Marry on a cross. Individualism, divorce, and radical self-placement: The Spanish case

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between marital status, specifically divorce and separation, and political radicalisation in Spain, focusing on sociodemographic profiles susceptible to radical ideological self-placement. Drawing on the theories of social and political value realignment and using quantitative data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, the analysis reveals nuanced associations between life course events and political attitudes. Contrary to previous assumptions, the findings indicate that radical self-placement is not predominantly masculine, but rather feminine. This study has found that women are especially prone to positioning themselves as radical left. Moreover, separated and divorced individuals display a greater likelihood of radical identification, suggesting that marital dissolution may act as a catalyst for ideological shifts. The least radical group comprises married men aged 18–30, while a gender gap persists in the intensity and direction of radicalisation, offering novel insights into the intersection of personal trajectories and political behaviour in contemporary Spain.

Keywords: *Marital status • Divorce • Political radicalisation • Radicalism • Spain*

1. Introduction

Political science research has increasingly examined radicalism considering growing polarisation and anti-system attitudes (Mudde 2021; 2024; Rosanvallon 2020). Understanding the sociodemographic characteristics and factors influencing radicalisation is essential: while the literature covers general political participation (Dehdari et al. 2022; Frödin Gruneau 2018; Kern 2010; Kinder 2006), the connection between divorce, separation, and radicalisation remains underexplored. Consequently, this study investigates how changes in marital status, particularly divorce or separation, affect individuals' political expression. The three main research questions (RQs) guiding this investigation are as follows:

- RQ 1. Are men more likely to exhibit a greater degree of radical self-placement?

- RQ 2. Is there a verifiable relationship between being divorced or separated and exhibiting a greater tendency towards radical self-placement?
- RQ 3. Is radical self-placement more common among men aged 31 and older, divorced or separated, and right-leaning?

This study seeks to identify sociodemographic profiles susceptible to radicalisation and to explore the divorce-radicalisation relationship in Spain, where divorce has been legal since 1981. First, a theoretical framework addressing social and political value shifts alongside growing political dissatisfaction manifesting as polarised, radical positions will be established. Second, employing data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), a variety of quantitative methods will analyse the connection between marital status and radical ideological identification. Third, results showing a significant yet nuanced correlation between marital status and radical political attitudes will be presented and discussed, with men aged 18–30 identified as the group least associated with radicalism.

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2. Value transformations, family dynamics, and political radicalisation in post-materialist societies

2.1 Shifts in values

Values, conceived as socially esteemed qualities arising from the societal fabric and bridging the individual-collective divide, exemplify the substantial transformation Western liberal democracies have endured in recent decades. Generational change primarily drives shifts in individual values (Inglehart 1977): successive generations, nurtured amid stability, security, and economic growth, increasingly prioritise autonomy and self-expression. Thus, the rise of post-materialist values cultivates greater individualism, which significantly shapes patterns of political polarisation.

Contemporary societies also display heightened electoral volatility and political dealignment, coupled with widespread public disenchantment towards parties and political institutions (Dassonneville 2018; Drummond 2006). This context fosters the ascendancy of radical political stances, observable both in electoral support for extremist parties and in subtler forms such as ideological polarisation and approval of radical anti-system rhetoric (Casal Bértoa, Rama 2021: 1).

Classical analyses of radical ideologies identify distinct socio-personal profiles: far-right supporters often conceive a hierarchical social order sharply differentiating dominant from subordinate groups, reinforced by an ethos valuing masculine violence (Fenner, Weitz 2004: 10). Similarly, Italian fascism idealised the disciplined, vigorous, and obedient warrior dedicated to national service (Morgan 1996: 111). This masculine element substantiates the hypothesis (RQ1) that men exhibit a greater propensity for radicalism.

Nonetheless, understanding modern radicalisation and political orientation requires acknowledgement of enhanced individualisation and subjective political polarisation (Kriesi 2010). The decline in party membership and electoral participation, alongside diminishing influence of social class, highlights individual values as critical factors in political polarisation (Inglehart 1992; Flanagan 1982). Consequently, political self-placement constitutes an essential measure, bypassing partisan disengagement and more accurately reflecting ideological attitudes amid ongoing social change (Inglehart et al. 1984).

Beyond the political sphere, this individualistic trajectory has profoundly altered institutions historically impervious to atomisation, such as marriage and the family. Since the 1960s, increases in divorce and the deinstitutionalisation of marriage have reframed it as an interpersonal arrangement rather than a social institution (Cherlin 2004; Díez Nicolas, Inglehart 1994; 2018).

2.2 Family, marriage, and divorce in post-materialist societies

Since the eighteenth century and the emergence of romantic love, marriage has undergone a profound sentimental transformation, diverging notably from its formerly predominant economic and transactional basis (Cherlin 2004; Giddens, Sutton 2013). Fundamentally, marriage is defined as "a socially recognised and sanctioned sexual union between two consenting adults" (Giddens, Sutton 2013: 441). However, in Western democracies, marriage has increasingly centred on affective individualism, wherein the union's success and longevity depend on the personal satisfaction of the partners, thereby catalysing the ongoing deinstitutionalisation of marriage (Bell 2000; Stone 1986).

From the late 1970s onwards, this process of deinstitutionalisation and erosion of social norms regulating behaviour within marriage has become particularly pronounced (Cherlin 2004: 848). First, because material and demographic changes such as improved living standards, declines in infant and overall mortality, and greater female labour market participation have reshaped family structures. Second, evolving cultural values increasingly prioritise individual emotional fulfilment derived from romantic relationships and the pursuit of self-realisation through personal expression (Cherlin 2004; 2020).

