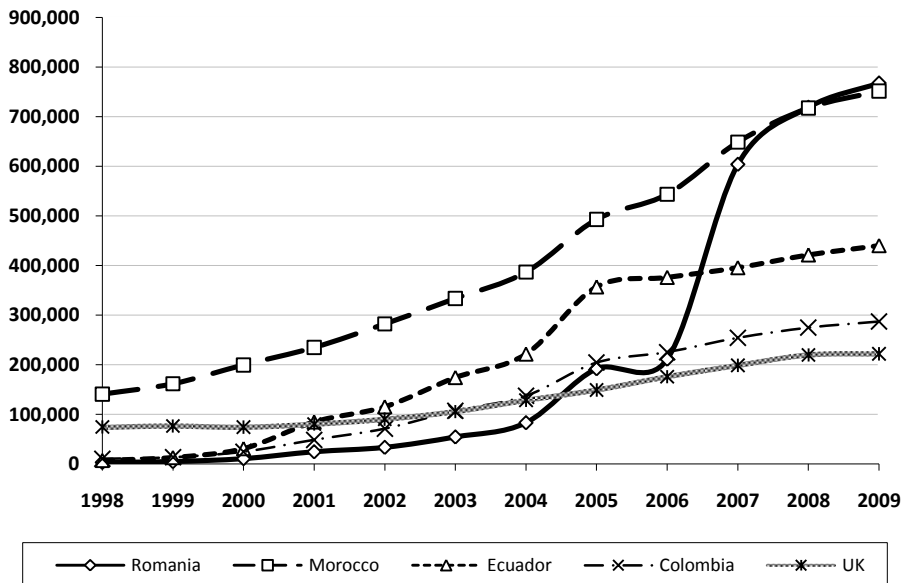Data from Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración. Presentation author's own

Table 2. Immigrants registered on the Padrón Municipal. All residents, regardless of legal status or available identity documents must sign the Padrón. This enables a measurement of the undocumented population in addition to the figures in Table 1

	2001	2006	2010
Romania	31,641	407,159	829,715
Morocco	233,415	563,012	746,760
Ecuador	139,022	461,310	395,069
United Kingdom	107,326	274,722	387,226
Colombia	87,209	265,141	289,296
TOTAL:	1,370,657	4,144,166	5,708,940

Data from Instituto Nacional de Estadística

Furthermore, growth of transnational transport and interpersonal links between Romania and Spain enabled many to make the journey cheaply and easily (Viruela Martínez 2008). Individuals could reside for three months whilst working informally before returning to Romania, and family members and friends could share one job, handing over to the new arrival when the time came to return (Hartman 2008). Thirdly, supranational institutional developments in the form of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007 have implied the granting of citizenship of the EU to nationals from these countries. Romanian citizens were to be given the right to freedom of movement between Member States, to residence, use of public services and welfare benefits, and to be treated as equals with the native population (Art. 17 TEC). The process of EU expansion and integration to the East has therefore played a key role in the arrival of Romanian nationals in Spain as it has further eased travel across national borders and settlement in any member state of the Union.

Figure 3. Evolution of the principal migrant populations in Spain

Data from Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración

The considerable size of the Romanian migration and its rate of growth have urged Spanish society to assimilate and adapt to an intense episode of

demographic and cultural change (Parra 2009). Within the general scheme of migration to Spain, the Romanian population has particular characteristics. When compared with the complex historical ties between Spain and the Maghreb or Latin America, it is noticeable how there is a relative lack of socio-cultural links between Romania and Spain. The presence of these links contributes to the development of *a priori* preconceptions regarding a group's identity. With the absence of such ties in the case of Romanian migrants, how are perceptions composed and social relations structured between them and the native Spanish population? The growth of the Romanian population has also developed over a more concentrated time period than that of immigrants from the Maghreb and Latin America. It is therefore relevant to ask not only how Spain has responded to immigration as a whole, but also how distinctions are made across and between these groups. Analysis of these perceptions occupies a double role, furthering our knowledge of this particular group of migrants, as well as adding to a wider understanding of the way that new migrant groups are perceived in host societies.

State of the literature: perceptions of immigration

Spanish responses to immigration are composed of a range of diverse social attitudes. In 1997 the academic Patricia Griñán noted that 'the problem of foreigners [in Spain] is, in reality [...] a phenomenon that is uncomfortably perceived and lived by Spaniards as an altering of the 'normal' situation' (my translation, Griñán 1997:179). Social and political tensions between foreigners and natives have been clearly visible as a result of high profile occurrences such as the memory of the violent revolt of the native population at El Ejido in Almería in 2000, burning immigrant houses in reaction to the murder of a Spaniard by a Moroccan citizen (Zapata Barrero 2003). From this year politicisation of immigration has been increasingly common and divisive, giving the impression that immigration is *per se* a conflictive topic (Retis 2009). According to academics such as D'Ancona & Valles Martínez, there is an increasingly common trend, adopted from other European countries, to use exclusionary or xenophobic messages to gain votes (2008:15). For example, in 2006 there came a proposal from the Catalan party *Convergencia i Unió* for a system of points rewarding immigrants that respected Catalan law, language and culture, and a similar proposal from the *Partido Popular* in 2008 for 'an integration contract' which would commit immigrants to respect the law, culture

and language of Spain and force them to return to their country of origin in the case of not finding employment (Ibid.:12-13). These examples illustrate the salience of immigration in public debate and suggest that a section of the Spanish political elite is willing to promote the idea that foreigners do not belong in the country.

