

# The 2019 Local Elections in Valencia's Metropolitan Area\*

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## ABSTRACT

Voting behaviour in Valencia's Metropolitan Area can be split into four periods: (1) During the early years of democracy (1979-1991) following the Franco dictatorship, the area was a stronghold of the Left; (2) In 1991, the City of Valencia switched and was governed by the Right; (3) In 2011, the Right extended its control to the whole of the Metropolitan Area; (4) In the May 2015 elections, the Left won not only in the 'red' metropolitan belt but also in the City of Valencia. This study looks at what happened in the last set of local elections in 2019. To this end, we begin with a brief review of the election results, voting trends, and the institutional performance of each party since the first post-dictatorship local elections in 1979. We then go on to analyse the electoral behaviour of each of the parties, breaking this down by geographical variables: town/village size, *comarcas* ('counties'), and the so-called 'red belt' before drawing our conclusions.

**Keywords:** elections, voting behaviour, Local Government, Metropolitan Area, Local Politics.

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Electoral behaviour in the Valencia Metropolitan Area is marked by four key features: (1) During the early years of Spain's restoration of democracy (1979-1991), both the centre of Valencia and its 'Red Belt' were seen as Left-Wing strongholds; (2) In 1991, the City of Valencia became governed by the Right-Wing for the first time, first as a coalition government, and then under PP alone with an absolute majority; (3) In 2011, the Right-Wing victory spread to the municipalities ringing the Capital to take in what up until then had been 'The Red Belt', which fell to the Right during this legislature; (4) The May 2015 elections saw a shift back to the Left, which won not only in 'The Red Belt' but also in The City of Valencia.

In this study, we shall examine what happened in the last local elections, which were held in 2019. To this end, after setting out the election results in the Metropolitan Area on polling day (the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2019), we shall briefly examine voting trends and the institutional value of votes for each party. We shall also analyse the election behaviour of each of the parties, broken down by geographic variables — population size, counties, and 'The Red Belt'. The final section sets out our conclusions.

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### THE 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS AND THE VALENCIAN METROPOLITAN AREA: POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RELEVANCE

Local elections were held throughout Spain on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2019. These were affected by the State and Regional elections that were to be held little over a month later on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. This was something wholly new in Spain's short modern democratic history. Furthermore, it was the first time in The Valencian Country that local elections had not been held on the same day as the Regional Election. While the local elections came first, their results were influenced by the looming General Election. From an institutional standpoint, preparations for the General Election were held in abeyance until the local and regional elections in other parts of Spain were over. They were also affected by the

results of the Valencian Regional Election in which the Left, although fragmented, had won by a comfortable margin. The uncertainties of the new electoral scenario were added to the traditional explanations given for the way citizens voted, to wit, structural factors (social class, education, age, gender, etc.) and other factors (management record, programmes and discourses, corruption, leadership, etc.). That is why what happened on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May in Valencia (one of Spain's most dynamic metropolitan areas) was of great importance. The metropolitan area not only has a great deal of institutional clout, in the form of the Mayorship of Valencia, and the Valencia Metropolitan Board but also bears on citizens' attitudes following the political fragmentation in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis. In many cases, electoral behaviour in the area has been a harbinger of electoral events and trends in the rest of Spain.

The Valencia Metropolitan Area constitutes "A socio-spatial system that emerges from the spread of a central settlement" (Martínez and Martínez, 2002). Our working hypothesis is that Valencia is an urban nucleus that ended up spreading many of its features further afield, although these become less marked the farther away one gets from the Capital. The same thing can also be seen when it comes to the electoral dimension. It must be said that the criteria for delimiting this area are both diverse and hotly debated. For the purposes of this study, our point of departure was that metropolitan areas comprise a central municipality which meets certain conditions in terms of population size. In this case, the central municipal is The City of Valencia and those areas that are strongly linked to it by residence-work relations. It includes municipalities of over 100,000 inhabitants, or of between 50,000 and 100,000 ringed by bordering localities with a population of at least 50,000. The criteria for deciding whether a locality forms part of the metropolitan area are: 20% or more of travel to or from the central municipality by over a 100 workers or 15% of travel to or from the central municipality of over a 100 workers for linked localities. The algorithm used follows conventional criteria, adapted to the special features of Spanish urban systems. Annex

1 of this papers lists the 74 municipalities meeting such criteria and which we have therefore defined as Valencia's Metropolitan Area.

The Valencia Metropolitan Area is the third largest built-up area in Spain. Under our definition, it has a population of over two million inhabitants. In Valencia's case, the intricate web of interrelationships found in this area is even more important than the population size. As we have already noted, the metropolitan area is one that hosts a large number of industrial, economic, social, and cultural nodes (Castells, 2010; Rozenblat, 2010; Salom and Fajardo, 2018). From this relational perspective, Salom and Fajardo argue that while Valencia's Metropolitan Area does not occupy key strategic positions in international trade, it nevertheless links countries and regions with the wider world economy. Its trade links extend to European, Latin American, and other Mediterranean countries. From this standpoint, Valencia occupies a second-tier position after Madrid and Barcelona as a city with major international functions (trade and industry). That said, it punches beneath its population weight when it comes to advanced services (Halbert, Cicille, Pumain and Rozenblat, 2012). The region's economic potential stems from decades of economic development which began in the 1970s, forging thriving industries that set up on the coast near the The City of Valencia. This economic growth attracted many migrants from Spain's rural, inland areas. These combination of these processes led to rapid infrastructural development — motorways, dual carriageways, the port and airport — and finally to a strong service economy based on swift digitalisation, supported by a wide network of universities and science parks. In a nutshell, the importance of the Valencia Metropolitan Area and its socio-economic dynamics underpins the region's key political role. This is particularly so in a Europe racked by tensions and issues, including the rise of nationalism and populism, Brexit, migratory crises, and an incipient trade war between the worlds biggest powers. Against this background, the electoral behaviour of these big metropolitan areas can be seen as a litmus test, revealing political trends in advanced societies and where these might lead.

## THE RESULTS OF THE 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The results of the May 2019 local elections in the Valencia Metropolitan Area are shown in Table 1. PSPV-PSOE won nearly 30% of the votes, the most of any party, followed by PP with 22%. Compromís came a close third with almost 20% of the votes. Ciudadanos trailed some way behind in fourth place with a little under 13%. EUPV won 5.84% of the votes, with Vox a little way behind with 4.88%.

**Table 1 Election results of the main parties in the 2019 municipal elections in the Valencia Metropolitan Area**

	Number of votes	Percentage of votes
PSPV-PSOE	265 546	29.01%
PP	201 201	21.98%
COMPROMIS	181 416	19.82%
CIUDADANOS	118 078	12.90%
EUPV-PODEM	53 442	5.84%
VOX	44 725	4.88%
OTROS	50 669	5.53%
TOTAL	915 077	100.00%

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

IU and Podemos' results are grouped for the 2019 election, given that in many municipalities, the parties offered a joint candidate.

In general, we can say that although PP and PSPV-PSOE were the parties winning the most votes, they failed to win big majorities. Taken together, the two main parties scarcely accounted for over 50% of the votes cast. Compromís came in as a close third, followed some way behind by Ciudadanos in fourth place. Despite coming third and fourth respectively, Compromís and Ciudadanos between them accounted for no less than 32% of the votes cast.

**Table 2 Electoral results in the Valencia Metropolitan Area in the 2019 local, regional, and general elections**

		LOCAL	REGIONAL	GENERAL
PP	Nº	201 201	182 359	181 774
	%	21.98%	17.18%	16.94%
PSPV-PSOE	Nº	265 546	233 728	285 397
	%	29.01%	22.03%	26.60%
COMPROMÍS	Nº	181 416	205 993	78 337
	%	19.82%	19.41%	7.30%
CIUDADANOS	Nº	118 078	193 903	195 549
	%	12.90%	18.27%	18.23%
EUPV-PODEM	Nº	53 442	81 414	159 929
	%	5.84%	7.67%	14.90%
VOX	Nº	44 725	111 557	128 628
	%	4.88%	10.51%	11.99%
OTHERS	Nº	50 669	51 995	43 024
	%	5.53%	4.93%	4.04%

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

One should also note that taken together, Left-Wing parties accounted for 54.67% of the vote — significantly more than that polled by Right-Wing parties 39.76%. These results led to the formation of progressive councils in most of the municipalities in the metropolitan area. The Left therefore scored a notable victory over the Right in one of Spain's most economically dynamic areas by a margin of almost 15 percentage points.

