

Who Are the Two Spains?

Attitudes, Lifestyles, and Social Sorting

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Abstract

This article revisits the idea of “the two Spains” through the lens of lifestyle-based social sorting. Drawing on an original survey of 3,015 respondents conducted in June 2024, it examines how political identities are embedded in cultural practices. Using statistical techniques for dimension reduction and clustering, the study identifies two dominant lifestyle formations—*Progressives* and *Conservatives*—that mirror Spain’s main ideological cleavage. These groups diverge not only in moral and political orientations, but also in cultural engagement, leisure activities, mobility, and attitudes toward minorities, underscoring the social embeddedness of political conflict. A secondary analysis further disaggregates this divide into four clusters—*Progs*, *Tepids*, *Moderates*, and *Disengaged*—which capture heterogeneity in cultural participation, political alignment, and daily practices. Extending lifestyle polarization research into a multiparty European context, the article contributes to political and cultural sociology by showing that divisions in Spain are increasingly lived through routine behaviors and cultural tastes.

Keywords: political polarization; lifestyles; social sorting; Spain; cluster analysis

1 Introduction

In June 2023, during the general election campaign, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez appeared on *El Hormiguero*, Spain’s most-watched television program. In that widely viewed interview, he referred to the existence of “dos Españas” (two Spains), pointing directly to the polarization shaping the national climate. His comments underscored the difficulty of forging consensus between the main center-left and center-right parties, while also reminding audiences of the deep fractures in Spanish society. The phrase “the two Spains” has long served as a shorthand for the country’s enduring divides, encapsulating tensions between competing visions of identity: one more traditional, religious, and hierarchical, the other more secular, progressive, and critical of established orders. Historically, it has carried across debates on centralization and regional autonomy, the role of the Church, the scope of individual rights, and the pace of cultural modernization (Juliá, 2004). While its origins lie in earlier conflicts, the notion continues to resonate, functioning as a metaphor for cleavages that cut across ideology, culture, and everyday life.

Though forged in Spain’s particular history, the idea of “two Spains” reflects broader dynamics of polarization seen in many democracies, where entrenched divides complicate consensus-building. Polarization has become a pervasive feature of contemporary life, undermining social cohesion, eroding democratic norms, and amplifying risks such as disinformation, conflict, and ineffective responses to global challenges (World Economic Forum, 2024). Recent European developments highlight the urgency of this problem, including the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, the rise of radical-right parties, and contentious debates on migration, climate policy, and gender equality. Polarization is thus increasingly a European phenomenon with significant consequences for governance and everyday life.

Polarization is a multifaceted and dynamic process that manifests across social domains (Lelkes, 2016; Levin, Milner, & Perrings, 2021). It is driven by two interrelated forces: top-down polarization stemming from the radicalization of political elites and their constituencies (Rodríguez-Teruel, 2020; Tworzecki, 2019), and bottom-up social sorting, whereby individuals align into distinct ideological and social communities (Mason, 2016; Harteveld, 2021a). While the former has received extensive attention, the latter remains largely underexplored outside the United States. Although scholars increasingly note feedback loops

whereby mass-level polarization shapes elite behavior (Davis & Dunaway, 2016; Leonard et al., 2021), polarized attitudes are still often studied as if confined to the political sphere.

This paper approaches polarization as a social phenomenon that permeates everyday interactions and networks. While political preferences both shape and are shaped by these dynamics, we argue that the roots of polarization lie in broader patterns of social, demographic, and geographic sorting. In the United States, partisan identities are increasingly intertwined with leisure activities, consumer choices, and aesthetic preferences (DellaPosta, Shi, & Macy, 2015; Mason, 2018). In Europe, similar processes are emerging: cultural practices such as digital engagement, participation in the arts, and consumption of cultural goods are stratified by education, income, and class, producing enduring cleavages in social identity (Helsper et al., 2024; Katsillis, 2024). Other studies show that cultural participation and leisure behaviors remain strongly tied to inequality and differentiation across European societies (Hanquinet, 2022; Wiertz, 2021). Building on this tradition, our study examines whether such stratification is mirrored in political alignments in Spain.

Spain provides a valuable case for this analysis. The long-standing narrative of the “two Spains” has framed conflicts from the civil war to the democratic transition, while recent disputes over territorial governance, the rise of radical parties such as Vox and Podemos, and debates on gender, family, and immigration have intensified divisions. These dynamics unfold within a multiparty system that contrasts with the U.S. two-party model, offering a unique opportunity to study lifestyle-based sorting under different institutional conditions. Against this backdrop, this paper presents the first systematic analysis of how political ideology intersects with cultural practices and lifestyles in Spain, addressing the core question of whether current ideological and partisan divides are reflected in differences in tastes, attitudes, and daily routines.

To investigate how polarization is embedded in lifestyles and attitudes in Spain, we fielded an original online survey with a stratified national sample of 3,015 adult respondents in June 2024. The questionnaire covered a broad array of domains—from leisure habits, musical preferences, and mobility patterns to personal values, moral beliefs, and political orientations. Using a dimensionality-reduction technique, we condensed this dataset into interpretable indices across thematic blocks. These indices formed the basis for a k-means clustering anal-

ysis, through which we identified distinct lifestyle segments. We then examined how these clusters correlated with sociodemographic characteristics and political variables, including ideological self-placement and party identification.