Academic approaches to the topic are limited and concentrate primarily on public opinion surveying of perspectives of immigration. Views recorded in surveys have varied over time as the presence of migrants in Spanish society has evolved, and the results are also sometimes contradictory (Ayerdi & de Rada 2008, González Enríquez 2004, Zapata Barrero 2009). For example, Carmen González Enríquez (2004) uses data from the regular series of *Barómetro* opinion surveys from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) to illustrate how national attitudes to immigration underwent a shift from largely negative to positive perceptions between 1990 and 2004. However, for the same period the author also highlights data reflecting an increasing tendency to associate immigration and crime and the fact that by 2003 half of the Spanish population thought there were too many immigrants in the country (Ibid.). Similarly, Ayerdi & de Rada have suggested that public opinion towards migrants can somewhat confusingly be defined either as moderate and permissive, or as a 'worried tolerance' (Ayerdi & de Rada 2008). A more analytically rigorous study is presented by Zapata Barrero (2008), who notes that social attitudes are dependent on interpretations of immigration more than on the facts of migrant numbers. Peaks in negative public opinion towards immigration are linked to periods of politicization of the issue, rather than being caused simply by an increasing presence of foreigners. In this way 'negative attitudes are orientated towards policies and the government's actions rather than towards immigrants' (Ibid.:1107).

However, these approaches are problematic in the way that they concentrate either on immigration as an abstract topic or on immigrants as a homogeneous social group. Despite the range of different nationalities and ethnicities today settled in Spain, we have little understanding of distinctions between groups. Regarding Romanians in Spain, we find that research is limited to anecdotal comments and observations, such as that noted above by González Aldea (2007). In academia, the journal *Migraciones* has dedicated a special edition to the study of Romanian migration in Spain (2007). However, this focuses on migratory flows and migrant experiences and does not inquire as to native perceptions and experiences. Indeed, across the board there is little available work

into either measurements of public perceptions of specific migrants or the political salience of individual groups in national debate. This context makes Romanian migrants a particularly interesting case study. Research into migration in Spain is yet to catch up with the intense arrival of Romanian nationals and there has been little work produced on the reception and integration of this group. The present paper therefore goes towards filling these gaps.

Theory: immigration, public opinion and the political arena

Academics have frequently approached the question of the social tensions and political pressures resulting from the arrival of foreigners in host countries. Many of these studies argue that the intensification of migratory flows and consequent growth of immigrant populations results in social tensions with natives, the politicisation of immigration and the spread of xenophobia (D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008, Huntington 2004, Money 1999, Weiner 1995). In economics, for example, there has been concern over the impact of competition between natives and immigrants in the labour market. Jeannette Money's work in this area suggests that as immigration rises, competition will become fiercer and native perceptions of immigrant groups will deteriorate (1999). Huntington's work on the Clash of Civilisations and the effect of Latin American migration on the United States' national identity is even more dramatic (Huntington 1996, 2004). As migration rates rise from the global South to the North, Huntington predicts the segregation of society and the exacerbation of tensions due to cultural differences between foreigners and natives. With less dramatic tone, the realist political science approach of Myron Weiner also argues that each society has a threshold for absorbing foreigners, and once this level is reached, or surpassed, social balance is threatened (1995). Public discontent will then become more visible as citizens 'become fearful that they are now being invaded not by armies and tanks but by migrants who speak other languages, worship other gods, belong to other cultures' (Ibid. :2). This is translated into radical xenophobic political discourse as politicians give a voice to citizen's fears and hostility towards foreigners.

These theoretical approaches continue to influence current research into the perception of immigrants in host countries. One example is the comprehensive study from the Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia (OBEREXE) into social attitudes and public opinion in Spain (D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008). The

recent rise to prominence of right wing populist political parties on the back of anti-immigrant rhetoric in many European countries is taken by the authors to be representative of a general pattern: as the immigrant population grows, so too do xenophobic attitudes in society and in political debate. The hypothesis framing their study suggested that 'the greater the presence of immigrants [...] the greater the tendency to activate xenophobia in Spain' (Ibid.:19). This pattern appears to be evidenced by examples of successful discriminatory parties such as the Swiss People´s Party and the Lega Nord in Italy, which have both gained support through labelling and aggressively criticising the growing immigrant population in their respective countries.