Consequently, the changing value system manifests in shifting perceptions of marriage as a social institution. Deinstitutionalised marriage is now commonly viewed as a personal achievement, signifying the culmination of a satisfying, self-chosen relationship (Cherlin 2004; 2020). By contrast, the traditional conception of marriage as fulfilling socially prescribed roles – such as spouse or parent – is diminishing. The repercussions of marital transitions extend beyond physical aspects to encompass profound effects on individuals' emotional wellbeing, aligning with broad social and political value trends documented by Díez Nicolas, Inglehart (1994). Although rising divorce rates partly stem from legislative liberalisation, they also signal deeper socio-cultural changes concerning marriage. Notably, divorced and separated individuals report higher dissatisfaction levels compared to their married counterparts, especially near the point of marital dissolution (Dehdari et al. 2022; Inglehart 1992).

Gendered patterns emerge in the aftermath of separation or divorce. Dehdari et al. (2022) observed a particularly strong demobilising impact of divorce on male electoral participation in Swedish data, with men exhibiting greater political disengagement than women. Further research on personal and economic crises' effects on political behaviour utilises social psychological frameworks highlighting negative emotions such as anxiety and anger (Kern 2010; Ojeda, Michener, Haselswerdt 2024; Reilly 2017).

Divorce specifically is identified as a factor diminishing electoral participation (Dehdari et al. 2022; Frödin Gruneau 2018). Putnam (1995: 671) attributes a moderate yet meaningful share of declining trust and reduced group membership to divorce. The erosion of social ties stemming from marital and familial dissolution undermines individuals' capacity for political engagement (Frödin Gruneau 2018; Reilly 2017). Beyond mobilisation, it is critical to investigate how separation or divorce may foster political radicalisation, potentially altering political orientations and interests (Kinder 2006). Putnam's (1995) thesis posits that decreased civic engagement, including reduced trust in institutions and political parties, may be aggravated by divorce: a trend likely amplified by post-materialist cultural emphases on individual self-expression and realisation.

2.3 Shifts in values and political changes

Individualisation, manifested through the adoption of post-materialist values, diminishes economic and class-based polarisation (Inglehart 1977). This perspective invited a reassessment of the classical cleavages, which traditionally encapsulated societal conflicts capable of polarising political systems (Inglehart, Norris 2016; Kriesi 2010; Lipset, Rokkan 1990). However, the current legitimacy crisis and heightened electoral volatility point to an alternative scenario, one characterised by issue-specific divides driven by individual value alignment rather than broad social cleavages (Kriesi 2010).

New political cleavages have thus emerged, exemplified by oppositions such as materialist vs post-materialist values, libertarian vs authoritarian orientations, self-expression vs survival priorities, and the Green-alternative-libertarian vs traditional-authoritarian-nationalist divide (Bornschier 2010; Kriesi 2010; Norris, Inglehart 2009). Therefore, denationalisation and globalisation have split societies into "winners" and "losers," with the latter experiencing alienation and value dislocation both economically and culturally. This disenchantment has provoked a repudiation of cosmopolitan, liberal, and globalisation-friendly values, including post-materialist ones (Inglehart, Norris 2016).

Underneath this realignment, a pronounced anti-establishment sentiment, conceptualised as a reaction to perceived threats is found. In fact, the emergent cleavage between establishment and anti-establishment camps primarily polarises on values rather than economic factors, with one pole embracing post-materialist, cosmopolitan liberalism endorsing social progress, individual autonomy, and self-actualisation; while the other upholds materialist principles, traditional institutions such as religion and family, and social order (Bornschier 2010; Inglehart et al. 1984).

This transformation is a crisis of institutional trust and political disaffection, observable in the rise of anti-establishment attitudes and scepticism towards democratic legitimacy. Within this framework, marriage and its dissolution through separation or divorce assume differing significance across the political spectrum. Crucially, non-adherence to post-materialist values does not preclude coexistence with those who do embrace them. Research on cultural shifts indicates that materialist individuals often value marriage and family as sources of fulfilment, whereas post-materialists prioritise individual leisure activities. Accordingly, two hypotheses arise from this duality: the tension between materialist and post-materialist values, and the political implications of marital dissolution.

Disaffection with a traditionally valued social institution, such as marriage, may correlate with distrust toward conventional, pro-establishment political actors. The pursuit of autonomy and personal growth through rejection of such social norms might translate politically into more radical orientations, distancing oneself from moderate establishment positions. Conversely, drawing on the cultural backlash theory, divorce might provoke political radicalisation as a response against perceived assaults on stable social institutions. Here divorce is experienced as the failure of a fundamental life project, eliciting emotions like anxiety and insecurity – factors known to influence political engagement – potentially triggering radical political reactions. Thus, it is hypothesised (RQ2) that divorced or separated individuals are more likely to exhibit political radicalism.

2.4 Disillusionment, identity, and radicalism

A pivotal concept in analysing contemporary political dynamics is what Rosanvallon (2020: 69) describes as positional emotions: affective responses epitomising the

resentment felt by individuals perceiving themselves as disregarded, marginalised, or neglected by those in power. This captures democratic resentment, emblematic of the "losers of globalisation," whose unsettled political identities and undermined self-worth materialise through such emotional states (Helbling, Jungkunz 2020; Illouz 2023; Steiner, Mader, Schoen 2023; Teney, Lacewell, De Wilde 2014; Vallespín, Bascuñán 2017: 105; Walter 2021).

Here lies a cognitive dissonance between broad statistical representations of societal conditions and the individual's lived experience that can be stark even among socioeconomically similar groups, owing to personal circumstances like family composition. This incongruence between macro-level data and micro-level realities engenders confusion regarding the true nature of societal issues. Therefore, political discourse fragments and becomes increasingly acrimonious, losing coherence and structure. The resulting tension between subjective perceptions and overarching narratives hampers the clear identification of social problems and complicates the development of effective solutions, thereby contaminating public debate and limiting society's capacity to engage constructively with pressing challenges, driving political life towards polarisation and extremes (Rosanvallon 2020: 69–70, 227–229).