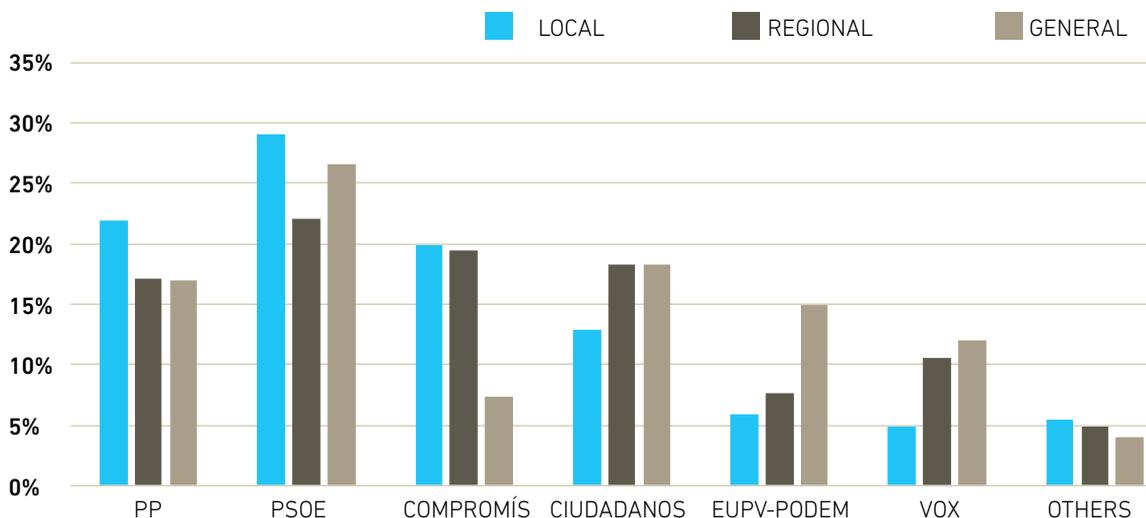
That said, the results of the local, regional, and general elections in the Valencia Metropolitan Area showed significant differences (Table 2). On the one hand, PSPV-PSOE was the most voted for party in all three elections, the local elections being the ones in which it gained the highest percentage of votes cast (29.01%). This fell to 26.60% in the Spanish General Election, and to 22.03% in the Regional Election. The PP also did best in the local elections (21.92%), less well in the Regional Election (17.18%), and worst in the General Election (16.94%). The two parties'

local consolidation over the years may help explain these results.

By contrast, Compromís won almost the same share of the vote in the local and regional elections (19.82% and 19.41%, respectively) but only a paltry 7.30% in the General Election. The make-up of the vote among the potential electors of this coalition of parties is worth examining in detail. The fact that Compromís' much worse result in the General Election (12% behind the other elections) only seems explicable through a transfer of votes between Compromís and EUPV-Podem. While the latter party won low percentages of the vote in the local and regional elections (5.84% and 7.67%, respectively), in the General Elections its share rose to 14.9%.

Although it falls outside the scope of our study, one should mention that Compromís, as the second biggest party in the regional election, and the third in the local ones, nevertheless drops to sixth place in the General

**Figure 1 2019 results in the local, regional, and general elections in the Valencia Metropolitan Area**



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

Election — trailing a long way behind other parties such as Ciudadanos, EUPV-Podem, and even Vox.

From this standpoint, one should note that Ciudadanos' worst results were in the local elections (12.90%), compared with 18.27% and 18.23%, in the regional and local elections, respectively. The difference of almost five percentage points matches the five points PP gained in the local elections compared with the regional and general elections.

Coming at the back of the pack, Vox's poor performance in the local elections can be attributed to its lack of branches throughout the Valencia Metropolitan Area municipalities. Thus, while the party won 10.51% in the Regional Election and 11.99% in the General Election, it only got 4.88% of the votes cast in the local elections.

With regard to voting and abstention in local, regional, and general elections, contrary to what one might think, abstention was greatest in the local elections at roughly 35%. This was ten percentage points above

the abstention rate in the 2019 regional and general elections in The Valencian Country. This may have been because the general and regional elections were held on the same day. Here, one should note that Valencians take most interest in the General Election. Another factor was the need to ensure a legitimate, stable government at a time of political crisis. This would explain why voters were more eager to cast their ballot papers — an enthusiasm that may have spilled over to the regional election.

### HISTORICAL TRENDS IN VOTES CAST IN THE VALENCIA METROPOLITAN AREA

The results of the elections held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2019 can only be understood if one looks at the historical trends showing voter behaviour over time. Here, it is worth looking at the history of election results in the Valencia Metropolitan Area.

The first local elections held in 1979 were marked by a high abstention rate of 32.89%. PSPV-PSOE was the

party winning most support: 251 106 votes (36.84%); UCD was the second biggest party with 222 697 votes (32.67%). PCE came third with 118 995 votes (17.46%). Alianza Popular (now the PP) stood in the elections as Coalición Democrática (CD) and only got 811 votes (0.12%) given that it only presented candidates in three municipalities in Valencia's Metropolitan Area.

In 1983, the abstention rate was 28.03%, less than in earlier elections. PSPV-PSOE won 387 954 votes (50.66%), which gave it an absolute majority in the metropolitan area. Given that the UCD had vanished from the scene, the AP-PDP-UL-UV obtained better results with 235 264 votes (30.72%), becoming the second biggest party. PCE suffered a major setback, winning only 70 271 votes (9.17%). Other parties such as Centro Democrático y Social (CDS) and Unitat del Poble Valencià (UPV) formed part of the Opposition in some areas.

In 1987, the number of votes cast grew to 800 262 votes. PSPV-PSOE got 317 2256 votes (39.64%),

losing their absolute majority. The second-biggest party was Unió Valenciana (UV), with 121 612 votes (15.20%). CDS won 75 184 votes (9.4%), followed by IU-UPV with 67 537 votes (9.12%). In some municipalities EUPV stood in a coalition with UPV. This time round, AP stood on its own and only won 58 065 votes (7.26%).

The 1991 elections seem to be more of the same but there were some important changes. The percentage of votes cast fell to 66.1%. PSPV-PSOE won 321 003 votes (41.7%), while PP (formerly, AP), obtained 172 179 (22.37%), a step up that was mainly at the expense of CDS, which only won 18 225 votes (2.37%) this time round. UV votes grew slightly to 131 956 votes (17.14%). EUPV, which stood alone in this election, got 65 102 votes (8.56%); meanwhile UPV, its former partners in some municipalities, won 12 071 votes (1.57%), mainly gleaned in The City of Valencia. One should add that this election marked the beginning of a major change in the political landscape with more votes being cast for the Right Wing, especially for

Partido Popular, in The City of Valencia. There, the Right Wing parties taken together won more votes than the Left Wing parties did.

The 1995 local elections were a watershed. The total number of votes cast rose greatly to 932 151 votes (74.47%). The PP made the biggest leap forward, doubling its votes to 376 586 (40.4%). At the same time, support for PSPV-PSOE waned to 282 992 votes (30.35%). EUPV made major gains, albeit in coalition with Esquerra Valenciana (EV): 123 850 votes (13.29%). UV began its decline, winning only 84 950 votes (9.11%). UPV, allied with Bloc Nacionalista, also did badly: 15 677 votes (1.68%), falling below the threshold needed to win seats.

The 1999 elections, unlike those in some other regions, brought few changes. The votes cast fell to 867 340 (65%). PP once again gained a majority with 353 071 votes (40.7%), followed by PSPV-PSOE, with 288 679 votes (33.28%). The reason these elections were seen as a watershed was mainly because of the large numbers of votes lost by EUPV, which only got 53 555 votes (6.17%), and the waning support for Unió Valenciana (UV), with 61 103 votes (7.04%).