But how do national political debates specifically respond to expanding migrant populations? According to Foucault and contemporary linguists, the presentation of topics such as immigration in public debate is controlled, manipulated, and selected according to the needs and motives of those in power, often at the expense of minority groups (Foucault 2008, van Dijk 2008, Wodak & Chilton 2005). It is argued that, through political discourse, elites attempt to influence public interpretations of social conditions. Discourse can therefore be interpreted as a social process: while responding to social stimuli, it also constitutes an element of society that contributes to other forms of discourse and social attitudes (Fairclough 1989).

The work of Teun van Dijk on racism and discrimination in discourse provides an example of this (1993, 1997, 2008). Through studying parliamentary debates, media reports and everyday speech acts, van Dijk argues that elites play a key role in the propagation of racism in overt and covert ways (1993). Thus, 'many of the beliefs, prejudiced attitudes, and ideologies of popular racism are derived from interpretations of elite discourse [...] and, especially, political discourse' (1997:32). A dual relationship is therefore envisaged between social attitudes and political discourse. Whilst public opinion informs the discursive choices of politicians, these are strategic and in turn attempt to influence public opinion in their favour. In this way, social attitudes and political debate on a topic such as immigration will be seen to evolve in tandem, both influencing each other.

In summary, in this section two theories of the perception of immigration have been described. On the one hand, increasing politicisation of immigration and the spread of xenophobic attitudes is seen as the outcome of growing immigrant populations in host countries. The assumption here states that where immigrant

populations increase in size, social tensions also increase, making immigration more politically salient and causing public debate on the issue to escalate. On the other hand, perceptions of immigration are understood as directly linked to political debate due to the way that elites attempt to use them as a tool for influencing public opinion in their favour. Thus, the theory assumes that where there is greater salience of immigration in political debate, this will be reflected in public opinion.

However, these approaches are limited and problematic. They treat 'immigrants' as one homogeneous population or discursive category. In reality there are distinctions to be made between the composition of migratory flows, settlement patterns and cultural characteristics from one group to another. For example, as outlined above, the dynamics of Romanian migration to Spain and the characteristics of this group are quite different to those of the Moroccan, Colombian, British or any other nationality group. Perceptions of individual immigrant groups may therefore vary widely from one national group to another. By looking specifically at perceptions of Romanian migration in Spain, this article consequently provides a critique of the generalised theories outlined above. As a result the questions shaping the analysis are as follows:

First, does the size of the Romanian migrant population in Spain influence political debate? According to the theory above, intensification of migratory flows from Romania and the consequent growth in the Romanian population in Spain will be accompanied by negative public opinion and increasing salience of political debate on this national group.

Second, does political discourse on Romanian immigration follow or dictate public opinion on this group? According to the theory above, there should be a dual relationship: political debate and public opinion will influence each other.

Third, is there a specific reaction to the Romanian population? The individual trajectory of Romanian migratory growth to Spain and the large size of this group suggest that it will have greater salience in political debate.

In the following section the results are illustrated and defined. These are divided into two parts presenting the evolution of social attitudes towards Romanian migration, and references to this group in political debate. This will be followed by conclusions which use the findings to offer specific answers to the research questions expressed above.

Results I: The evolution of social attitudes

As mentioned above, the principal measure of Spanish social attitudes comes from the *barómetro* public opinion surveys of the CIS, which is used here. The repeated measuring of opinions with the same survey format means the CIS data can be compared over time. Where limitations occur in the data, this is taken into account and explained below. Further secondary literature is also used when this allows for richer analysis of social attitudes. Particularly relevant in this respect is the OBEREXE report on racism and xenophobia in Spain, and the qualitative analysis of perceptions of individual migrant groups that is contained within (D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008).

A look at the general evolution of attitudes towards immigration suggests that as immigration has been consolidated and migrant populations in Spain have grown, so too has there been an increasingly negative perception of the phenomenon (see Figure 4 below). The opinion that there are too many foreigners in Spain is taken as representative of a negative perception of immigration. Unfortunately, changes in the wording of questions in the CIS surveys have made more recent trends difficult to follow. In 2008 and 2009 the possible answers were altered from *excessive*, *acceptable, low* and *not enough* to *excessive, high, acceptable* and *not enough,* causing comparability issues to arise. This is because the term *high* does not entail the same negative connotations as *excessive*, whilst *low* does not carry the same connotations as *not enough.* A marked rise in negative perceptions is evidenced from 2000, coinciding with a period of centre-right government of the Partido Popular (PP) of José María Aznar during which criminalisation and securitisation of immigration became increasingly common (Rojo & van Dijk 2004). This peaks in 2002 following the dramatic events at El Ejido, before continuing the rising tendency evidenced previously. In addition, these rising negative opinions are accompanied by a consistent decline in the percentage of people who see immigration levels as acceptable. This reflects a total decline in public opinion as the immigrant population has increased.