The contemporary political landscape is further defined by political consumerism, wherein citizens harbour elevated expectations and demands for government accountability. However, the articulation of these demands often paradoxically weakens the legitimacy of the very institutions tasked with governance. This cyclical dynamic reinforces enduring disillusionment, stemming from widespread societal scepticism towards leaders and political entities. Since Hegel, delineating the multiplicity of the State alongside its unity has remained a defining challenge, demanding a delicate balance between collective identity and political representation (Duso 2004; Galindo Hervás 2021).

Modern electorates simultaneously exhibit heightened political activity while contributing to the erosion of political structures they seek to influence, cultivating an atmosphere of frustration and disenchantment. A paradox emerges: the expansion of representative democracy coincides with diminishing authentic political engagement. The pressures exerted by counter-democratic forces, illiberal tendencies, and threats to civil liberties (Mudde 2024) have engendered governmental caution, restraining reformist ambitions. Electorates increasingly prioritise preserving existing conditions over transformative aspirations, fostering a disconnection between political actors' conduct and citizen attitudes, perpetuating mutual mistrust between governors and governed (Rosanvallon 2008; Weaver 1986).

Globally, democracy faces growing risks of autocratisation (Lührmann, Medzihorsky, Lindberg 2021), exacerbated by the fragmentation of traditional party systems (Hernández, Kriesi 2016; Hooghe, Marks 2018), intensifying political polarisation (Gidron, Adams, Horne 2020), and sustained institutional disaffection (Crozier, Huntington, Watanuki 1975; Pharr, Putnam 2000; Mair 2013). These forces, compounded by socioeconomic and familial variables, predispose subsets of the electorate towards radical or authoritarian leanings, manifesting as support for coercive governance, hierarchical obedience, and traditionalist ideology (Adorno et al. 1950; Billiet, De Witte 1995; Allen 2017; Moffit 2015).

This crisis has produced sceptical, atomised societies towards experts and media, alongside anxieties over social change, thereby nourishing populism and radicalism (Forti 2021: 52–53). The assimilation of radical ideas into mainstream politics (Mudde 2021), the fragmented character of radicalism (Adorno 2020), and the connections between extremist movements such as masculinism and online radical forums (Stefanoni 2021) create a "pathological normality" threatening Western democratic foundations. Rodrik (1997) presciently warned that globalisation could entail social fragmentation and identity retrenchment, intensified by the accelerating erosion of liberal order fundamentals (Vallespín, Bascuñán 2017: 105).

Moreover, this crisis exhibits a generational dimension, with reactionary movements gaining ground particularly among men with lower educational attainment, who are especially susceptible to populist appeals. This phenomenon reflects an existential malaise compounded by insecurities rooted in traditional patriarchal socialisation (Murray 2012; Vallespín, Bascuñán 2017: 115).

2.5 Political radicalism, family, and self-placement

Within the most extreme ideological domains, coherent political thought is often replaced by rhetorical manoeuvres, facilitating the spread of radical ideas amid rapid technological diffusion, shaping electoral outcomes and generational perspectives. As traditional information sources fragment and cede ground, a decline in critical detachment and holistic understanding emerges, alongside a trend of secularisation. These shifts undermine sustained narrative coherence, reflective critique, and collective memory (Nicasio-Varea, Pérez-Gabaldón, Chavez 2023). Consequently, the prevailing politico-social context tends to promote acquiescence to external constraints rather than self-examination, supporting hypotheses

linking radicalisation with political polarisation and societal inertia (Innerarity 2023: 44).

At this juncture, Innerarity (2023: 75) identifies an electoral niche of fearful, confused individuals channelling discontent by endorsing figures embodying what they revile: negative mobilisation overshadowing affirmative democratic engagement. This landscape between politics and anti-politics, frequently manifesting as populism, arguably transcends traditional left–right dichotomies in explanatory power. Therefore, populism is variably construed – as strategy, intervention mode, experimental stance, or minimalist ideology – with adaptability through rhetorical elasticity as its core. It constructs a moral binary opposing a virtuous "people" to a corrupt "elite," thus gaining resonance through polarisation. However, populism's effects are predominantly deleterious: it intensifies societal polarisation, inconsistently bolsters electoral participation, and often engenders political intolerance, even within consensual systems. Affective polarisation tends to widen disparities in political engagement rather than mitigate democratic deficits (De la Torre, Peruzzotti 2008; Frei, Rovira-Kaltwasser 2008; Mudde 2004; Mudde, Rovira-Kaltwasser 2019; Phillips 2023).

Moreover, populism fuels radicalisation by appealing to a supposed majority feeling marginalised by a vocal minority believed to subvert equal citizenship. Both radical left and right utilise antagonistic rhetoric rooted in grievances about betrayal of tradition and popular will, directed at cosmopolitan liberalism perceived as complicit in exploitation, corruption, and subversion of sovereignty. Radicalism, akin to populism, stems from perceived social injustice and contravenes classical republican virtue ethics by enabling voter deflection of responsibility through vilification of officials (Gerbaudo 2023: 64–76; Malkopolou, Moffitt 2023).

This framework casts radical actors as taboo-breakers opposing "political correctness," exploiting political demystification enabled by citizen emancipation and asymmetries between economic integration and political jurisdiction (Mudde 2004; Surel 2011), channelling resentment from outsourcing, automation, job insecurity, and stagnant middle-class incomes (Muro 2017: 11). Beyond austerity's direct impact, stagnation infiltrates interpersonal and familial realms.

Such narratives resonate by appealing to desires for cultural homogeneity and regaining control, linked to promises of restoring lost socio-economic status. This is worsened by a narrowed political sphere where democratic institutions and electoral participation within liberal democracies and the EU appear increasingly ineffective (Matthews-Ferrero 2018: 103). Consequently, radical populism's drivers refine, creating discursive space for appeals to societal reconstruction through unity, recognition of difference, and emotionally charged rhetoric (Olivas Osuna 2020: 843).

This discourse occupies voids left by erosion of fundamental institutions such as family and employment, often blaming traditional political actors for personal failures. Giddens (1998: 23) presciently noted the attraction of radical proposals promising repair to fragmented solidarities. Paradoxically, new solidarities, especially familial, may nonetheless emerge amid rising divorce and separation.