Our analysis reveals two complementary lenses on lifestyle polarization in Spain. The two-cluster solution shows a stark divide between *Progressives* and *Conservatives*, mapping directly onto the country’s main ideological cleavage: Progressives are culturally engaged, secular, and left-leaning, while Conservatives are more religious, family-oriented, and right-leaning. A secondary four-cluster specification provides a more fine-grained view, distinguishing subsets of Progressives and Conservatives (*Progs* and *Moderates*), alongside a centrist *Tepid* cluster with middling engagement and political ambivalence, and a younger, more educated yet politically *Disengaged* cluster with weak cultural and partisan attachments. More broadly, the findings demonstrate that lifestyle-based polarization is a general process in contemporary democracies, not limited to the two-party institutional setting of the United States. At the same time, they underscore the persistence of Spain’s overarching left–right divide and the heterogeneity of lifestyle formations within it. By documenting these patterns, the study shows how everyday behavior and cultural practices contribute to the reproduction of political polarization in a multiparty context.

2 Social Sorting and Lifestyle Polarization

Most studies of polarization in Europe focus on elite-driven dynamics and their effects on voter behavior, including ideological and affective polarization as well as patterns of partisan alignment (Reiljan, 2020; Harteveld, 2021a).

The concept of *ideological polarization* refers to the growing divergence between political parties, both in their symbolic positioning along the left–right spectrum and in the content of their policy platforms (Dalton, 2008). In such systems, parties become more internally cohesive while accentuating their differences from rivals. A related phenomenon is *partisan alignment*, whereby specific social or demographic groups consistently occupy opposing sides of political debates. In the American context, scholars have documented the increasing alignment of partisan identity with a wide range of social characteristics and policy views (McCarty et al., 2016; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2019), alongside rising *issue polarization* that links partisan identity to broader patterns of policy meaning-making (Kozlowski & Murphy, 2021; Nelson, 2025). In Europe, similar dynamics

have been observed in multiparty settings, with cleavages over immigration, integration, and redistribution reinforcing partisan divides (Kriesi et al., 2006; van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009; Hernández & Kriesi, 2016).

Beyond ideology, polarization is also expressed through affective responses toward political actors and partisans. Known variously as *affective polarization* (Iyengar et al., 2019), *partyism* (Sunstein, 2015), or *political sectarianism* (Finkel et al., 2020), this form is characterized by positive feelings toward co-partisans and hostility toward political opponents. Comparative research shows that affective polarization is not confined to two-party systems. In Europe, citizens display clear patterns of in-group favoritism and out-group hostility across multiple parties, often structured more strongly around cultural than economic issues (Reiljan, 2020; Hartevelt, 2021a). In Spain, affective polarization has intensified in the past decade, particularly in the wake of the Catalan independence crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic (Galais & Balinhas, 2025). Together, these findings underline that affective polarization is a general democratic challenge, not solely an American one.

Both ideological and affective polarization reflect a top-down dynamic, in which elite rhetoric and behavior shape mass attitudes (Jost et al., 2022). Yet research in the United States shows that bottom-up processes also matter: individuals increasingly self-select into communities where most residents share similar political and cultural values (Bishop, 2008). This geographic sorting reinforces ideological segregation and facilitates homophily in everyday interactions. Scholars have further distinguished between polarization over specific policy issues and polarization rooted in social identity, showing that partisan alignment often generates affective bias, political anger, and activism even when policy differences are not sharply defined (Mason, 2015; Kozlowski & Murphy, 2021; Nelson, 2025). Baldassarri and Goldberg (2014) extend this perspective by highlighting that citizens differ not only in what they believe but also in how coherently their beliefs are structured. Building on this, DellaPosta, Shi, and Macy (2015) demonstrate how ideological divisions permeate lifestyles and aesthetic preferences—producing cultural archetypes such as “latte liberals” and “bird-hunting conservatives.” Importantly, these patterns cannot be explained solely by demographics. While such dynamics have been well documented in the United States, lifestyle-based polarization remains largely unexplored in Spain and much of Europe.

3 Methods

3.1 The NORPOL Survey

Our analysis draws on the NORPOL Survey, fielded in June 2024 on a stratified national sample of 3,015 adult respondents in Spain. The sample was constructed using quota sampling to mirror the demographic composition of the Spanish population along gender, educational attainment, age, municipality size, and regional distribution. Fieldwork was conducted through the online panel of Netquest, and the dataset is publicly available (Miller et al., 2025), ensuring transparency and replicability.¹ The questionnaire combined original items with batteries adapted from widely used international and Spanish surveys,² ensuring both comparability with earlier research and high construct validity. For example, the battery on moral foundations closely parallels items from the World Values Survey, while the feeling thermometer replicates a widely used instrument for assessing affective polarization. This design allows us to situate our findings within a broader international tradition while also capturing lifestyle domains specific to the Spanish context.