However, these figures are problematic. The opinion recorded is simply the interviewee's perception of immigrants as a general social category, rather than of individual migrants. The CIS surveys have attempted to look into this issue by asking *"When we speak about foreign immigrants living in Spain, who do you*

immediately think of?" The data illustrates a changing and evolving perception of immigration and immigrants as migratory flows develop over time (see Figure 5). The majority of the Spanish population has typically associated immigration with Moroccan nationals. In line with the significant growth of migratory flows from Latin America, specifically Ecuador and Colombia, and Romania since 2000, popular awareness of these groups has also been reflected in the survey results, and by 2009 a quarter of the population associated immigration with Latin Americans, and a fifth associated it with Romanians. As the Romanian population has increased in size, it has become increasingly distinguished from other migrant populations. Interestingly, accession to the EU has not resulted, nevertheless, in Romanians being associated with other European nationalities. Instead they are either referred to as Eastern Europeans or a specific category on its own.

Figure 4. Evolution of attitudes towards immigration in Spain

What is your opinion about the number of immigrants in Spain?
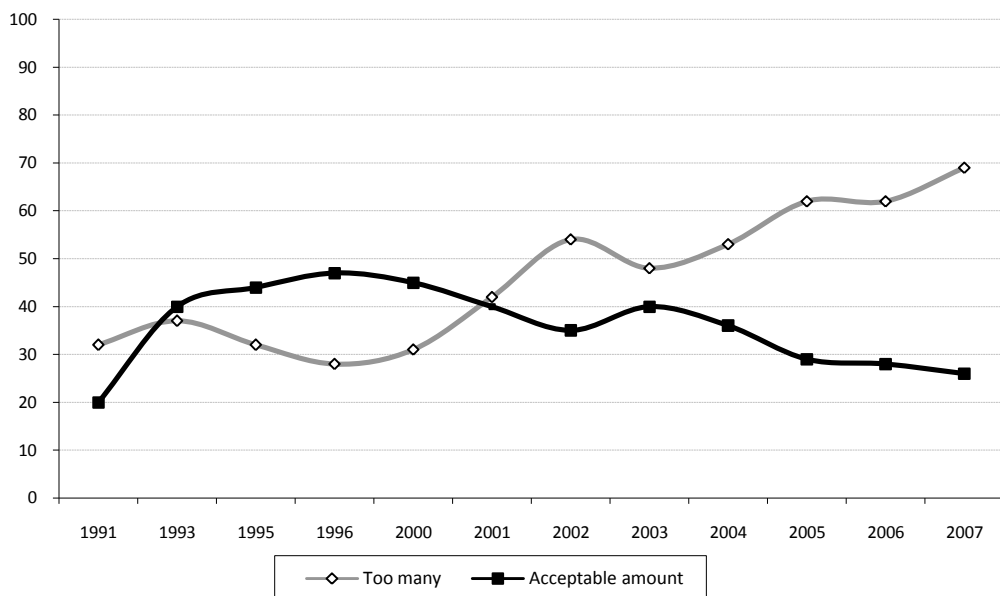
Data taken from Cea D'Ancona & Valles Martínez 2008: 33-35)

Yet the results place Romanians behind Moroccans and Latin Americans as being associated with immigration. This is despite the fact that the Romanian population has grown to be larger than that of Moroccan immigrants in 2009. Similarly, the Latin American general population, taken as the total of migrants

from all Latin American countries, is larger than both. Regardless of this, Moroccans remain the principal group associated with immigration. Public recognition of different migrants is therefore not simply due to the size of the population or group. Cultural traits may single out one group more than others, and fears of the number of immigrants may be associated with related social problems, such as employment, welfare shortages, or crime (Rydgren 2008). To reach an understanding of perceptions of Romanian migrants, and the way that these perceptions are constructed, we must look in further detail.

Figure 5. Results from the question: *When we speak of foreign immigrants living in Spain, who do you immediately think of?*

Group	CIS survey results (%)						
	1993	**1995**	**1996**	**2000**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Moroccans and North Africans	41	49	50	58	31	23.9	25.6
Latin Americans (in general)	6	6	6	5	25	22.9	24.1
Romanians	-	-	-	-	14	19.6	20.6
Africans (in general)	13	15	12	12	9	18.4	15.5
Ecuadorians	-	-	-	-	5	7.9	7.8
Eastern Europeans	1	1	1	2	16	5.3	4.4