Supporting this, research shows populist sympathisers do not inherently reject liberal democratic institutions but explicitly repudiate political parties as suitable representatives, holding them accountable for eroding elements vital to personal aspirations (Zaslove, Meijers 2023). Radicalism emphasises concepts of home, family, and community, with "house" connoting intimacy (Alvira 1999: 19). Nativism, a fusion of nationalism and xenophobia, focuses on idealised family roles and the home as a national bastion, endorsing traditional gender norms (Akkerman, De Lange, Rooduijn 2016; Mudde 2007). While right-wing parties promote these values, support also exists among non-nativists, indicating traditional gender attitudes foster radicalisation beyond nativist factions (Akkerman 2015; Christley 2022).

Household structure thus encodes life projects significant for radicalisation. Parental ethnic socialisation, familial extremism, and intra-family conflict positively correlate with radicalisation, whereas higher socioeconomic status, larger families, and strong familial bonds confer protection (Anwar, Wildan 2020; Zych, Nasaescu 2022).

Recent studies (Roll, De Graaf 2024) reveal declining male income heightens sympathy for extremist right-wing parties; for women, this effect appears chiefly when they are primary earners. Family income reductions correlate with increased extremist sympathy across genders, challenging simplistic gender-gap assumptions (Givens 2004). This encompasses divorced, separated, or widowed individuals, whose emotional distress, identity disruption, social isolation, and internal conflict increase radicalisation vulnerability. These stem from frustration and emotional susceptibility, with radicalism offering clear blame attribution for familial fragmentation. Accordingly, the hypothesis (RQ3) suggests radicalism is more prevalent among men over 31 who are divorced or separated and identify with right-wing ideologies.

3. Methodology

This research utilises data from the CIS Study No. 3420, specifically the September 2023 Barometer, to address

the RQs posed. The survey employed a sampling of the Spanish population aged 18 and over with 10,101 interviews in stratified random sampling, with selection of individuals adhered to sex and age quotas. The sampling error, assuming simple random sampling, is ±1% at a 95.5% confidence level (two sigmas).

For data analysis, quantitative methods were applied. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, graphs, contingency tables) provided an initial overview. Ideological positioning was operationalised via the ESCIDEOL variable, with recoding to isolate radical left (1 and 2) and radical right (9 and 10) extremes. Marital status (ECIVIL) – with divorced and separated grouped – served as the primary explanatory variable, complemented by sex (SEXO) and age (EDAD) to incorporate gender and generational dimensions.

To test associations between marital status and radical ideological identification, chi-square test, Likelihood Ratio, Risk Test, and Linear-by-Linear Association assess statistical significance. Binary logistic regression estimates how divorced or separated status influenced the odds of radical

positioning, controlling for additional variables. Further, multinomial logistic regression examines how marital status categories predicted identification across the full ideological spectrum (coded 1 = married, 2 = single, 3 = widowed, 4 = separated/divorced), with particular focus on extremities.