Voting recovered somewhat in 2003, with almost 70% of the electorate casting their ballot, to reach 948 616 votes. Partido Popular kept its majority with 404 160 votes (42.61%), followed by PSPV-PSOE, with 330 872 votes (34.88%). The two main parties gained roughly another 50 000 votes. EUPV, together with Izquierda Republicana (IR), Esquerra Valenciana (EV) and Els Verds formed a coalition under the 'Entesa' banner, winning 67 315 votes (7.1%). These elections marked the UV's swan-song: 44 712 votes (4.71%). Last but not least, a new party — Bloc Nacionalista Valencià (Bloc), whose support had grown in earlier elections — won almost 37 000 votes (4.35%).

In 2007, the total number of votes cast was similar to that in earlier elections: 937 781 votes. Partido Popular won 456 416 votes (48.67%). It was followed by PSPV-PSOE, with 324 083 votes (34.56%). By contrast, EUPV suffered a big reverse despite having allied with

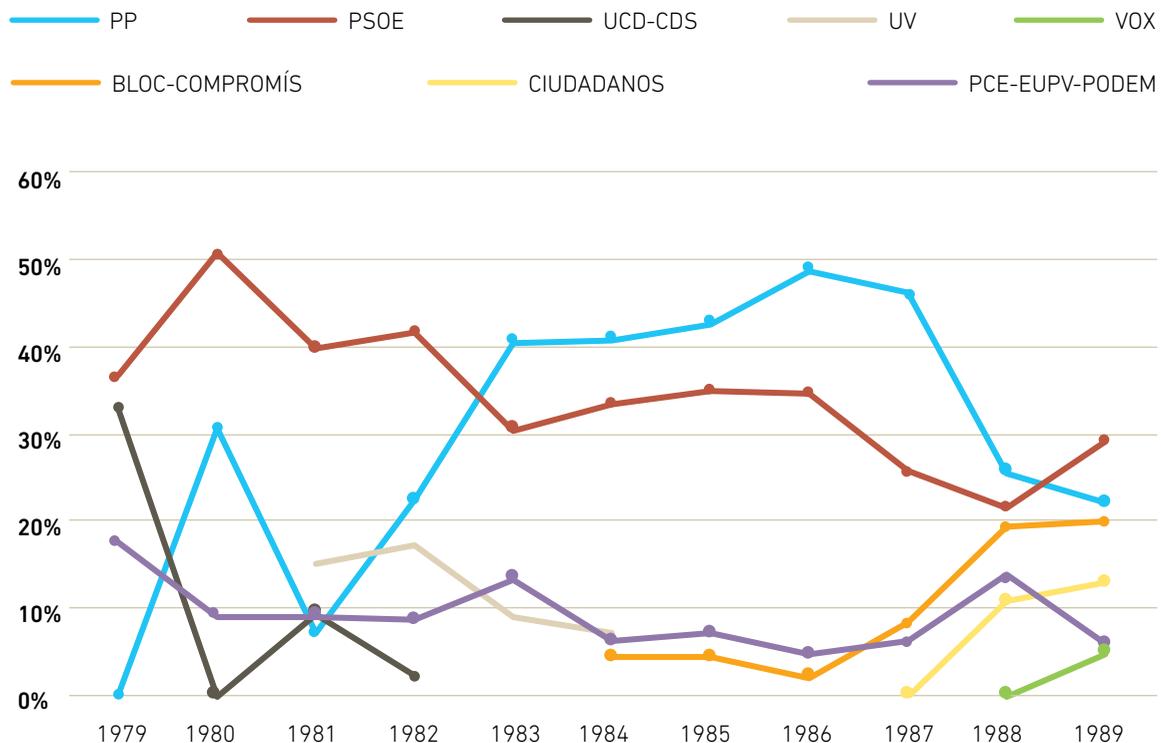
local progressive parties (Els Verds and IR) in some municipalities, winning 44 178 votes (4.71%). El Bloc, which joined with Els Verds, in some places, won 20 162 votes (2.14%).

In 2011, even though the two big parties lost votes both in absolute and percentage terms, they still made up the majority of the votes cast. PP won 454 136 votes (46.18%). It was followed by PSPV-PSOE, which suffered a big drop in support with 253 351 votes (25.76%). Compromís appeared on the scene as a coalition, including parties such as El Bloc, Els Verds-Esquerra Ecologista del País Valencià (EV-EE) and Iniciativa del Poble Valencià. This coalition won

83 573 votes (8.50%). EUPV made big gains, winning 62 784 votes (6.38%).

Last, in the the 2015 elections, the two big parties lost much of the support that they had built up since the 1980s. PP won 253 498 votes (25.56%) — losing almost half of its support compared with the 2011 election; PSPV-PSOE won 212 067 votes (21.38%), forty-one thousand votes less than in the 2011 election. By contrast, other political parties made gains: Compromís, 193 017 votes (19.46%); Ciudadanos, 106 143 votes (10.70%), and parties close to Podemos making up roughly 80 361 votes (8.10%). Although support for EU weakened slightly, its vote generally

**Figure 2 The trend of parties' votes in the Valencia Metropolitan Area (1979 – 2019)**



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

bore up in the area's municipalities with 56 029 votes (5.65%).

Figure 2 shows the trends in the main parties' votes spanning the period from the first local elections held in 1979 (shortly after the Franco dictatorship) to the last ones in 2019. The Figure clearly shows PSPV-PSOE's dominance in the 1980s, PP's dominance in the 1990s and the 2000s, and the strong emergence of Compromís in the 2015 election, in which the last party practically equalled the votes of the first two. Ciudadanos and Podemos also gained a significant number of votes in 2015, as did Vox in 2019, confirming a new, highly fragmented political landscape with no single party commanding an absolute majority.

Over this forty-year period, the votes cast for the sundry political parties have gone through ups and downs, some of them dramatic. PSPV-PSOE was the party winning the most votes in elections between 1979 and 1991, reaching its zenith (50%) in the 1983 election. In the period from 1995 to 2007 its share of the vote swung between 30% and 35%, falling to a little over 25% in 2011, before dropping further to almost 20% in 2015. Even so, the party recovered many of the mayorships lost in earlier elections thanks to the rise of other Left-Wing parties, allowing PSPV-PSOE to form coalition governments. Finally, the party boosted its vote to 30% in 2019, once again becoming the most voted for party in the metropolitan area after 28 years on the slide.

With regard to PP (up until 1989, Alianza Popular), the party went from having virtually no votes in 1979 to winning almost 30% in 1983, before dropping almost 7% in 1987 before gradually rising to 40% in 1995. The last figure was maintained in the following three elections, PP being the party winning the most votes. It gained almost 50% of votes in the 2007 and 2011 elections. In 2015, even though it still got more votes than any other party, its share of the total vote plummeted by twenty percentage points, leaving it only a little way ahead of the second most voted for party, (PSOE) and the third party (Compromís). This meant that PP lost most of the mayorships in the area, which were picked up by the Left. In this last

election, PP's support dropped yet again, this time to almost 22% of the vote. From 1995 to 2011, PP and PSPV-PSOE were the two main parties by a long chalk. It was from 2015 onwards that the two-party system began to fall apart. This decácle for both parties (especially for PP) stemmed from the social and economic crisis beginning in 2008 and the way they had dealt with it. The aftermath of the crisis gave wings to other parties such as Compromís, Ciudadanos, and Podemos (Martín, Bodoque, Rochina and Clemente, 2017). This was particularly true of, Compromís since becoming a coalition in 2010, with its share of vote rising — especially from 2011 to 2015, when it put on ten percentage points to become the third-largest party (19.46%), close on the heels of PSPV-PSOE (21.38%) and PP (25.56%). In the latest election, Compromís' share stayed steady (19.82%), close behind PP (21.98%), but trailing almost ten points behind PSPV-PSOE (29.01%).

Ciudadanos, which produced one of biggest upsets in the 2015 election (10.70%), failed to greatly boost its results in 2019 (12.90%). Even so, one can say that the party consolidated its presence in the Valencia Metropolitan Area during the last election.

The EUPV-Podem coalition, after a surge in the 2015 local election (13.75%) (which combined two parties that until then had stood separately), saw its share more than halve to just 5.84%.