Data from CIS Barómetro Surveys, 1993-2009

Specific perceptions of Romanian nationals can be found in two sources: the CIS surveys from 2000 to 2009, and the qualitative research of D'Ancona & Valles Martínez which was carried out to build on the CIS data (2008). The CIS surveys from 2000 to 2003 included a question asking respondents to judge, on a scale of 0 to 10, their feeling towards a certain group of immigrant (0 representing negative and 10 positive feelings). Until 2007, respondents had to choose from migrant groups mentioned as large blocs according to their place of origin, making specific perceptions difficult to register. The results from the year 2000 illustrated in Figure 5 show that the most positively perceived group was that of Western Europeans, as they were given higher scores, with North Africans being the most negatively perceived and receiving lower scores. Romanians were included as Eastern Europeans at this point are fairly positively placed in relation to other groups, with people registering more positive attitudes towards them than towards Africans or North Americans. But from the chart we can see that positive perceptions of Eastern Europeans have decreased over time (Figure 6). A tentative

assessment of this data could suggest that as awareness of Romanian and other Eastern European migrants has increased in Spain. Greater specificity is available in the survey data from 2008 and 2009 when the question was more open, asking *Are there any groups of immigrants that you get along with badly or dislike?* This offers a more insightful view. Romanians are noted as a specific group, distinct to 'Eastern Europeans'. This is in keeping with the data presented earlier regarding the general awareness of this group when referring to immigration. Also, social attitudes towards the Romanian migrant population have taken a particularly negative tone.

**Figure 6: Attitudes towards Eastern European migrants in Spain**
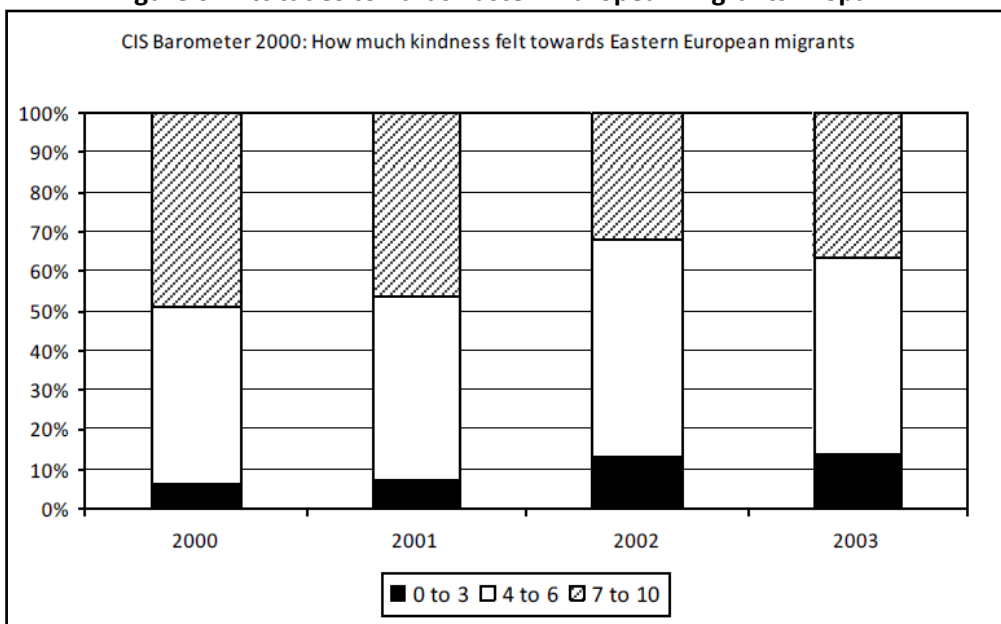
Data from CIS Barómetro 2000-2003

As shown by the data in Figure 7, Romanian nationals were recorded as being the most disliked among the respondents of the CIS survey. This develops further the negative perceptions seen at the beginning of the decade, as noted above. Further analysis from D'Ancona & Valles Martínez shines light on these perceptions (2008). In 2007 these authors find that when asked which groups are the most segregated and resist integration; specific mention was made of Romanians by only 10% of the respondents, less than for Moroccans and Gypsies. Moreover, qualitative research in focus groups also carried out in the same study found that many residents in Spain associated Romanians with crime and

insecurity, providing evidence from rumours they had heard and events they had seen in the street (Ibid. :91). Indeed, Romanians were classified as the most 'frightening and untrustworthy' migrant population (31% of respondents), considerably more so than 'Muslims' (19%) and 'gangs' (8%). They were thought of as the most likely to form ghettos (19% of respondents), and the second most segregated group due to differences of culture and traditions, behind Muslims (Ibid.:105). This illustrates how Romanian nationals have not only been increasingly distinguished from other migrant groups as the population grows, but also been perceived as having negative characteristics that further differentiate them from the native Spanish population.