The questionnaire was organized into six thematic blocks. The first block focused on leisure habits, including reading, attending concerts, watching television, practicing sports, and participating in cultural events. It also measured musical preferences—ranging from classical to reggaetón—as well as sports,

¹As with most online panels, web-based data collection presents several methodological challenges. Coverage and self-selection biases may arise because individuals without stable Internet access or with lower digital literacy are underrepresented, while politically engaged or opinionated citizens tend to be overrepresented. Although stratified quota sampling help mitigate these issues, online panels remain nonprobability-based and may differ from the general population on unobserved traits. Comparative studies show that online respondents often display greater ideological consistency and stronger affective polarization, which may affect absolute estimates but less so relational patterns. These limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting results, particularly regarding levels rather than associations. See Simmons and Bobo (2015) for an in-depth discussion of the inferential challenges of nonprobability Internet surveys.

²Leisure, musical, and cultural practices were drawn from the Spanish Survey on Cultural Habits and Practices; sports activities from the Spanish Survey on Sports Habits; dietary and media habits from the General Media Survey; moral and political values, as well as questions on redistribution, the environment, immigration, and the EU, from the World Values Survey and the German Longitudinal Election Study. Self-placement on the left–right scale and party proximity were adapted from the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS) barometers; the feeling thermometer battery, covering 26 social groups, was taken from the World Values Survey. Items on love, sexuality, and relational values were inspired by the National Survey on Health and Sexual Habits and the Survey on Social and Affective Relations in Times of Pandemic. Demographic questions on occupation, income, religiosity, and family structure followed CIS barometer conventions.

food, and clothing choices. The second block addressed mobility and transportation, asking about modes of travel and vehicle ownership. The third block explored personal and relational values, including attitudes toward love, sexuality, and online dating. The fourth block examined moral and political beliefs, with items on equality, redistribution, environmental trade-offs, immigration, and gender issues. The fifth section measured ideological orientation, vote intention, and affective polarization, the latter using a 0–100 “feeling thermometer” toward 26 distinct social groups covering religious affiliations, migration origin, other minorities, football supporters, educational levels, political beliefs, and party identification. Finally, the sixth block collected demographic and socioeconomic information, such as education, occupation, religiosity, marital status, and family structure. A full translation of the questionnaire is available in the Supplementary Material.

3.2 Analytic Strategy

Studying lifestyles presents a methodological challenge because of the breadth and heterogeneity of the data. The main analysis relies on more than 129 variables covering leisure, music, cultural preferences, sport participation, moral attitudes, and political orientations, while the full database includes 218 variables across additional domains. Treating all items equally would risk overweighting weakly informative questions and producing clusters driven by noise rather than substantive differences (Hastie, Tibshirani, & Friedman, 2009). Dimensionality reduction is therefore essential for identifying meaningful latent structures, improving interpretability, and ensuring comparability with prior research on cultural differentiation (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Savage et al., 2013).

The analysis proceeded in four main steps. First, we applied Nonlinear Principal Component Analysis (NLPCA), which is well suited for survey data because it accommodates nominal, ordinal, and interval variables without assuming linearity or normality (Linting et al., 2007; Linting & van der Kooij, 2012). Separate NLPCA models were estimated for each thematic block (e.g., leisure, music, moral values, feelings).³ As an illustration, in the leisure block (Table A1 in the Supplementary Material), thirteen binary activities were summarized into four coherent dimensions: *cultural engagement* (concerts, opera, museums, cinema), *domestic pastimes* (gardening, handcrafts), *digital leisure* (video and

³All NLPCA models were estimated using the `prinicals` function from the `Gifi` package in R.

board games), and *mass media* (listening to music, radio, television). Similar latent structures were identified in other domains, with full results reported in the Supplementary Material (section A.1).

Second, we constructed standardized indices from the extracted dimensions. For binary or nominal blocks (e.g., leisure activities, sports, music), indices were computed as the sum of endorsed behaviors. For ordinal or continuous blocks (e.g., moral values, policy attitudes, feelings), we calculated mean scores across items. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, with indices retained if $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).⁴ Dimensions such as transport, food, clothing, and several affective subcomponents did not reach acceptable reliability and were excluded. In total, we retained eight indices: *Cultural Leisure*, *Sports Participation*, *Highbrow Music*, *Alternative Music*, *Romantic Attitudes*, *Conservative Values*, *Progressive Policy*, and *Minority Sentiment*. Cronbach’s alphas ranged from 0.67 (Alternative Music) to 0.88 (Minority Sentiment). All indices were standardized (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) to facilitate comparability across dimensions.

Third, we identified lifestyle groupings using *k*-means clustering (MacQueen, 1967), which partitions individuals into clusters based on similarity in their index scores. Clustering methods are widely used in sociology to uncover latent lifestyle or participation profiles in multidimensional cultural data (Hanquinet, 2022; Wiertz, 2021; Katsillis, 2024).⁵ To determine the appropriate number of clusters, we relied on two standard heuristics: the elbow method, which evaluates reductions in within-cluster variance, and the silhouette method, which compares average within- and between-cluster similarity (Rousseeuw, 1987; see Supplementary Material, section A.4, for details). The elbow criterion suggested three- to four-cluster solutions, whereas the silhouette method pointed to a more restrictive two-cluster solution. Guided by these diagnostics and visual inspection, we retained the *k*-means results as the most substantively interpretable and parsimonious representation of the data.