Vox, together with PSPV-PSOE, is the party that has grown most. It has gone from having no seats at all (its votes previously hardly reached 1% of those in the metropolitan area) to almost 5% (4.88%, to be exact) and to have councillors in some of the Town Councils in the Metropolitan Area, especially in The City of Valencia.

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## THE ELECTORATE'S LOCAL BEHAVIOUR WITHIN THE METROPOLITAN AREA

In the foregoing sections, we have seen how electoral behaviour in the Valencia Metropolitan Area is

**Table 3** Votes cast for parties in 2019 in relation to population size

		PSOE	PP	COMPRO- MÍS	CS	EUPV- PODEM	VOX
<b>Valencia</b>	Nº	74 597	84 328	106 395	68 283	16 158	28 126
	%	19.17%	21.67%	27.34%	17.54%	4.15%	7.22%
<b>Over 50 000</b>	Nº	35 479	17 547	11 621	9666	8328	6257
	%	36.96%	18.28%	12.10%	10.07%	8.67%	6.51%
<b>Between 10 000 and 50 000</b>	Nº	116 154	71 699	48 517	31 116	23 512	8919
	%	36.08%	22.27%	15.07%	9.66%	7.30%	2.77%
<b>Under 10 000</b>	Nº	39 316	27 627	14 883	9013	5444	1423
	%	36.36%	25.55%	13.76%	8.33%	5.03%	1.31%

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

markedly different from those in other areas. Yet this behaviour is far from being homogeneous within the area. We shall now examine the electoral behaviour of each of the parties, breaking it down by sundry variables: population size, counties, and 'The Red Belt' before drawing our conclusions.

#### *Votes by the population size of municipalities*

There are marked differences in the results obtained by the political parties in the 2019 local elections, depending on the population size of the municipalities (Table 3 and Figure 3).

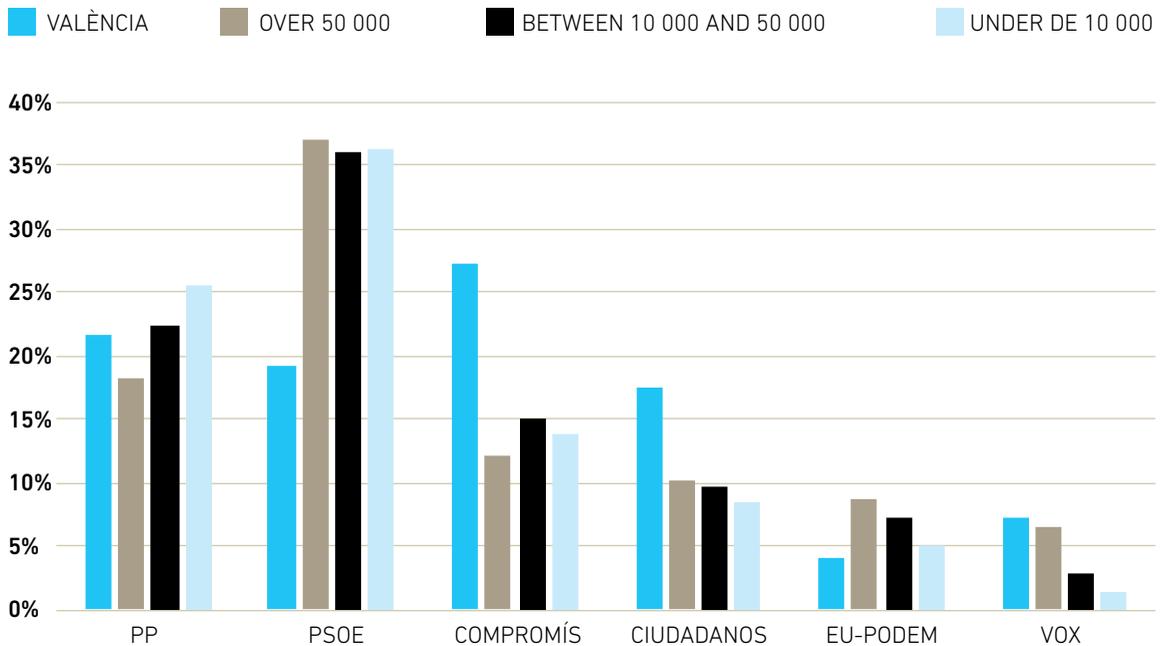
First, one should note that voters in The City of Valencia show different behaviour from those in the other municipalities. Compromís had a lead in The City of Valencia of almost seven percentage points over the runner-up, which in this case was PP. This allowed the Mayor, Joan Ribó, to have a second term of office (with the support of PSPV-PSOE). Vox's rise was also marked in The City of Valencia, winning over 7% of votes and leaving EUPV-Podem in sixth place without a seat on the City Council.

In the rest of the municipal population bands, PSPV-PSOE was the party that got the most votes with a

36% share, followed by PP with got more support the smaller the municipality. The reverse was true for Ciudadanos and Vox, which received fewer votes the smaller the municipality. Something similar occurred with EUPV-Podem, even though its worst results were in The City of Valencia. With regard to another Left-Wing party, Compromís, even though it won by a decent margin in The City of Valencia, it did less well in the other municipalities, where it generally got between 10 and 15% of the vote: a little over 12% in municipalities with over 50 000 inhabitants; 15.07% in municipalities between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants; and under 14% in municipalities of under 10 000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, it was the party that got most votes in most municipalities and with, together with PSPV-PSOE, would end up governing the most municipal councils, whether or not it held the mayorship.

Figure 3 shows that Compromís and Ciudadanos gleaned most of their support in The City of Valencia. By contrast, PSPV-PSOE and EU-Podem received many fewer votes in the Metropolis. With the exception of The City of Valencia, the smaller the municipality's population, the greater the support for PP. Vox followed the opposite pattern, to wit: the smaller the municipality,

**Figure 3** The main parties' 2019 Local Election by groups of municipalities in relation to population size



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

the smaller its share of the votes. This voting behaviour in terms of population bands is highly significant in political terms, if we start from the hypothesis that vote transfers from Left to Right or *vice versa* were negligible (see the CIS post-election surveys. Here:

It is relatively easy to see how votes shifted between PSPV-PSOE, Compromís, and EU-Podem. In The City of Valencia, the party gaining most from Left-Wing votes was Compromís, with 27.34% of the votes. Nevertheless, almost 15% of the votes in smaller municipalities were cast for PSPV-PSOE, whose overall support grew by fifteen points, and even a little more in the smallest municipalities (precisely where EUPV-Podem got their worst results).

Likewise, we can see how Right-Wing voters behaved with regard to PP, Ciudadanos and Vox. PP won around

22% of votes in The City of Valencia and in municipalities of between 10 000 and 15 000 inhabitants, no doubt among other reason because PP has a strong branch network throughout the region. The reverse occurred with Ciudadanos and Vox, which got better results in The City of Valencia and whose votes steadily dropped the smaller the municipality.

**Table 4** Voting/abstention by population size in 2019

	Voting	Abstaining
Valencia	66.32%	33.68%
Over 50 000	59.91%	40.09%
Between 10 000 and 50 000	64.06%	35.94%
Under 10 000	68.78%	31.22%

Source: ARGOS (Authors).

With regard to voter participation and abstention in relation a municipality's population size, one should note that municipalities with under 10 000 inhabitants had the lowest abstentions rate — 31.22% — followed by The City of Valencia with a little under 34%. It was highly significant that the abstention rate in municipalities with over 50 000 inhabitants exceeded 40%, which is precisely where PP got its worst results.

One also needs to take account of the variation in abstention since the previous local election. If we compare the abstention rate in 2015 with that in 2019, in the latest election, abstention rose by no less than 8% in municipalities of over 50 000 inhabitants. Two factors might explain this rise: (1) there was no Valencian regional election on the same date in 2015; (2) Right-Wing voters may have lost heart after seeing the results of the General and Regional elections (the latter elsewhere in Spain) a couple of months earlier.