Figure 7. Social attitudes towards individual migrant groups in Spain
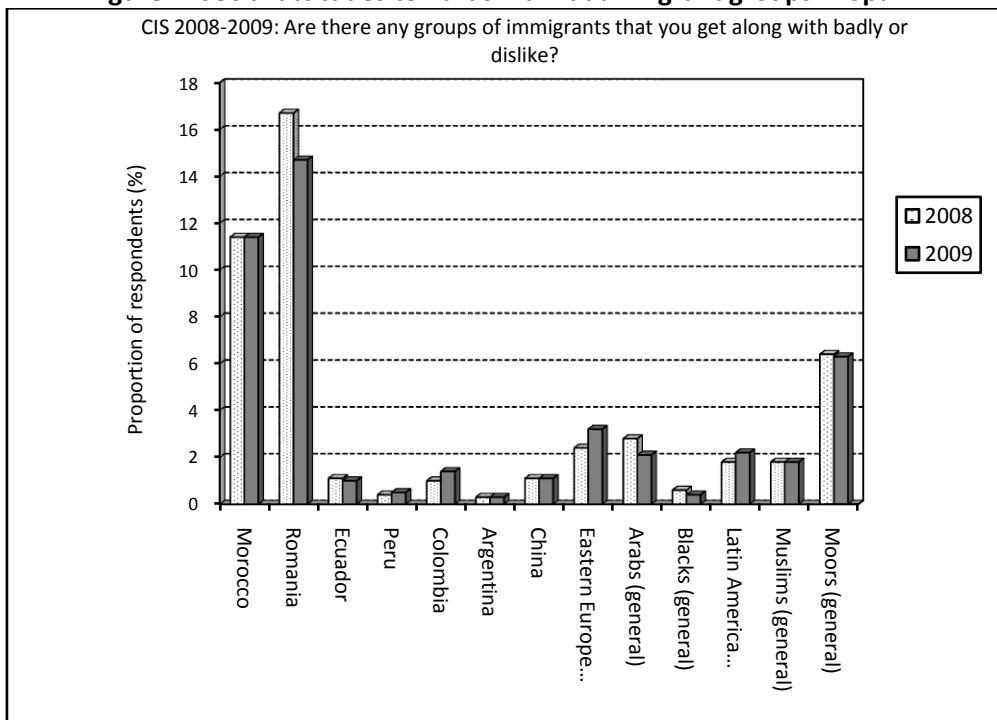
Data from CIS Barómetro 2008-2009

In summary, the data presented here reflects a general move towards negative perceptions of Romanian migrants in Spain. This occurs as part of a wider shift in public opinion against immigration from 2000 to today. More specifically, the growth of the Romanian migrant population has been accompanied by a process of recognition. First, although precise data is unavailable, the tendency

evidenced has been for recognition of Romanians as a specific migrant group to increase as the population has increased in size. Second, since 2007 shifting perceptions have also been evidenced and Romanians have been more frequently recognised as thieves and criminals. However, have these developing attitudes been translated into political debate? How have the characteristics of the Romanian population and social attitudes in Spain influenced the way that political debate refers to this migrant group? In order for these questions to be assessed we must look specifically at the political process.

## Results II: The evolution of political debate

The development of political debate and politicisation of the Romanian population is illustrated through parliamentary debates from the Congreso de los Diputados between 1979 (the first legislature) and January 2011 (midway through the current legislature). However, the results from the latest mandate (2008 – 2012) are interpreted as preliminary, due to this period being unfinished at the time of writing. These included initiatives and interventions (speeches) from the Congress and its Commissions. The texts were obtained through the search engine of the Congress' website (for more information see http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso). The search parameters are included in the results.

The intention here has been to note any correlation that may arise between contextual variables (the size of the Romanian population and the development of public opinion) and public debate on Romanians and Romania. Rising debate on this national group is taken not only as a reflection of increased interest in Romanian migrants in Spain, but also in the economic, political, social and cultural links between the two countries. Furthermore, the results are also taken into comparison with evolving political debate on 'immigration' and 'Moroccans' as the other most significant foreign population in Spain in order to place this group within a wider pattern of Spanish political debate.

There has been very little debate on Romanians in Spain over the recorded period. Although an increase can be seen during the 1990s, this remains minor with only 26 or less occurrences in all oral and written questions, policy proposals and legislative acts during each mandate of four years, until 2004. In order to determine if this outcome is unique to Romanian migrants or if these results can be explained

as part of a wider pattern, the results are compared to the occurrences in reference to 'Immigration' and Moroccans (see Figures 9 and 10). From 1996 onwards 'immigration' rapidly gains salience in Spanish political debate. Despite being incomplete, the latest legislature appears to follow the trend. Concerning Moroccans, political debate has increased from the 1980s, with a particularly significant rise from 2000. On the one hand, this reflects the wider range of political ties between Spain and Morocco, meaning that this country and its people have greater relevance to the politics of Spain. On the other hand, however, this also represents a greater salience of the Moroccan population in contemporary political debate despite the fact that the Romanian population has today outgrown it. In both cases, these topics enter political debate before Romanian immigration and record a considerably greater number of occurrences. As a result, the Romanian population appears relatively unnoticed in political debate until 2004. Indeed, the general trend is for this group to be of minor relevance when compared to other migrant groups such as Moroccans.