The choice of ideological self-placement as the dependent variable rests on three premises: first, Spanish citizens align politically more on ideological blocs than party affiliation, especially post-2015 amid political fragmentation (Orriols 2021); second, CIS variables typically used for constructing radicalisation indexes (vote recall, party sympathy) are limited by coding constraints and high electoral volatility, reducing their descriptive power; and third, vote recall elicited a high proportion (25.7%) of non-expressive answers (blank, null votes, abstentions), while ideological self-placement non-response was notably lower (5.3%). This renders ideological self-placement a more precise measure of radicalism, reflecting ideological attitudes over party allegiances without restriction to limited response options.
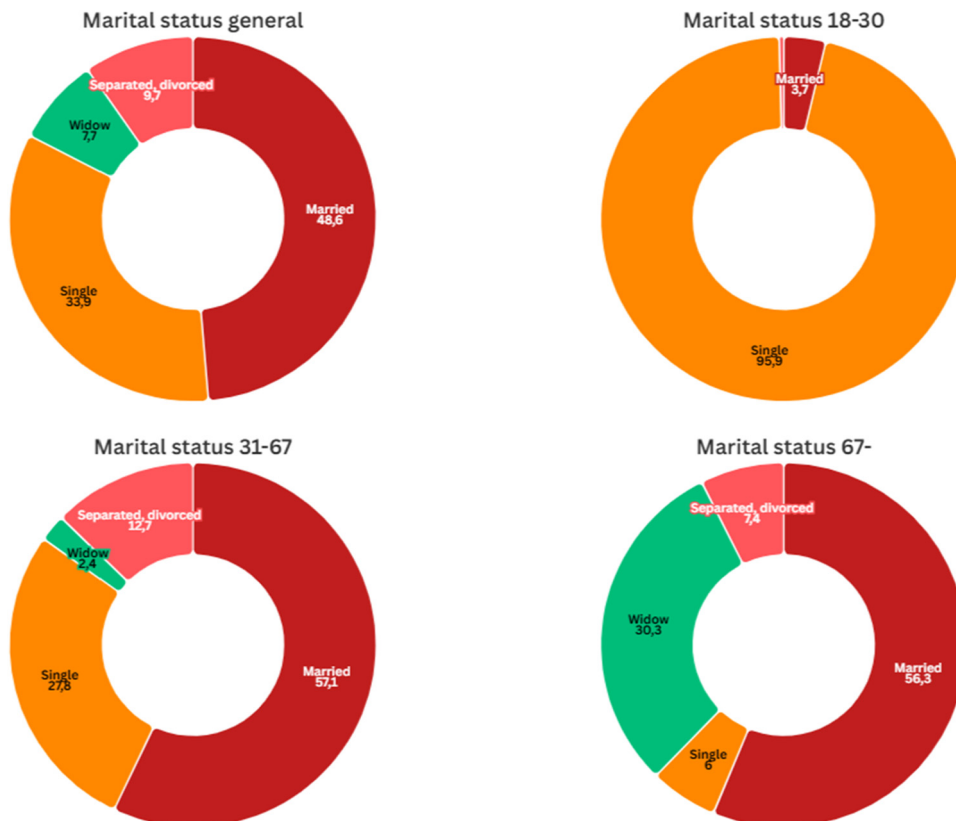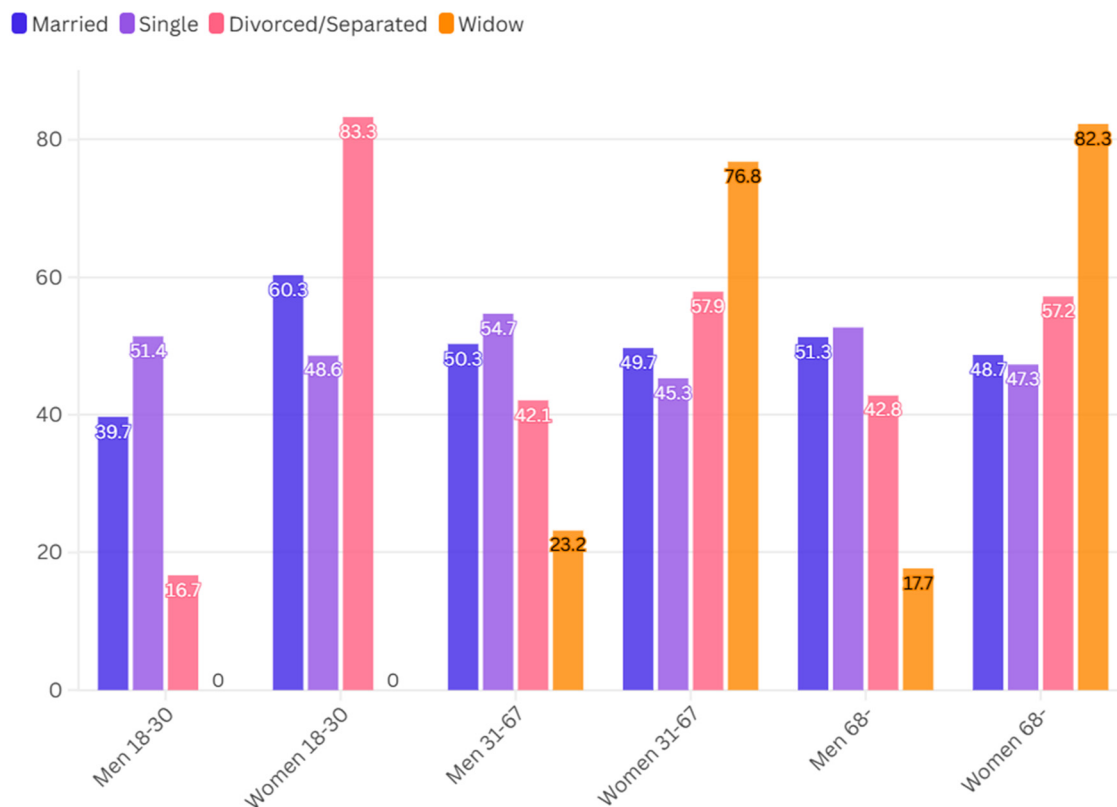

Figure 1. Marital status age distribution.

Source: Data from the CIS Study No. 3420. The graphical design was made with Flourish.

Figure 2. Marital status distribution per age and gender.
Source: Data from the CIS Study No. 3420. The graphical design was made with Flourish.

4. Results

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of marital status across different age groups. In general, marriage predominates (48.6%), followed by single status (33.9%). The 18–30 cohort exhibits an overwhelming majority of singles (95.9%), with minimal married individuals (3.7%). Also, the 31–67 age group shows a shift towards marriage (57.1%), though a significant proportion remain single (27.8%): notably, divorce and separation rates increase (12.7%). Among those 67 and older, marriage remains prevalent (56.3%), but widowhood becomes substantial (30.3%); this age group also shows the lowest proportion of singles (6%). Specifically, divorce rates appear to peak in middle age and decline in later life, suggesting age-specific patterns in marital dissolution.

Continuing with the analysis, Figure 2 reveals distinct gender-based patterns in marital status across age groups. In the 18–30 cohort, women are significantly more likely to be married (60.3%) or divorced/separated (83.3%) than men. Meanwhile, the 31–67 age group shows a more balanced distribution, with men slightly more likely to be married (50.3%) or single (54.7%), while women

dominate the divorced/separated (57.9%) and widowed (76.8%) categories. This trend continues in the 68+ group, where men maintain a slight lead in marriage (51.3%) and singlehood (52.7%), while women overwhelmingly represent the widowed category (82.3%). In other words, these results suggest that women tend to marry earlier and are more likely to experience marital dissolution or widowhood across all age groups.

