

Territorial Polarization and Ideological Divergence in Spain: Implications for Economic Behaviour and Regional Dynamics

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Abstract

This research examines the long-term evolution of ideological self-placement in Spain, focusing on the growing territorial divergence between Catalonia and the Community of Madrid. While the Catalan independence movement (*procés*) has been extensively studied from political and institutional perspectives, its broader economic and business implications—through changes in citizens' attitudes and preferences—remain less explored. Using the Spanish Cohort Ideology Database (SCID), which harmonizes survey data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) over the period 1977–2025, the study explores how ideological positioning has evolved across time, regions, and age groups. The empirical strategy combines descriptive analysis with regression models including interaction effects between region and key political periods (post-2012 and post-2017), as well as robustness checks using individual-level data. The results show that ideological divergence between Catalonia and Madrid is a long-term process that predates the *procés* but intensifies significantly during this period. The ideological gap between both regions increases by more than half a point on a 1–10 scale after 2012. In addition, the analysis reveals an increase in ideological dispersion, particularly in Catalonia, suggesting higher internal heterogeneity in preferences. These findings have relevant implications for economic and business environments. Territorial polarization may affect consumer preferences, investment decisions, regional economic expectations, and firm location strategies, especially in contexts of political uncertainty. The results suggest that political conflict can contribute to the fragmentation of economic perceptions across regions, potentially influencing market behaviour and institutional trust.

Keywords: territorial divergence, political polarization, regional economic dynamics, ideological self-placement

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.66414/mlabs.9745>

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