⁴Two indices were retained despite falling slightly below this threshold because of their strong conceptual coherence: *Cultural Leisure* ($\alpha = 0.68$) and *Alternative Music* ($\alpha = 0.67$).

⁵We selected *k*-means clustering because the analysis relies on standardized continuous indices, a data structure for which partitioning algorithms based on Euclidean distance are particularly appropriate (Everitt et al., 2011). In contrast, hierarchical clustering—while useful for exploratory visualization and small samples—tends to perform less efficiently with larger datasets and continuous standardized variables, where linkage criteria can be sensitive to scale and outliers. Moreover, *k*-means provides clearer partitions and facilitates subsequent comparisons across clusters through means and variances.

Finally, we examined how the resulting lifestyle clusters aligned with political orientations and sociodemographic attributes. Mean index scores were compared across clusters to identify distinctive cultural and attitudinal profiles. Political alignments were assessed using respondents’ self-reported left–right placement and vote intention. For socioeconomic status, we analyzed both household income and nine occupational categories, with the latter providing greater coverage given higher rates of missing income responses. Differences across clusters in categorical and continuous variables were tested for statistical significance with adjustments for multiple comparisons. We also analyzed domains excluded from index construction due to low reliability—such as food and clothing preferences, television consumption, and transport behaviors—by testing differences in their distribution across clusters. This strategy provides a comprehensive account of the cultural, demographic, and political bases of lifestyle polarization in Spain.

4 Results

4.1 Latent Dimensions and Index Construction

From these components, we constructed indices only when the underlying items formed a coherent and internally consistent scale. While NLPCA identifies interpretable dimensions, not all of them translate into reliable indices suitable for subsequent analyses. In some domains—such as food and clothing choices, television content, or transport modes—the resulting groupings displayed weak correlations and were therefore excluded despite being conceptually meaningful. The same applied to several moral and affective dimensions, where item heterogeneity produced low internal consistency.

Ultimately, eight indices were retained for the main analyses: *Cultural Leisure*, *Highbrow Music*, *Alternative Music*, *Sports Participation*, *Romantic Attitudes*, *Conservative Values*, *Progressive Policy*, and *Minority Sentiment*. All indices were standardized to have mean zero and unit variance, ensuring comparability across domains.⁶

⁶Sports provide a good example of the challenges of index construction. The NLPCA suggested partially interpretable components (e.g., individual vs. team sports), but none achieved acceptable reliability. Aggregating all thirteen items into a single scale yielded a coherent measure of *Sports Participation* ($\alpha = 0.70$), capturing overall engagement rather than specific sporting subcultures (see Supplementary Material, Table A3).

In sum, combining NLPCA with reliability testing reduced an unwieldy set of survey items to eight standardized indices that are both theoretically interpretable and empirically robust. These indices provide the foundation for the clustering analysis that follows, where we examine how lifestyle patterns map onto political identities and social cleavages in Spain.

4.2 Interrelations Among Lifestyle and Attitudinal Indices

Table 1 summarizes the eight standardized indices constructed from the NLPCA and subsequent reliability checks. Each index condenses a theoretically coherent domain of practices or attitudes into a single scale, ranging from cultural leisure to political orientations. The dimensions also align with existing research: for example, attitudes toward minorities are central to analyses of political exclusion and mobilization (Tope, Pickett, & Chiricos, 2015), while moral value orientations capture divides that may erode social trust (Rapp, 2016).

Table 1: Summary of Constructed Indices

Index	Items Included	Interpretation
Cultural Leisure	Cinema, Museums, Concerts, Opera, Restaurants	Social leisure
Highbrow Music	Blues, Jazz, Classical, Folk	Traditional and elite musical forms
Alternative Music	Rap, Techno, Punk, Rock, Reggae, Indie	Non-mainstream, youth-driven music
Sports Participation	13 items (e.g., Running, Football, Tennis, Surfing, Skateboarding)	Breadth of involvement in sports
Romantic Attitudes	True Love, A Better Half	Idealized emotional bonds in relationships
Conservative Values	Care, Meritocracy, Authority, Loyalty	Hierarchical and moral worldviews
Progressive Policy	Homosexuality, Abortion, Rent Cap, Independence Referendum, Gender Equality, Defense Spending	Progressive stance on policy issues
Minority Sentiment	Thermometer scores for minority groups (e.g., Muslims, Roma, Latinos, Africans)	Positive affect toward minorities

Notes: Indices are standardized (mean = 0, SD = 1).

To assess how these dimensions relate to each other, we estimated pairwise Pearson correlations and partial correlations that adjust for fourteen background

characteristics (including age, gender, education, religiosity, and region). Figure 1 provides an overview of the correlation structure.⁷

Three main patterns stand out. First, the non-political lifestyle indices form a coherent cluster. For instance, *Cultural Leisure* and *Sports Participation* correlate at $r = 0.32$ ($p < .001$; Table A11), which remains virtually unchanged after controls ($r = 0.28$; Table A12). Likewise, *Highbrow Music* and *Alternative Music* correlate at $r = 0.39$, strengthening to $r = 0.47$ once controls are applied. These results indicate that cultural consumption patterns travel together in ways not reducible to basic sociodemographic profiles.