#### *Votes by counties within the Metropolitan Area*

Like in the previous case, there were differences in electoral behaviour in the 2019 local election at the county scale. Looking at Table 5 and Figure 4, PP got similar results in Horta Oest and Nord counties — 20-

21% of votes — but in Horta Sud support for the party rose significantly, to reach a vote share of almost 26%. PSPV-PSOE was the party that got the most votes in all the Horta counties. This result was highly significant in Horta Oest, where the party won almost 45% of votes, to the detriment of Compromís which barely got 11% and did little better than Ciudadanos, which got similar results of between 9% and 11%. EUPV-Podem came next, just a little way behind with votes shares of between 6% and 7.5%, except in The City of Valencia. One should also note that in Horta Sud county, Vox only got a 0.63% share of votes — much less than that in Horta Oest and Nord, where the party got between 3.5% and 4.5%. Vox's very poor showing in Horta Sud seems to be linked to the good results obtained by PP in this county, as we have just seen.

It is worth focusing on the greater or lesser homogeneity of the electoral results depending on counties and political parties. PP's results were fairly even in each of the counties, with a range of about 5 points between 19.94% in Horta Oest and 25.73% in Horta Sud,. By contrast, PSPV-PSOE showed a much greater range — over twenty points — between 19.17% in The City of Valencia, and 44.90% in Horta Oest. That said, PSPV-PSOE's good results in Horta Nord, 35.07%, and

**Table 5 Results of the 2019 elections by counties in the Horta area**

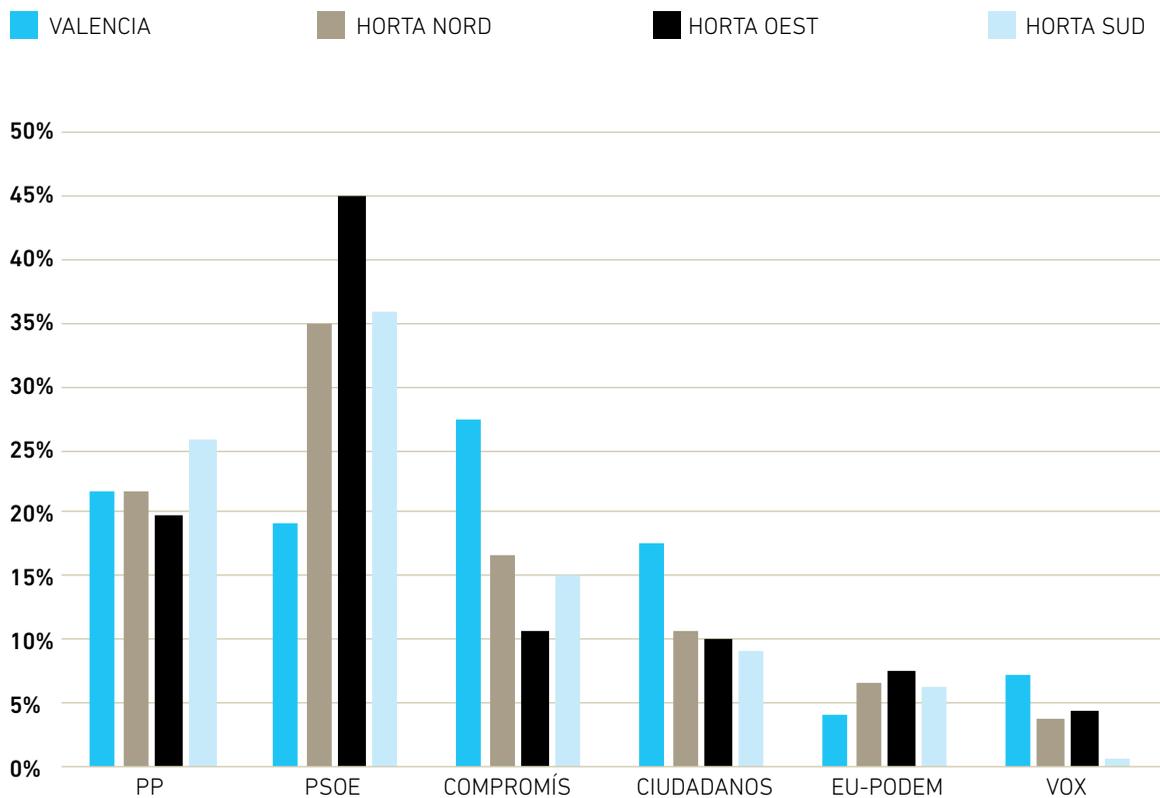
		PP	PSOE	COMPRO- MÍS	CS	EUPV- PODEM	VOX
Valencia	Nº	84 328	74 597	106 395	68 283	16 158	28 126
	%	21.67%	19.17%	27.34%	17.54%	4.15%	7.22%
Horta Nord	Nº	24 810	40 044	18 945	12 199	7683	4342
	%	21.73%	35.07%	16.59%	10.68%	6.72%	3.80%
Horta Oest	Nº	32 531	73 243	17 659	16 313	12311	7327
	%	19.94%	44.90%	10.82%	10.00%	7.54%	4.49%
Horta Sud	Nº	22 288	31 119	13 214	7871	5529	546
	%	25.73%	35.93%	15.25%	9.08%	6.38%	0.63%

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

in Horta Sud, 35.93%, lay within a much narrower nine-point range. The range of results in Compromís’ case was also wide, spanning from 10.82% of the votes in Horta Oest to 27.34% in The City of Valencia — a seventeen-point difference. However, EUPV-Podem’s results were fairly even, with between 4.15% in The City of Valencia (a percentage below the 5% threshold, leaving the party without seats) and 7.54% in Horta Oest — a difference of roughly three points. Last, Vox showed wide variation, with a very poor showing in Horta Sud (just 0.63% of votes) to a more worthwhile 7.22%, achieved in The City of Valencia, with almost 7 points difference, reflecting the geographic concentration of Vox’s incipient party network.

Figure 4 clearly reflects these differences in voting behaviour. In PP’s case, the purple bar for Horta Sud stands out, while the rest are pretty much the same. In the case of PSPV-PSOE and Compromís, their respective blue bars (The City of Valencia) show different voter behaviour, revealing that Left-Wing voters chose to back Compromís rather than PSOE. Meanwhile, the picture in the Horta counties was the other way round, especially in Horta Oest (green bars), where Left-Wing voters backed PSPV-PSOE rather than Compromís. In Ciudadanos’ case, its support in The City of Valencia stands out against a fairly even but much less impressive performance in the Horta counties. EUPV-Podem’s results are also fairly even in the Horta counties but

**Figure 4 Party results in The City of Valencia and the three counties in the Horta area**



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

unlike Ciudadanos, are better than its results in The City of Valencia (blue bars). Finally, Vox did much better in The City of Valencia (blue bar) than in the Horta counties (and with an almost negligible result in Horta Sud, shown by the purple bar).

### *The area's 'Red Belt' vote*

Voting trends in what used to be known as Valencia's 'Red Belt' shows how the PSPV-PSOE and PP two-party pattern is stronger than in other parts of the Valencia Metropolitan Area. This was especially so in the last local election, where votes for PSPV-PSOE surged by over

ten per cent, putting the party almost twenty points ahead of PP, the second-biggest party. PP, together with Compromís saw their support shrink in The Red Belt, albeit not markedly. Ciudadanos' support rose slightly, while votes for EUPV-Podem plunged from 13.63% in 2015, when the two parties stood separately, to just 7.08% in the 2019 local election, where they both stood on a joint ticket.