At first sight, results shown by Figure 3 reveal notable gender disparities in ideological self-placement across the political spectrum: women exhibit a slightly higher tendency towards extreme left positions (categories 1–2), with 18.6% compared to 15.6% for men, who conversely show a marginally higher representation in moderate left and centrist positions (categories 3–5). On the other hand, the extreme right (categories 9–10) demonstrates a subtle female predominance at 7.1% vs 6% for males. Interestingly, the results suggest a more pronounced polarisation among women, with higher percentages at both extremes. However, the centrist position (category 5) remains the most populous for both genders, indicating a general preference for moderate political stances.
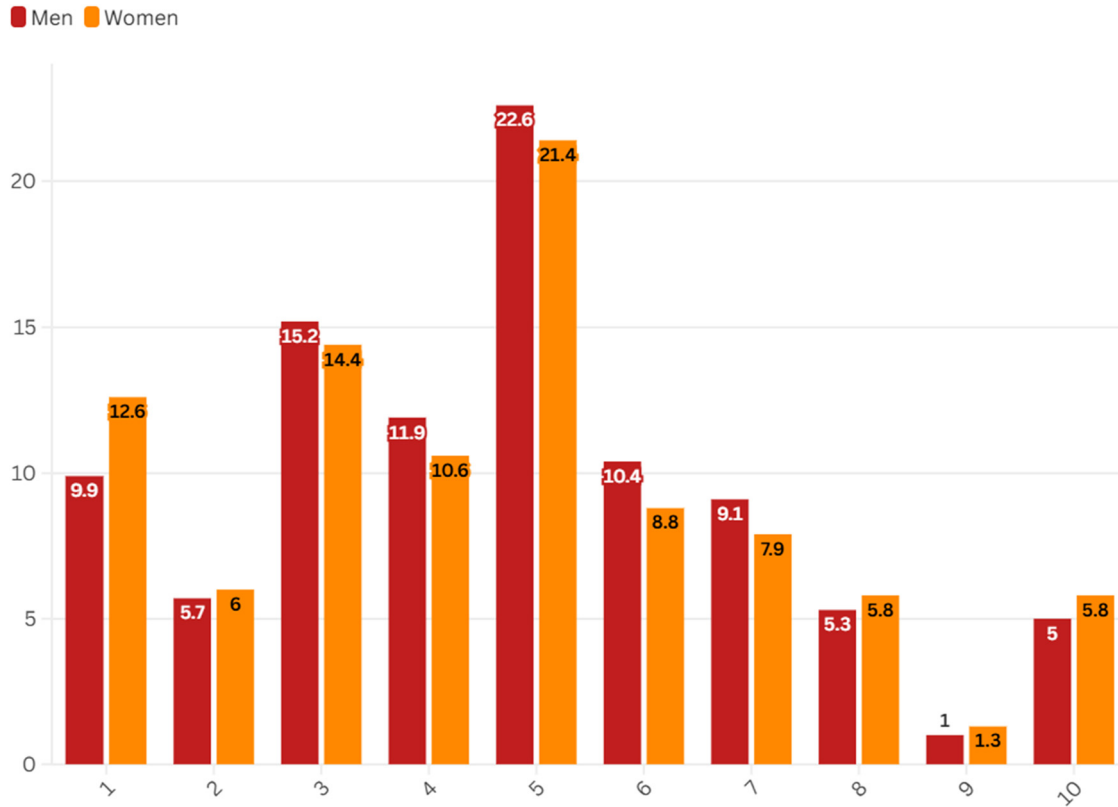
Figure 3. Leftright self-placement (1–10).

Source: Data from the CIS Study No. 3420. The graphical design was made with Flourish.

Finally, the analysis of Figure 4 reveals complex inter-actions between age, gender, marital status, and ideological leanings. Radical self-placement exhibits a notable age-related trend, with older cohorts (68+) demonstrating a significantly higher propensity for radical views (42.4%) compared to younger groups (28–28.4%): this tendency is particularly pronounced among divorced and separated individuals aged 31 and above. Also, gender disparities are evident across all age categories, with women consistently displaying higher radical percentages than men, as well as marital status emerging as an influential factor, especially for the 68+ divorced/separated category, where radicalism reaches its peak at 60.6%.

Curiously, no divorced or separated individuals in the 18–30 age group identify as radical, as the distribution between radical left and right orientations varies with age, showing a gradual shift towards right-wing radicalism in older cohorts; however, the leftist tendency remains predo-minant, oscillating between 60 and 80% of the distribution. This leftward inclination is particularly pronounced among women, especially those who are divorced or separated. These findings show the complex relationship between demographic factors, such as marital status, and ideological

self-placement. This suggests the need for more nuanced approaches to understanding political radicalisation, an issue this study seeks to explore further through the application of advanced quantitative techniques, as shown in the following tables.

The results of the Chi-square test, as presented in Table 1, reveal a statistically significant association between radical ideology and marital status (χ^2 = 158.620, df = 3, p < 0.001). This robust finding, derived from a substantial sample of 10,090 cases, suggests a non-random relationship between

	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square		3	<0.001
Likelihood ratio	158,620	3	<0.001
Linear-by-linear association	71,976	1	<0.001
No. of valid cases			10,090

Table 1. Chi-square test.

Source: Authors calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420.

Age group	Civil state	Radical presence	Total	Total radical %	Radical left/right distrib.
18-30	All		1572	28.40	78.88/21.20
18-30 Men	All		797	24.10	72.39/26.38
18-30 Women	All		772	32.90	82.76/17.24
18-30	Divorced, separated		6	0.00	-
18-30 Men	Divorced, separated		1	0.00	-
18-30 Women	Divorced, separated		5	0.00	-
31-67	All		6640	28.00	75.39/24.61
31-67 Men	All		3212	23.90	75.42/24.58
31-67 Women	All		3229	32.00	76.51/23.49
31-67	Divorced, separated		821	28.00	75.3/24.7
31-67 Men	Divorced, separated		346	26.30	69.62/30.38
31-67 Women	Divorced, separated		475	40.00	77.98/22.02
68-	All		2079	42.40	61.11/38.89
68- Men	All		869	32.20	63.20/36.80
68- Women	All		1211	36.20	60.04/39.96
68-	Divorced, separated		155	60.60	77.5/22.5
68- Men	Divorced, separated		73	31.50	55/45
68 - Women	Divorced, separated		82	46.30	68.97/31.03

Figure 4. Radicalism self-placement distribution per age and civil state: overall.
Source: Authors calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420. The graphical design was made with Flourish.

		Value	Approximate significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.125	<0.001
	Cramer's *V*	0.125	<0.001
No. of valid cases			10,090

Table 2. Symmetric measures test.
Source: Authors' calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420.

these variables. The likelihood ratio and linear-by-linear association tests corroborate this conclusion, both yielding *p*-values below 0.001. Notably, the analysis meets the assumptions for Chi-square testing, with all expected cell counts exceeding 5. While these results demonstrate a significant correlation, it is crucial to emphasise that they do not imply causality. Further investigation into potentially confounding variables and the nature of this relationship is warranted to elucidate the complex interplay between marital status and radical ideological leanings, as shown in Tables 2–4.