Figure 8. Salience of Romanians in Spanish political debate (occurrences in Congress debate in each legislature of four years)

Data from http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso
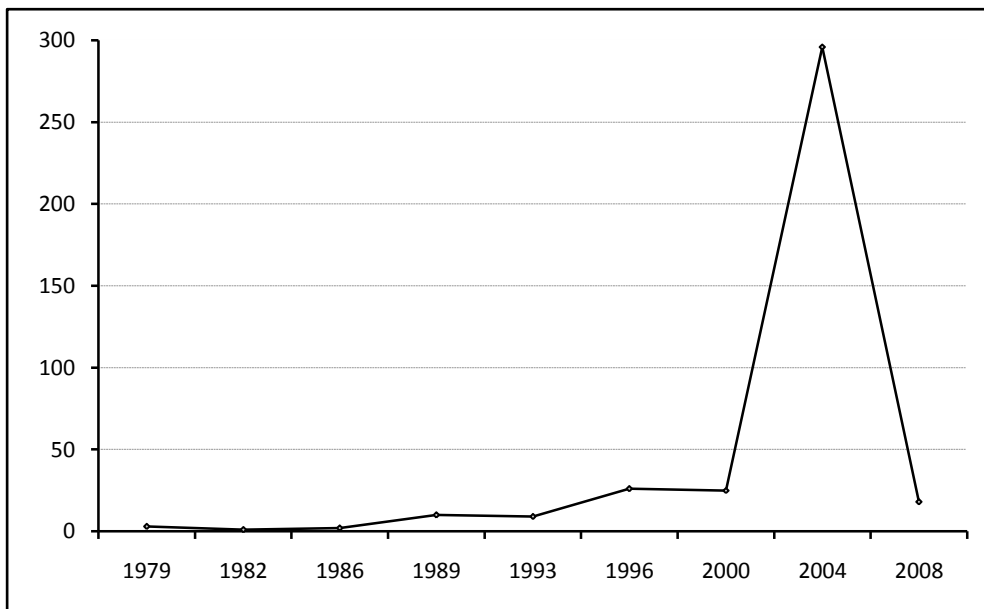
At only one moment, from 2004 to 2008, does the increase in debate on

Romanians follow the rising pattern noticed with these other groups. A superficial assessment could interpret this as a reaction to the rapid growth in size of the Romanian population in Spain: as this group becomes more visible, public interest is focused more sharply on their presence. Yet it would be a mistaken conclusion. References to Romanians drop off from 2008 onwards, returning to the level recorded previously. Debate on Moroccans follows a similar decline. Moreover, whereas specific references to Romanians have almost disappeared from debate following 2008, immigration and the Moroccan population remain significant topics. The data from 2004 to 2008 therefore constitutes an anomaly in the trend, and should be interpreted as an outlier. This is particularly evident in Figures 8 and 10. Although immigration remains a salient political topic, references to Romanians decline to the levels of 1996-2000.

So why was there this increase in occurrences between 2004 and 2008? Closer examination of the debates reveals that the majority of the occurrences are closed written questions. These are principally used for administrative or accountability purposes, as they request a specific piece of information. The information here solicited can be grouped into two sections. Firstly, the majority of the references constitute specific questions regarding the national context, for example, inquiring about the number of Romanian nationals resident in a specific area, or the amount of Romanian nationals who have had their home driving licence validated in a certain region. Of the 183 references recorded during this period, 118 (64%) are of this type and occur during 2005. This coincides with a mass amnesty for undocumented migrants, carried out for two years from 2005. Specific data on immigration to regions of the country is collected at this time to gain awareness of the impact of immigration before and after the amnesty. As Romanian nationals represented a relatively 'new' immigrant group in Spain at this time, this gathering of data would have been particularly significant in order to assess the spread of migratory flows and integration policies on this population and across different parts of the country. Secondly, 22 of the remaining references are composed of questions on international bilateral and European efforts to limit illegal immigration from Romania to Spain. This reflects a preoccupation with the (then) forthcoming accession of Romania to the European Union in 2007. Inquiries are made as to the number of buses arriving daily over the Pyrenees from Romania, the actions being taken with other EU member states, the delay on allowing full European citizenship rights to Romanians, and steps to be taken to limit the spread

of Romanian mafia organised crime groups. Particularly relevant here are questions regarding international cooperation across the EU to measure and control Romanian migration and, when necessary, deportation. These occurrences represent a preoccupation about the rates of migration from Romania to Spain and possible transnational crime upon the opening of the borders of EU member states to this country from 2007 onwards.