Table 6 reveals the main trends in voting behaviour in The City of Valencia's 'Red Belt'. The 2007 and 2011 elections (Martín, Escribano, Jiménez and

**Table 6 Election result trends in Valencia's Red Belt (1999 – 2019)**

		1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
<b>PP</b>	Nº	93 932	103 781	127 022	144 269	81 357	62 897
	%	34.48%	35.00%	42.75%	45.56%	24.85%	21.37%
<b>PSPV-PSOE</b>	Nº	113 919	130 295	115 032	101 089	94 997	111 205
	%	41.82%	43.95%	38.71%	31.92%	29.01%	40.51%
<b>UV</b>	Nº	21 082	15 374	5890			
	%	7.74%	5.19%	1.92%			
<b>Entesa/ EUPV</b>	Nº	19 934	20 388	13 564	20 858	20.336	
	%	7.32%	6.88%	4.56%	6.59%	6.21%	
<b>BLOC/ Compromís</b>	Nº	12 079	15 344	18 709	24 939	52 869	39 504
	%	4.43%	5.18%	6.30%	7.88%	16.14%	13.42%
<b>Ciudadanos</b>	Nº					26 847	28 858
	%					8.20%	9.80%
<b>Podemos (2015) EUPV- Podem (2019)</b>	Nº					24 319	20 855
	%					7.42%	7.08%
<b>VOX</b>	Nº						11 129
	%						3.78%
<b>Others</b>	Nº	11 479	11 256	19 927	25 477	26 649	11 804
	%	4.21%	3.80%	5.70%	8.05%	8.14%	4.01%

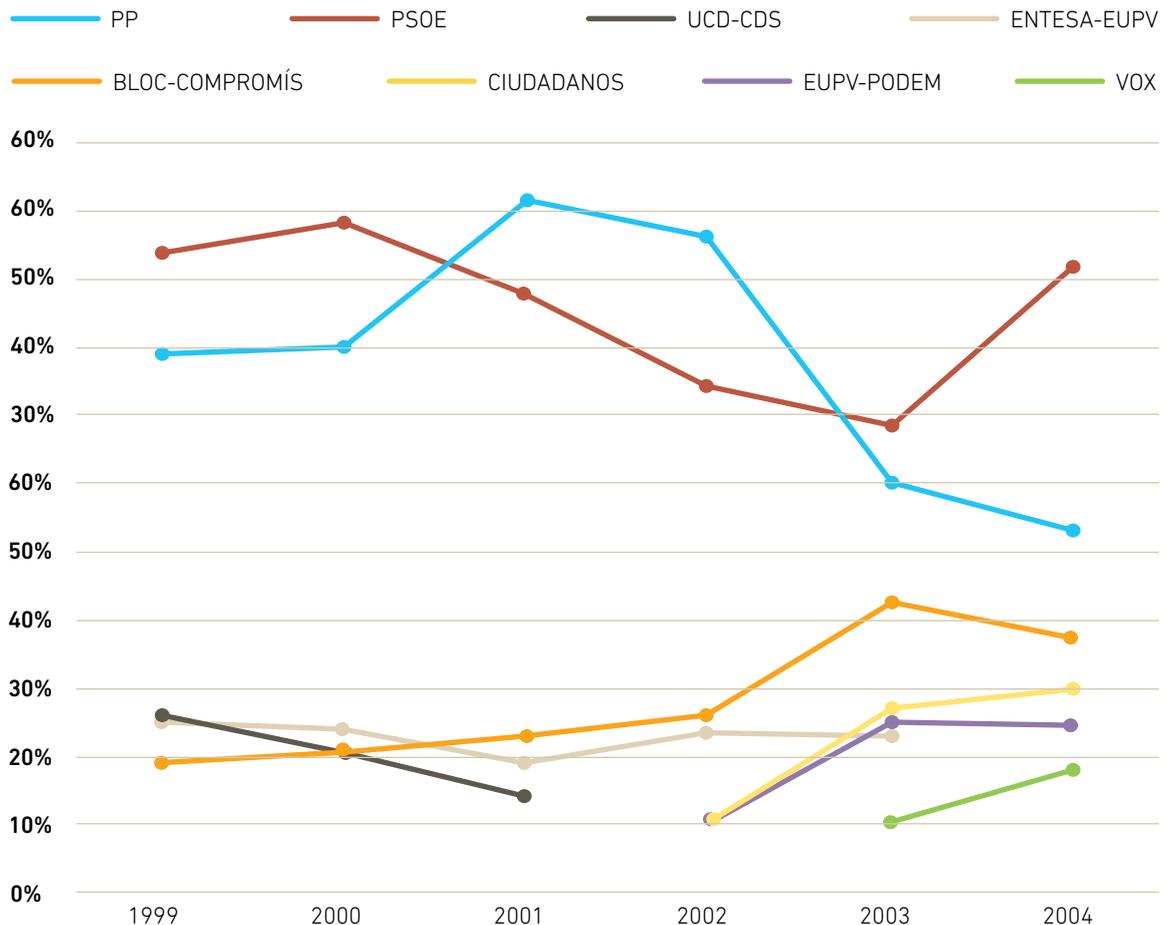
Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

Ramis, 2011) here are something of an exception, given that PP won over 40% of votes — 42.75% and 45.56%, respectively. In earlier elections, PP’s support lay around the 35% mark. The party’s management of the 2008 Financial Crisis (GFC) and its involvement in a host of corruption cases led this to fall to a little over 20% of votes. By contrast, PSPV-PSOE, after also sharing the blame for the 2008 Financial Crisis, rebounded to around 30% of votes in the 2011 and 2015 elections and once

again seems to have regained the traditional support it enjoyed in ‘The Red Belt’, passing the 40% mark in the 2019 election.

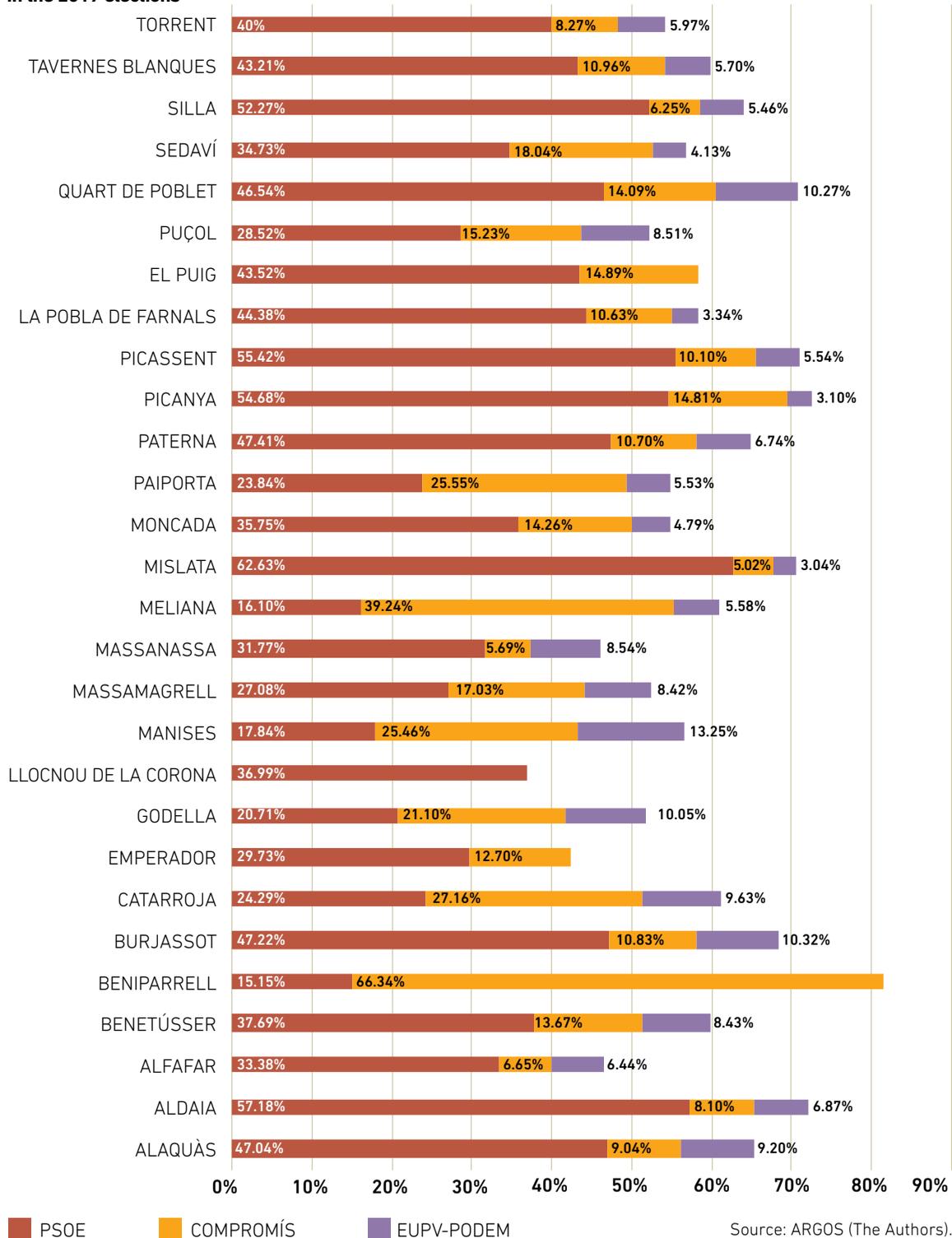
PP’s loss of ten percentage points in the 2019 election also stands out compared with its performance in elections before 2011. The Right-Wing party that seems to be picking up these votes is Ciudadanos — a new political force emerging in 2015. Here, it should be noted that Ciudadanos’ 2015 and 2019