Table 2 presents the results of Phi and Cramer's *V* measures of association, which provide insight into the

strength of the relationship between our variables. Both measures yield identical values of 0.125 ($p < 0.001$), indicating, as shown in Table 1, a statistically significant association. Interpreting these values within the conventional framework for effect sizes in social sciences, where 0.10–0.30 typically denotes a weak association, we can conclude that the observed relationship, although statistically significant, is not particularly strong. This nuanced result underscores the complexity of factors potentially influencing radical ideological orientations and points at the need for cautious interpretation within the broader context of the research, which makes compulsory to establish some regression models to explore even more this field.

The results of the Risk estimate analysis, presented in Table 3, suggest a significant association between marital status and radical ideology. Specifically, the results for marital status indicate that divorced individuals are more likely to be radical compared to those who are not divorced, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.052 to 1.389. This supports the hypothesis regarding the potential inclination of divorced individuals towards radicalism. These findings suggest that there are opportunities to further explore the relationship between this

	95% Confidence interval		
	Value	Lower	Upper
OR for marital status	1.209	1.052	1.389
For cohort ideological self-location = Non-radical	1.064	1.014	1.116
For cohort ideological self-location = Radical	0.880	0.804	0.964
No. of valid cases	10,090		

Table 3. Risk estimate analysis.
Source: Authors' calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420.

category of marital status and ideological radicalism, which can be explored through more advanced analytical models as outlined in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4's regression analysis also reveals a statistically significant relationship between marital status and radical ideology. Furthermore, the positive B coefficient indicates that as marital status grows, understanding this as the status changing from married to divorced or separated,

the likelihood of radical ideology increases. The odds ratio (Exp(B) = 1.205) suggests a 20.5% increase in the odds of radical ideology for each step in marital status. This implies that married individuals may be less prone to radical ideological views compared to single or divorced individuals. However, there are conflicting interpretations regarding which marital status is most associated with radicalism. According to this, it seems crucial to note that while a significant relationship exists, other factors not included in this model may influence radical ideology. Additionally, causality cannot be directly inferred from these results, and further research is needed to clarify the nature of this relationship, which hinds the necessity to develop a more detailed model, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 contains a multinomial logistic regression analysis that offers significant insights into the demographic factors associated with self-placement as "Radical" vs "Non-radical." In a nutshell, the model examines the impact of marital status, gender, and age on ideological self-placement. Marital status emerges as a significant predictor, particularly for the first category: married individuals. This group demonstrates a 28.8% lower probability

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1[a]	Marital status	0.187	0.022	71.650	1	<0.001	1.205
	Constant	−1.139	0.046	611.754	1	<0.001	0.320

[a]Variable(s) entered in step 1: Marital status.
Table 4. Regression model 1.

Source: Authors' calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420.

								95% Confidence interval for Exp(B)	
Ideological self-location[a]		B	Std. error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	Lower bound	Upper bound
Radical	Intercept	0.014	0.086		1	0.872			
	Married	−0.340	0.075		1	<0.001	0.712	0.614	0.825
	Single	−0.053	0.084		1	0.526	0.948	0.805	1.117
	Widow	0.157	0.107		1	0.140	1.170	0.949	1.443
	Divorced/Separated	0[b]	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	Man	−0.442	0.045	97.009	1	<0.001	0.643	0.589	0.702
	Woman	0[b]	.	.	0	.	.	.	.
	18–30 years	−0.660	0.091	52.096	1	<0.001	0.517	0.432	0.618
	31–67 years	−0.551	0.060	85.205	1	<0.001	0.576	0.513	0.648
	68−	0[b]	.	.	0	.	.	.	.

[a]The reference category is: Non-radical.
[b]This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.
Table 5. Regression model 2.

Source: Authors' calculations with data from the CIS Study No. 3420.

of radical self-placement compared to the reference category, known to be divorced and separated individuals ($B = -0.340$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.712$). Interestingly, other marital status categories did not yield statistically significant results, suggesting a unique effect for married status in non-radicalisation.

According to the results, gender also plays a crucial role in ideological self-placement. The first category, male, exhibits a 35.7% reduced likelihood of radical alignment ($B = -0.442$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.643$). Presumably, these findings indicate a substantial gender disparity in radical self-placement. Age also demonstrates the most pronounced effect among the variables examined. The youngest cohort displays a striking 48.3% lower probability of radical self-categorisation ($B = -0.660$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.517$); meanwhile, the second age group (31–67 years old) follows with a 42.4% lower likelihood ($B = -0.551$, $p < 0.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.576$): these results suggest, indeed, a strong inverse relationship between youth and radical ideological alignment.

In conclusion, these findings propose that factors such as being married, a male, and between 18 and 30 years old are associated with a decreased propensity for radical ideological self-placement, providing valuable insights into the demographic correlates of political radicalisation, and offering a nuanced understanding of how personal characteristics may influence ideological self-placement. Finally, a prudential warning may be done to understand that it is crucial to interpret these results cautiously, considering potential confounding factors and the complex nature of ideological formation. According to this, our RQs can be answered as it follows:

RQ.1. The radical profile is not predominantly masculine. In the case analysed, radicalism is more prevalent among women, with higher percentages of ideological self-placement on both the radical left and right. This tendency is more pronounced, almost double in number, on the radical left.

RQ.2. Indeed, there exists an effective correlation demonstrating a greater propensity for separated individuals to position themselves in radical political stances.

RQ.3. Marital status, specifically being married, along with being male and falling within the age range of 18–30 years, constitutes the demographic profile least associated with radical self-placement. Conversely, left-wing ideologies and being a female emerge as more prevalent characteristics among those exhibiting radical self-placement. The propensity for adhering to radical postulates increases in the following order of marital status: married, single, widowed, and divorced or separated, with the latter two being the marital status most conducive to radical self-

placement, corroborating the idea proposed in this research and addressed in previous RQs.