Figure 9. Salience of social groups in Spanish political debate

Time	Search Parameters		
	Inmigración/ Inmigrantes	Marruecos/ marroquí/ marroquíes	Rumanía/Rumano/ Rumana/ Rumanos/Rumanas
I Legislature (1979-1982)	3	16	3
II Legislature (1982-1986)	3	94	1
III Legislature (1986-1989)	8	89	2
IV Legislature (1989-1993)	50	191	10
V Legislature (1993-1996)	32	249	9
VI Legislature (1996-2000)	375	247	26
VII Legislature (2000-2004)	1301	516	24
VIII Legislature (2004-2008)	3127	713	183
IX Legislature (2008-Today)	2393	233	18

Figure 10. Salience of social groups in Spanish political debate

Political debate on Immigration, Moroccans and Romanians in Spain

Data from http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso
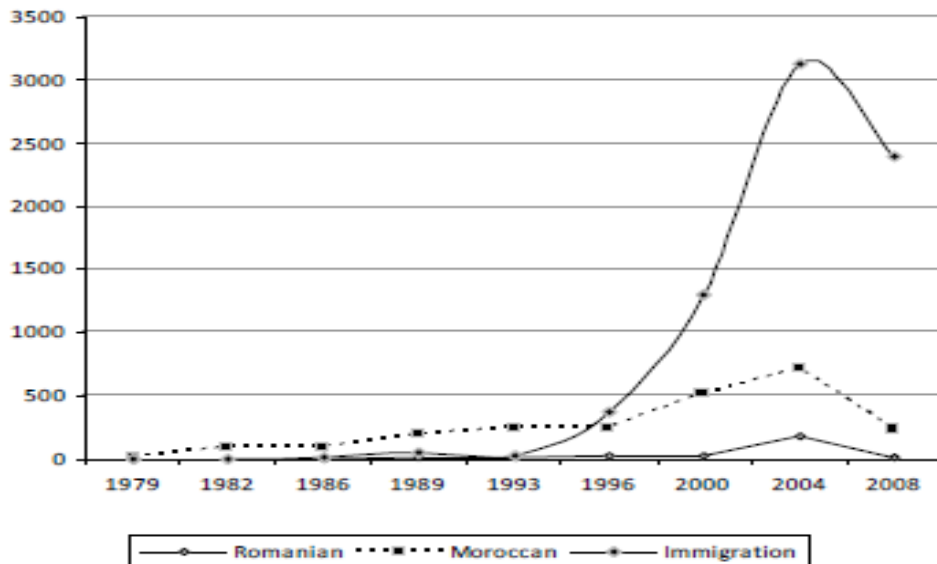
Closer assessment of debate from 2004-2008 therefore illustrates that political discourse on Romanian immigration is influenced by national and supranational policy concerns rather than social conditions and public opinion. In this way the data from this period constitutes an outlier in the general trend as a result of abnormal policy developments, in the form of a mass amnesty at national level and the dropping of border controls with Romania at the supranational level. Consequently, the increase in political debate during this period should not be seen simply as a response to the growing Romanian population or as a reflection of public attitudes towards Romanians. It is instead contingent on the development of national and supranational policies. As a result it is particularly interesting that, at the time when this group becomes the largest immigrant population in Spain, is increasingly recognised by the native population and associated with a negative reputation, political debate does not seem to acknowledge its presence in the same way that Spanish society and Spanish public opinion do.

Conclusions

This article has presented an overview of social and political perceptions of the Romanian migrant population in Spain. It is found that over time the Spanish public has increasingly recognised and distinguished between different national groups. As the Romanian migrant population has increased, there has been a growing awareness in society of this group as being distinct from other Eastern European nationalities. Social attitude surveys have also reflected an overall increase in negative assumptions regarding Romanian migrants as dangerous and segregated individuals who tend not to integrate.

However, this does not translate into political debate. By 2008, social attitude surveys registered perceptions of Romanians in a particularly negative light. Yet in this same year we have seen political debate on this group fall to low levels. In addition, once the anomaly of high salience of Romanian nationals between 2004 and 2008 is accounted for, it is clear that there has been only a minor increase in political interest in Romanian migration over the past two decades. A disconnect between local perceptions of Romanian immigration and national level political debate is evidenced.

The theoretical approaches outlined in this paper are therefore shown to fall short of explaining the reality of intercultural perceptions and the politics of

immigration on an individual group level. Political debate is not shown to be shaped by the size of a specific immigrant population. Indeed, national and supranational policy developments in the form of a forthcoming mass amnesty and the integration of Romania to the EU, have been more relevant in shaping political salience of Romanian migration than the character of the migrants themselves. Political debate and social attitudes are also not as closely interrelated as suggested. Although there is a tendency for politicians to voice public concerns on immigration as a general topic, with specific groups this is not the case, as evidenced by the fact that social perceptions of the Romanian population in Spain are not translated into political debate on this same group. Politicians cannot be seen to be signalling or scape-goating one specific migrant population in public debate. In fact, social perceptions of immigration are more nuanced than public debate and distinguish between groups in positive and negative ways that political elites do not. In this way, social attitudes in Spain towards Romanian migrants developed in a distinct way to elite-level political debate on this group.

To conclude, these results illustrate that the relationship between local perceptions of immigration in society and macro-level debates on a national stage is complex. It should not be assumed that processes based on these perceptions, such as discrimination or exclusion, automatically play out in the same way in politics and society, or on a national and a local level. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of academic approaches to these topics in the future.

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