**Figure 5** Eoting trends in The City of Valencia’s ‘Red Belt’ (1999 – 2019)



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

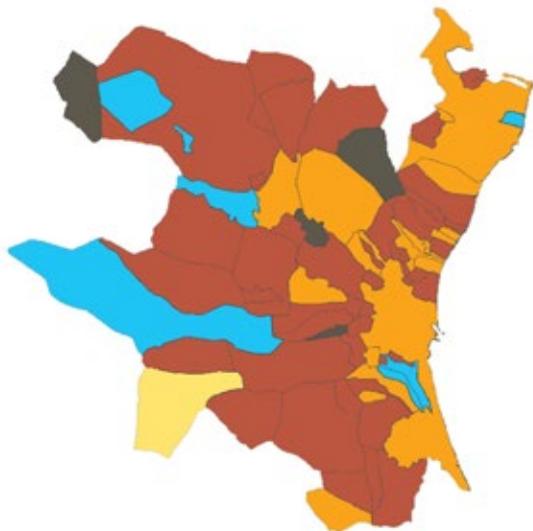
**Figure 6 The Left-Wing's results in the various municipalities making up the 'red belt' of Valencia's municipalities in the 2019 elections**



Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

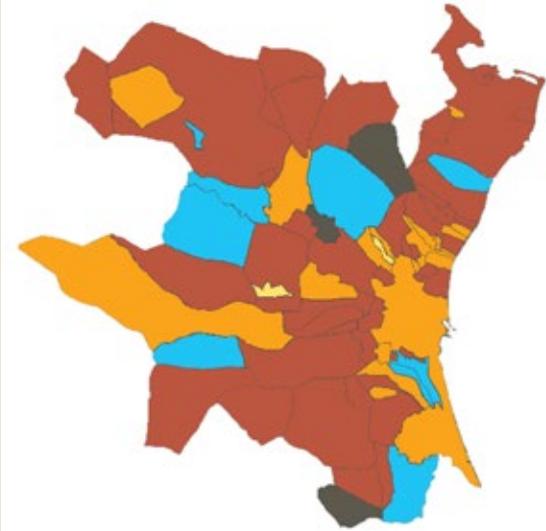
### Map 1 Comparison of the governing parties at the beginning of the local elections in 2015 and in 2019 in the Valencian Metropolitan Area

GOVERNING PARTY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 2015 ELECTION IN THE VALENCIA METROPOLITAN AREA



■ PSOE    ■ COMPROMÍS    ■ PP

GOVERNING PARTY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 2019 ELECTION IN THE VALENCIA METROPOLITAN AREA



■ CS    ■ EUPV-PODEM    ■ OTHERS

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

won close on 10% of votes. Finally, it is significant that votes cast for EUPV-Podem in The Red Belt in the 2019 election returned to the level traditionally achieved by the Entesa/EUPV coalition before the GFC (that is to say, somewhere around the 7% mark), recovering after a dangerous dip to 4.56% in 2007.

Figure 6 shows the results of the various Left-Wing parties in Valencia's 'Red Belt' municipalities. Analysing the figure shows that PSPV-PSOE is generally the party that wins most vote, far ahead of Compromís and Podemos, getting double their support. Apart from a few small municipalities in The Red Belt, such as Meliana and Beniparrell, where Compromís won votes from PSPV-PSOE, in the remaining municipalities, the Socialists beat Compromís (in some

towns such as Mislata, doing so by a wide margin).

In addition to doing well in most of Valencia's 'Red Belt' municipalities, the Left also got over 50% of total votes and in 12 of the 28 municipalities, 60%. The results in Beniparrell stand out here, where the Left got over 80% of votes. This was a municipality in which Podemos to not stand, and in which Compromís won an absolute majority.

#### THE INSTITUTIONAL VALUE OF VOTES

Map 1 and Table 7 provide comparative information on the municipalities in which each of the parties governed (holding the mayorship) in the

2015 legislature. Nevertheless, one should note that in some municipalities, various parties 'shared' the mayorship by holding it for longer or shorter periods during the legislature. Accordingly, this means that the party beginning in government in 2019 did not necessarily do so for the whole of the council legislature. One think that jumps out from the map is that most of it is coloured red, showing that PSPV-PSOE was in the riding seat, followed by orange (the colour used to indicate *Compromís*). These two parties worked together to ensure that had the necessary absolute majorities. To these one should add the purple areas (a handful of municipalities governed by EUPV-Podem, whether alone or in coalition with other parties). The whole range of warmer tones (save yellow) reveals the extent of the Left-Wing's landslide victory in the Valencia Metropolitan Area.

The few blue areas on the map show the areas governed by PP, while the yellow areas show where *Ciudadanos* held the mayorship. In general, the Right governed very few municipalities in the area. In most cases, coalition agreements had been cobbled together within either a Left-Wing bloc or within a Right-Wing bloc. Nevertheless, there were some exceptions to this rule, for example pacts between PSPV-PSOE and *Ciudadanos*, and — to a lesser extent — other combinations of parties (see Annex 2).

**Table 7 Comparison of Mayorships at the beginning of the legislature (2015 – 2019)**

	2015	2019	Variation
PP	8	11	+ 3
PSOE	48	45	- 3
COMPROMÍS	17	15	- 2
EUPV-PODEM	1	0	- 1
CIUDADANOS	0 (Turís, only lasted one month)	2	+ 2
OTHERS	2	3	+1

Source: ARGOS (The Authors).

Last, one should note that the rise in the Left-Wing vote and the shrinking Right-Wing vote compared with previous elections did not result in more municipal governments falling into the Left's hands (Martín, 2015). By contrast, the Right-Wing gained some 5 mayorships compared with the previous legislature, and logically enough, did so at the expense of the Left-Wing (which lost 6 mayorships). Here, one should note that some mayorships are supported by both Left and Right-Wing councillors. A few mayorships are in the hands of parties that we have refrained from labelling 'Left' or 'Right' given their special features.

Nevertheless, these few changes generally affect very small municipalities and the Left continues to govern in much of the Valencia Metropolitan Area (quite apart from conquering the much-prized mayorship of The City of Valencia).

## CONCLUSIONS

The electoral behaviour of large urban areas can be seen as a litmus test for new political trends in advanced societies, hence the interest in the Valencia Metropolitan Area's local elections. Here, it is worth recalling that Valencia is Spain's third-largest urban area and is an advanced, dynamic society with strong international links, especially to European nations and Mediterranean countries.

The election results in the Valencia Metropolitan Area on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2019 revealed a highly-fragmented party panorama comprising six parties (or party groupings). Four of these were fairly large: PSPV-PSOE, 29.01%; PP, 21.98%; *Compromís*, 19.82%; *Ciudadanos*, 12.90%. The remaining two were small: EUPV-Podem, 5.84% and Vox, 4.88%.

The short gap between the local elections on the one hand, and the general and regional elections on the other (scarcely a month before) lets one compare the results. The findings reveal that many Valencians' choice of who to vote for is strongly influenced by the kind of election. Although fracturing of the vote affected

all parties, it particularly affected Compromís, whose percentage of the vote was practically the same in both the local and regional elections, 19.82% and 19.41%, respectively but whose vote in the General Election nosedived to just 7.30%. The same is true of EUPV-Podem (albeit in reverse), with the party coalition gleaning relatively few votes in the local and regional elections (5.84% and 7.67%, respectively) but whose performance in the General Election was much stronger, winning 14.90% of votes.

The historical record of local elections since 1979 in the Valencia Metropolitan Area reveals major changes. For instance, there are parties that have disappeared without trace (UCD, UV, etc.). Meanwhile, others that have sprung up (Ciudadanos, Vox, etc.). The long-running parties have also had their ups and downs. Yet there are certain constants when it comes to votes for the Left. Save during the period 2011-15, PSPV-PSOE has been the favourite choice for Left-Wing voters in most elections.