Second, political and attitudinal indices also cluster strongly. The most notable example is the positive correlation between *Progressive Policy* and *Minority Sentiment*, $r = 0.39$ in the raw correlations and $r = 0.24$ in the partial specification. By contrast, the negative association between *Conservative Values* and *Progressive Policy* ($r = -0.21$) disappears once controls are included ($r = -0.01$), suggesting that their overlap largely reflects shared demographics rather than intrinsic opposition between the scales.

Third, several indices link cultural and political domains, pointing to lifestyle-based sorting. For example, individuals higher in *Cultural Leisure* also express more progressive policy views ($r = 0.15$, partial $r = 0.11$). Meanwhile, *Romantic Attitudes*, a domain not explicitly political, correlate positively with *Conservative Values* ($r = 0.38$, partial $r = 0.29$). These cross-cutting ties show how everyday practices and personal values spill into the political domain, contributing to broader symbolic boundaries between groups.

⁷Full estimates are reported in Appendix Tables A11–A12.



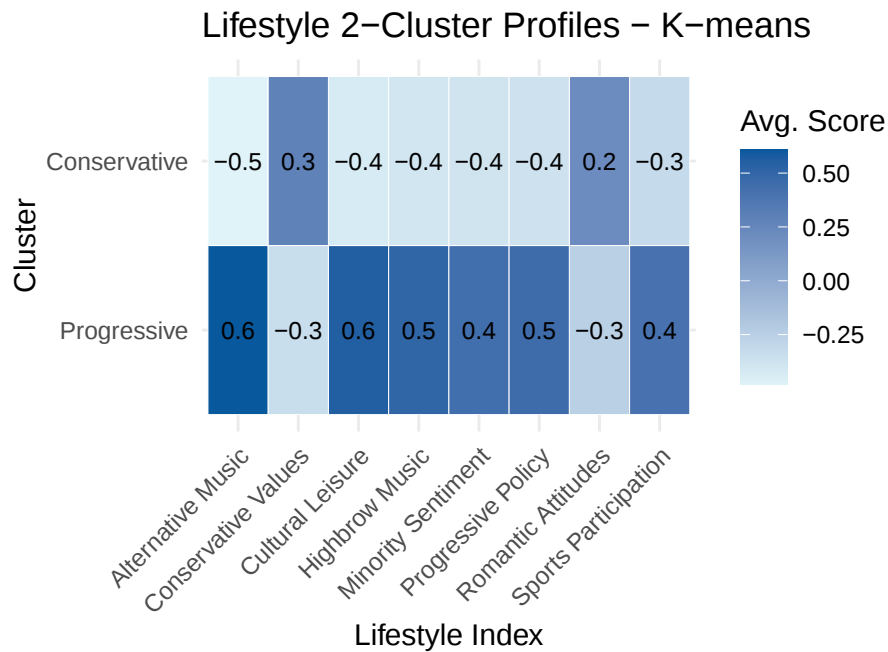
Figure 1: Pearson correlation matrix across lifestyle and attitudinal indices. Green cells represent positive correlations and red cells negative correlations; color intensity reflects the magnitude of the coefficient.

Overall, the partial correlations confirm that many interrelations persist even after accounting for demographic controls. This suggests that lifestyle choices and political values are not simply artifacts of age, education, or religiosity but instead cohere into broader cultural structures. While there is no evidence that Spain exhibits the geographic “self-segregation” patterns described by Bishop (2008) for the United States, these results indicate that cultural and leisure behaviors align systematically with political orientations. Consistent with DellaPosta et al. (2015), such patterns illustrate the deepening of lifestyle-based polarization within multiparty European contexts.

4.3 Two Lifestyle Formations: Progressive vs. Conservative

The analysis reveals a stark divide between two lifestyle formations in Spain. Using k -means clustering on the set of standardized indices, and guided by standard diagnostics that consistently pointed to two groups as the clearest solution (see Supplementary Material, Section A.4), we identified a partition into two roughly balanced clusters. These clusters can be interpreted as *Progressive* and *Conservative* formations (Figure 2).⁸ This twofold structure mirrors Spain's main ideological cleavage and provides the foundation for the more fine-grained analyses that follow.

Figure 2: Mean standardized scores by cluster across eight indices (K-means, $k = 2$)



Notes: Values represent mean standardized (z) scores for each cluster. Positive values indicate above-average endorsement relative to the sample mean; negative values indicate below-average endorsement. Indices are constructed from multiple survey items and standardized to mean = 0 and standard deviation = 1.

⁸Supplementary Material, Figure A2, provides a visualization of the first two principal components with the k -means assignments overlaid, illustrating the interpretability of the two-cluster specification.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents across the two lifestyle clusters. The groups are roughly balanced in size, with 1,289 classified as *Progressive* and 1,543 as *Conservative*, while 183 respondents could not be assigned due to missing data on clustering variables. These proportions indicate that lifestyle polarization in Spain divides the population into two large and comparably sized formations, rather than small or marginal subgroups. We describe the defining features of each cluster below.