5. Discussion

The results reveal that among all marital statuses, being divorced or separated exerts the strongest influence on individuals' likelihood to self-identify with more radical ideological positions. The dissolution of marital and family ties appears to increase individuals' susceptibility to radical political ideologies, potentially functioning as coping mechanisms for personal upheaval or as expressions of dissatisfaction with societal norms. Notably, this tendency is predominantly manifested by women, who are more prone to radical ideological self-placement on both the right and left of the political spectrum. Within this trend, divorced men and women alike show a greater inclination toward radical left-wing positions rather than the right.

These findings enrich the expanding literature on current political dynamics, aligning with recent studies on political indignation (Innerarity 2023) and the ramifications of affective polarisation and radicalism (Mudde, Rovira-Kaltwasser 2019; Phillips 2023). The literature establishes a strong link between these phenomena and the intensifying vilification of public officials, especially traditional political parties, which is a common citizen response to perceived social injustices (Gerbaudo 2023; Malkopolou, Moffitt 2023; Zaslove, Meijers 2023). This political disaffection, coupled with extensive social and political transformations, highlights ideological self-placement as a particularly salient indicator of these shifts (Casal Bértoa, Rama 2021; Inglehart et al. 1984). Moreover, the present study addresses a critical gap by emphasising the role of family well-being and personal relationships as key factors in preventing radicalisation. It suggests that radical inclinations may emerge from personal instability or perceived failure in individual life projects (Anwar, Wildan 2020; Zych, Nasaescu 2022).

The findings complement existing research on the effects of life disruptions and marital transitions on political behaviour, including participation (Frödin Gruneau 2018; Ojeda, Michener, Haselswerdt 2024; Reilly 2017). A notable gender disparity in radical self-placement corresponds with Dehdari et al. (2022), who observed that men tend to become politically demobilised following divorce more than women. This reduction in electoral participation may influence party affiliation and vote choices, supporting ideological self-placement as a proxy to evaluate the radical political stance of divorced individuals.

Regarding divorced women, the results resonate with Cherlin's (2020) analysis of marriage as an evolving institution. Contemporary marriages emphasise negotiated roles rather than traditional assumptions, reflecting individual aspirations for self-expression and personal fulfilment. This turn towards individualism corresponds with a broader social and political cleavage between traditional social order values and liberal universalist principles supporting social progress, self-expression, and self-realisation. Within this liberal framework, the women's liberation movement offers a critical lens to understand divorced women's political orientations (Ambert 1985; Inglehart et al. 1984).

Future research might expand on varying factors such as age cohorts, gender differences, and distinctions between left- and right-wing radicalism. Expanding the geographical and cultural scope can help uncover whether patterns observed are universal or culture-specific. This would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of how marital status intersects with radical political ideologies across diverse societies and political environments. Incorporating political party affiliation could provide a clearer view of how radical ideological tendencies translate into concrete political engagement, such as voting behaviour, thereby enriching interpretations of ideological self-placement. Also, further research should assess whether feminist positions are inherently perceived as radical, even among self-identified feminists.

Methodologically, this study's quantitative approach could be extended to better grasp political radicalisation's complexity. Utilisation of advanced statistical techniques, multidimensional analyses, and interaction modelling beyond the two regression models applied here may yield deeper phenomenological insights. Moreover, ideological self-placement as an indicator may be influenced by sociopolitical contextual factors unique to the sample, limiting generalisability. Longitudinal data collection would further allow tracking temporal trends and regularities in political radical attitudes. Moreover, research offers only a cross-sectional view; longitudinal studies are needed for deeper understanding of marital status and radicalisation.

In conclusion, this research accomplishes a dual purpose: it draws attention to marital status as a critical but underexplored sociodemographic factor within the study of ideological radicalism, and it offers a methodological foundation for further refinement. By highlighting the nexus of marital dissolution and political extremism, it fills a gap in the literature and lays groundwork for future investigations into the complex interplay between personal life circumstances and political attitudes.

6. Concluding remarks

This study provides significant insights into the interplay between demographic factors, particularly marital status, and political radicalisation in Spain. The findings reveal nuanced patterns in ideological self-placement, challenging some preconceived notions and confirming others. Contrary to previous theories, the Spanish radical identification is not predominantly masculine: women exhibit a higher propensity for radical ideological self-placement across both ends of the political spectrum, with a stronger tendency towards the radical left.

Also, there is a significant correlation between marital status and radical political stances, with separated and divorced individuals showing a greater inclination towards extreme ideological positions, suggesting that marital dissolution may act as a catalyst for ideological radical shifts, with the demographic profile least associated with radical self-placement resulting in married males aged 18–30. Conversely, being female and adhering to left-wing ideologies is more prevalent among those exhibiting radical self-placement, with propensity for radical ideological positioning increasing progressively from married individuals to singles, widowed, and finally, divorced or separated individuals.

Following recent research on political indignation trends and affective polarisation, this study offers novel insights into the complex interplay between personal life events and ideological positioning, while complementing existing literature on the effects of life disruptions on political behaviour, noting a gender gap in radical self-placement. Thus, the higher prevalence of radical ideological self-placement among divorced women aligns with theories of the institutional evolution of marriage, women's emancipation movements, and the trajectory towards individualism in spousal relationships.

Future research should further explore the multifaceted nature of political radicalisation, considering a wider range of variables and their intricate interactions. Nonetheless, this study contributes significantly to the field by exploring the intersection of marital status, especially divorced or separated, and ideological extremism, paving the way for more sophisticated analyses of political radicalisation in relation to sociodemographic factors.

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Author contributions

CGT was responsible for the methodology and quantitative analysis, as well as for developing the second part of the theoretical framework. MBT elaborated the first part of the theoretical framework. Both CGT and MBT were equally involved in the research design, formulation of research questions, overall revisions, and the preparation of the introduction and conclusions. CGT additionally undertook the overall revision and formal and linguistic editing of the manuscript and acted as the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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