Electoral behaviour in the Valencia Metropolitan Area is markedly different from that in other Spanish regions and, furthermore, is far from homogeneous within the area.

We found a marked differences among municipalities depending on which population range they fell into. Compromís' and PSPV-PSOE's victory in Valencia and in the remaining municipalities stood out. By contrast, support for PP, though it bore up in The City of Valencia, fell off the smaller the municipality. In Vox's case, the smaller the municipality, the greater the support for the party. EUPV-Podem's best results were obtained in middling-sized municipalities.

We also found different voting behaviour by counties. With the exception of The City of Valencia,

PSPV-PSOE's main support came from all the Horta counties, especially Horta Oest, where it won 44.90% of the vote. PP, with a little over a 20% share of the vote got its best results in Horta Sud, where it garnered 25.73% of votes. Compromís won in The City of Valencia with 27.34% of votes, but its performance dropped off in the Horta counties, especially in Horta Oest, where it won a relatively meagre 10.82% share of votes. Ciudadanos, save in The City of Valencia, where it won 17.54% of votes, got roughly a 10% vote share in the Horta counties. By contrast, EUPV-Podem got better results in the counties — roughly 6-7% of votes — than in The City of Valencia (4.15%). Finally, Vox, did well in the Regional Capital with 7.22% but its votes plummeted elsewhere — especially in Horta Sud, where it won a risible 0.63% of votes.

In Valencia's 'Red Belt', the more traditional parties — PSPV-PSOE and PP — made a good showing. This was especially true of PSPV-PSOE, which in these elections boosted its vote share to 40.51% — leaving the second-biggest party (PP) with 21.37% trailing some twenty points behind. Both PP and Compromís (13.42%) lost support, albeit slightly. Support for Ciudadanos rose somewhat (to 9.80%) while EUPV-Podem with 7.08% lost many votes compared with earlier elections in which the two parties won almost twice as many votes standing separately as they did together in 2019. In this case, the adage that 'unity is strength' was not borne out.

Finally, with regard to the institutional reward for votes, the Left-Wing got the best results. Yet this did not translate into greater institutional power given that the Right regained some five mayorships. That said, the election victory did give the Left a broader and more homogeneous political support in those municipal councils it did govern.

**ANNEX 1. LIST OF MUNICIPALITIES MAKING UP THE VALENCIAN METROPOLITAN AREA (AMV)**

ALQUÀS	DOMEÑO	PICANYA
ALBAL	ELIANA (L')	PICASSENT
ALBALAT DELS SORELLS	EMPERADOR	POBLA DE FARNALS (LA)
ALBORAYA	FAURA	PABLA DE VALLBONA (LA)
ALBUIXECH	FOIOS	PUIG (EL)
ALCÀSSER	GILET	PUÇOL
ALDAIA	GODELLA	QUART DE POBLET
ALFAFAR	GODELLETA	RAFELBUNYOL
ALFARA DEL PATRIARCA	LLÍRIA	RIBA-ROJA DE TÚRIA
ALGINET	LLOCNOU DE LA CORONA	ROCAFORT
ALMÀSSERA	LORIGUILLA	SAGUNT
ALMUSSAFES	MANISES	SAN ANT. DE BENAGÉBER
BENAGUASIL	MARINES	SEDAVÍ
BENETÚSSER	MASSALFASSAR	SERRA
BENIFAIRO DE LES VALLS	MASSAMAGRELL	SILLA
BENIFAIÓ	MASSANASSA	SOLLANA
BENIPARRELL	MELIANA	TAVERNES BLANQUES
BENISANÓ	MISLATA	TORRENT
BÉTERA	MONCADA	TURÍS
BONREPÒS I MIRAMBELL	MONTSERRAT	VALÈNCIA
BURJASSOT	MUSEROS	VILAMARXANT
CANET D'EN BERENGUER	NÁQUERA	VILLAR DEL ARZOBISPO
CASINOS	OLOCAU	VINALESA
CATARROJA	PAIPORTA	XIRIVELLA
CHESTE	PATERNA	
CHIVA	PETRÉS	<b>Total: 76 municipalities</b>

**ANNEX 2. POLITICAL PARTIES HOLDING THE MAYOR'S OFFICE IN MUNICIPALITIES IN VALENCIA'S METROPOLITAN AREA FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS ON THE 26<sup>TH</sup> OF MAY 2019**

- ALQUÀS: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- ALBAL: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís and Unidas Podemos (Councillors and support)
- ALBALAT DELS SORELLS: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- ALBORAYA: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- ALBUIXECH: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- ALCÀSSER: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- ALDAIA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)

- ALFAFAR: PP (Absolute majority)
- ALFARA DEL PATRIARCA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- ALGINET: Socialistes d'Alginet (Mayor's Office), Compromís (Councillors and support)
- ALMÀSSERA: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- ALMUSSAFES: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- BENAGUASIL: PP (Absolute majority)
- BENETÚSSER: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís, EUPV (Councillors and support)
- BENIFAIÓ DE LES VALLS: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- BENIFAIÓ: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- BENIPARRELL: Compromís (Absolute majority)
- BENISANÓ: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- BÉTERA: PP (Mayor's Office), M.Camarena-T.Conill (Councillors and support)
- BONREPÒS I MIRAMBELL: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís (Councillors and support)
- BURJASSOT: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- CANET D'EN BERENGUER: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- CASINOS: Compromís (Absolute majority)
- CATARROJA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- CHESTE: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), EUPV-SA, Compromís (Councillors and support)
- CHIVA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), IU, Vecinos Independientes de Chiva (Councillors and support)
- DOMEÑO: PP (Absolute majority)
- ELIANA (L): PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- EMPERADOR: PP (Absolute majority)
- FAURA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- FOIOS: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- GILET: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- GODELLA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- GODELLETA: PP (Mayor's Office), Ciudadanos, PUG (Councillors and support)
- LLÍRIA: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís (Councillors and support)
- LLOCNOU DE LA CORONA: PP (Absolute majority)
- LORIGUILLA: Ciudadanos (Mayor's Office); PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- MANISES: Compromís (Mayor's Office), Podem (Councillors and support)
- MARINES: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- MASSALFASSAR: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- MASSAMAGRELL: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE, Empoderem Massamagrell (Councillors and support)
- MASSANASSA: PP (Absolute majority)
- MELIANA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- MISLATA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- MONCADA: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- MONTSERAT: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), EUPV (Councillors and support)
- MUSEROS: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- NÁQUERA: UPdN (Simple majority)
- OLOCAU: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- PAIPORTA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- PATERNA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- PETRÉS: Compromís (Absolute majority)
- PICANYA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)

- PICASSENT: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- POBLA DE FARNALS (LA): PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- POBLA DE VALLBONA (LA): Compromís (Mayor's Office), Cupo, Contigo, PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- PUIG (EL): PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- PUÇOL: PP (Mayor's Office); Ciudadanos, Vox and others (Councillors and support)
- QUART DE POBLET: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- RAFELBUNYOL: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- RIBA-ROJA DE TÚRIA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- ROCAFORT: PP (Mayor's Office), Ciudadanos (Councillors and support)
- SAGUNT: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís (Councillors and support)
- SAN ANT. DE BENAGÉBER: AISAB (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- SEDAVÍ: Shared mayorship, first Compromís and then PSPV-PSOE
- SERRA: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), EUPV-Podem (Councillors and support)
- SILLA: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- SOLLANA: PP (Absolute majority)
- TAVERNES BLANQUES: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- TORRENT: PSPV-PSOE (Simple majority)
- TURÍS: PSPV-PSOE (Absolute majority)
- VALÈNCIA: Compromís (Mayor's Office), PSPV-PSOE (Councillors and support)
- VILAMARXANT: PP (Mayor's Office), Ciudadanos (Councillors and support)
- VILLAR DEL ARZOBISPO: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), IU and Compromís (Councillors and support)
- VINALESA: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Compromís (Councillors and support)
- XIRIVELLA: PSPV-PSOE (Mayor's Office), Podem Xirivella (Councillors and support)

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