Progressive. Members of this cluster score above the sample mean on culturally oriented and progressive indices. They are more likely to participate in *Cultural Leisure* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.60$), prefer *Highbrow Music* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.50$) and *Alternative Music* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.60$), and show warmer *Minority Sentiment* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.50$). They also express stronger support for *Progressive Policy* orientations ($\bar{z} \approx 0.55$). By contrast, they score below the mean on *Romantic Attitudes* (idealized traditional bonds, $\bar{z} \approx -0.30$) and *Conservative Values* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.30$). Their profile is complemented by higher engagement in *Sports Participation* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.40$). Politically, they lean left on the ideological scale (mean = 3.93, $n = 1,289$), a pattern discussed in more detail below.

Conservative. This cluster represents a mirror image. Respondents score below the mean on *Cultural Leisure* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.35$), *Highbrow Music* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.35$), and *Alternative Music* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.45$). They also express markedly lower *Minority Sentiment* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.45$) and oppose *Progressive Policy* orientations ($\bar{z} \approx -0.40$). In contrast, they score positively on *Romantic Attitudes* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.25$) and *Conservative Values* ($\bar{z} \approx 0.30$), and show somewhat lower *Sports Participation* ($\bar{z} \approx -0.25$). Their mean left–right ideology is more conservative (mean = 5.63, $n = 1,543$), consistent with their cultural and political orientations.

4.4 Correlates of Lifestyle Clusters

Having identified the two main lifestyle clusters, we now examine how they differ across key sociodemographic and political characteristics. Table 2 presents the sociodemographic and political profiles of the two lifestyle clusters: the *Progressive* and the *Conservative* formations. The results reveal consistent differences across family structure, religion, education, income, habitat, occupations, and political orientation.

The *Progressive* cluster is younger on average (47.6 years), less often in a couple (51.8%), and less likely to be parents (52.9%). They display a markedly secular

profile, with just one-third identifying as Catholic (34.3%) and a clear majority describing themselves as nonreligious (59.7%). Their educational attainment is comparatively high: more than half (57.6%) have completed university studies, while only a small share (18.0%) hold only primary education. Occupations also skew toward higher-status categories, including scientific and intellectual professions (29.9%) and managerial positions (16.1%). Socioeconomically, their income distribution is relatively balanced across low (39.1%), medium (35.8%), and high (25.1%) categories. They are somewhat more concentrated in urban areas (20.1%), though sizable proportions also live in rural and semi-urban municipalities. Politically, Progressives lean left, with a mean ideological self-placement of 3.93, and nearly four in five (77.7%) support one of the parties backing the left-wing coalition led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

By contrast, the *Conservative* cluster is older (mean age 52.8), more likely to be in a couple (61.0%) and to have children (64.0%), and significantly more religious: 61.9% identify as Catholic, while only 31.4% report no religion. Educational levels are lower, with over a third (35.3%) having only primary schooling and just 37.7% attaining university degrees. Their occupational profile is concentrated in service, sales, and manual categories, such as catering, personal, protection, and sales (20.8%), machine operators (9.3%), and elementary occupations (10.0%). In income terms, a majority fall into the low category (52.2%), with only 16.8% reaching the high-income group. Conservatives are also more prevalent in rural (49.0%) and semi-urban (34.9%) areas. Politically, they lean rightward (mean ideology = 5.63) and show much lower support for the Sánchez coalition (39.3%).

Beyond these structural correlates, additional lifestyle contrasts appear in domains not used to construct the clusters.⁹ In food and clothing habits (Appendix Table A13), Progressives report higher consumption of organic food, greater likelihood of buying second-hand clothes, stronger preference for foreign food, and higher rates of vegetarian or vegan identification. By contrast, no significant differences emerge in family meals on weekends, preference for cheap clothing, or choosing durable garments, underscoring that the Progressive profile centers on sustainable and alternative consumption rather than traditional household routines.

Television preferences (Appendix Table A14) also reveal clear divides. Pro-

⁹Unless otherwise noted, all differences reported in this section are significant at $p < 0.01$.

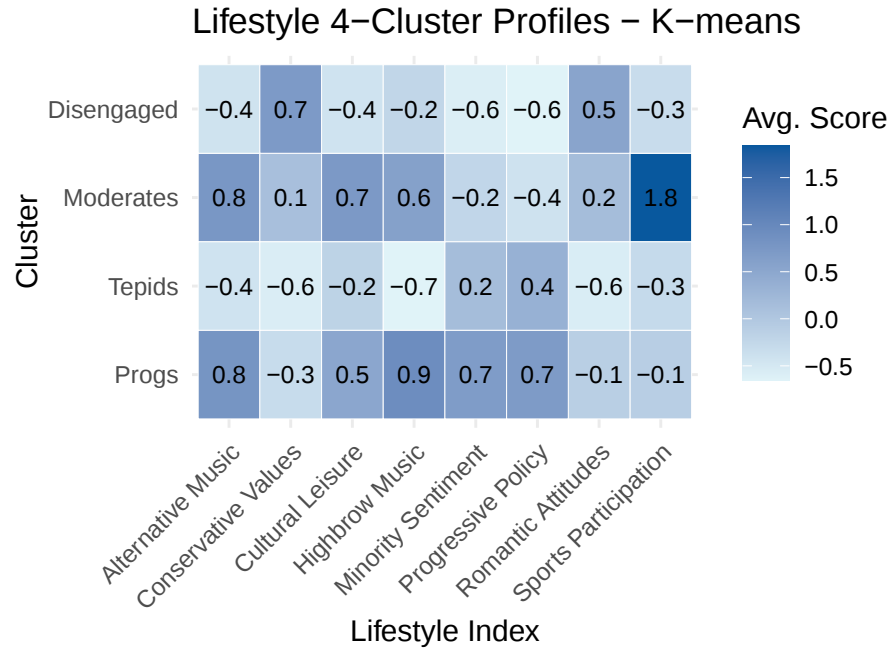
gressives are much more likely to follow cultural and informational content, including music programs (35% vs. 18%), science programming (42% vs. 24%), documentaries (63% vs. 46%), and debates or current affairs shows (43% vs. 30%). Conservatives show no systematic advantages in other genres, suggesting that Progressives engage more widely with cultural and knowledge-oriented media.

Mobility behaviors (Appendix Table A15) reinforce these patterns. Progressives are more likely to walk (68% vs. 58%), cycle (16% vs. 7%), and rely on public transportation (52% vs. 37%). They are also more inclined to adopt new forms of sustainable mobility such as electric scooters (5% vs. 2%) and carpooling (5% vs. 2%). By contrast, car use is equally common in both groups, while no significant differences appear in traditional fuel types or vehicle categories.

4.5 Four-Cluster Solution

The analysis also reveals that lifestyle polarization in Spain can be described at a more detailed level. In addition to the broad twofold divide, a four-cluster solution captures further variation within the population and highlights the heterogeneity beneath the main ideological cleavage. Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents across these four clusters. The groups are reasonably balanced in size, with 667 classified as *Progs*, 875 as *Tepids*, 354 as *Moderates*, and 936 as *Disengaged*, while 183 respondents could not be assigned due to missing data on clustering variables. These proportions indicate that lifestyle polarization in Spain does not only divide citizens into two opposing camps but also encompasses meaningful variation across four large and socially visible formations. This fourfold structure offers a more nuanced picture of how lifestyles map onto political divisions in Spain.

Figure 3: Lifestyle profiles in the four-cluster solution (K-means, $k = 4$). Cells display average standardized scores on each index.



Notes: Values represent mean standardized (z) scores for each cluster. Positive values indicate above-average endorsement relative to the sample mean; negative values indicate below-average endorsement. Indices are constructed from multiple survey items and standardized to mean = 0 and standard deviation = 1.

The four-cluster specification uncovers a more differentiated segmentation of lifestyles in Spain (Figure 3). Beyond political orientations, the clusters differ systematically in sociodemographic composition, cultural habits, media preferences, and mobility behaviors.

Progs. Moderately young (mean age 51) and gender-balanced, Progs are highly educated (57% with university degrees) and the most secular cluster, with two-thirds identifying as nonreligious. They lean distinctly to the left (mean ideology 3.5) and show overwhelming support for the Sánchez coalition (87%). Occupationally, they are concentrated in professional and managerial positions, consistent with high cultural capital.

Tepids. Younger (mean age 46), more often women (60%), and display an intermediate religious profile (55% nonreligious). Education is moderate (48%

with university degrees), and jobs are concentrated in office and service sectors. Politically, they locate slightly left of center (mean ideology 4.2) and support the Sánchez coalition at relatively high but not unanimous levels (75%).

Moderates. Middle-aged (mean 47), more often Catholic (53%), and less female (37%). They are relatively well educated (54% with university degrees) but lean right of center (mean ideology 5.5), with less than half supporting Sánchez (45%). Their profile combines cultural engagement with social conservatism. They report the highest restaurant and stand out for strong cultural media habits: nearly half watch science programs (49%), three-quarters documentaries (74%), and a majority debates and interviews. Their mobility patterns are the most diverse, with high cycling (32%), motorcycling (19%), and adoption of newer modes such as scooters (12%) and carpooling (8%).

Disengaged. The oldest cluster (mean age 56), the Disengaged are family-oriented (two-thirds in a couple; 69% parents) and the most religious (72% Catholic, 21% nonreligious). Education is lowest (36% with university degrees), and jobs tilt toward elementary and service occupations. They are also the most right-leaning (mean ideology 6.2), with only one-quarter supporting Sánchez and strong affinities with conservative parties. Daily practices confirm the label: they show the lowest adoption of organic food, vegetarianism, and second-hand clothing, limited cultural TV consumption (28% science, 52% documentaries), and conventional mobility patterns dominated by car use (78%) with minimal uptake of cycling or new alternatives.

These results show that the four-cluster solution adds nuance to the polarized picture from the two-cluster model. Alongside the expected *Progs* and *Disengaged*, the presence of *Tepids* and *Moderates* underscores that lifestyle polarization in Spain also includes intermediate and culturally active formations. These patterns demonstrate how political divisions intersect with cultural consumption, mobility practices, and everyday routines.

5 Discussion

To what extent are ideological and partisan divisions in Spain associated with differences in cultural tastes and everyday lifestyles? In contrast to approaches that focus narrowly on elite polarization or attitudinal divides, we examined polarization as a bottom-up process of lifestyle sorting. Drawing on the original

NORPOL Survey (June 2024) with more than 200 variables spanning leisure, music, values, cultural practices, and politics, and combining dimensionality reduction with cluster techniques, we identified distinct lifestyle formations that map directly onto Spain’s political cleavages.

The results revealed two complementary perspectives on lifestyle polarization. The two-cluster solution uncovered a stark division between *Progressives* and *Conservatives* that mirrors the overarching ideological cleavage in Spanish politics. Progressives are younger, more urban, more highly educated, and markedly secular. They display higher engagement with *Cultural Leisure*, *Highbrow Music*, and *Alternative Music*, stronger *Minority Sentiment*, and consistent support for *Progressive Policy* orientations and the governing left coalition. Conservatives, by contrast, are older, more rural or semi-urban, and more likely to be in a couple and parents. They are strongly Catholic, more oriented toward family and tradition, and more aligned with *Conservative Values*. Politically, they are defined less by active support for the progressive government coalition than by distance from it, coupled with low *Minority Sentiment* and opposition to *Progressive Policy* reforms. These contrasts confirm that everyday leisure, cultural preferences, and moral values are tightly interwoven with political identity in Spain. The four-cluster solution further shows that this divide fragments into socially distinct formations, revealing meaningful variation in cultural engagement and political embeddedness within each side.

These results carry several implications. First, the correlation analyses confirmed that cultural and political domains reinforce each other. Indices such as *Cultural Leisure*, *Highbrow Music*, and *Alternative Music* are positively associated with *Progressive Policy* and *Minority Sentiment*, while *Conservative Values* stand in negative correlation with both. These associations remain robust in partial correlations that control for sociodemographic factors, demonstrating that lifestyle polarization is not reducible to age, education, income, or religiosity alone. Instead, they reflect symbolic boundaries that structure social identities, consistent with Bourdieu’s theory of distinction and with recent work showing that cultural practices increasingly serve as markers of political identity (DellaPosta, Shi, & Macy, 2015).

Second, polarization in Spain is not confined to elite rhetoric or policy disputes, but extends into the practices of daily life. In the two-cluster comparison, Progressives are more likely to eat organic food, buy second-hand clothing, and

consume foreign cuisines; they prefer documentaries, science programming, and debates; and they are more likely to walk, cycle, use public transport, or adopt newer forms of urban mobility (e.g., scooters, carpooling). Conservatives are less engaged in these sustainable or cosmopolitan practices and remain more reliant on conventional transport modes. In the four-cluster view, these contrasts persist but become more differentiated: *Progs* and *Moderates* display strong interest in cultural and informational television (albeit from different political vantage points), *Tepids* exhibit generally low cultural TV engagement, and the *Disengaged* show the least adoption of alternative consumption and greener mobility. These patterns underscore that polarization is lived through ordinary routines—not just through explicit political expression.

Third, the comparative perspective highlights the distinctive Spanish trajectory of lifestyle polarization. In the U.S., lifestyle sorting has long been documented in residential choices, consumer behavior, and leisure (Bishop, 2008; Mason, 2015; DellaPosta et al., 2015). In multiparty European systems, Harteveld (2021a) shows that affective polarization and social sorting are increasingly salient, even without a strict two-party framework. Spain represents a hybrid case: lifestyle polarization is layered onto the long-standing symbolic cleavage of “the two Spains,” but updated through contemporary cultural markers such as musical tastes, mobility choices, and sustainable consumption. Unlike in the U.S., where a binary partisan system channels lifestyle sorting into two blocs, Spain’s proportional system allows for intermediate groups—here, *Tepids* and *Disengaged*—that temper the intensity of polarization while simultaneously introducing volatility and disengagement.

Fourth, the study makes a methodological contribution by demonstrating the value of combining dimensionality reduction with cluster analysis in high-dimensional survey data. This approach is well-suited to the mixture of nominal, ordinal, and continuous variables typical of cultural and attitudinal surveys, and it provides an interpretable typology of lifestyles. The results show how complex, heterogeneous data can be reduced to meaningful groupings that reveal the social bases of polarization.

Although the analytical strategy identifies consistent associations between cultural, moral, and political domains, the study is intentionally correlational rather than causal. The goal was to provide an initial empirical map of lifestyle-based social sorting in Spain, not to determine the direction of influence between

ideology and everyday practices. Establishing whether political orientations shape lifestyle patterns or whether lifestyle milieus foster particular political attitudes would require longitudinal or experimental designs that go beyond the scope of this study. Alternative approaches such as model-based clustering or Latent Class Analysis could, in principle, estimate predictors of group membership, but they operate as statistical “black boxes” and reduce transparency in the derivation of group structures. Given the exploratory aim and our focus on interpretability, we adopted a descriptive, data-driven approach that identifies population clusters as a necessary first step toward future causal and predictive research.

Finally, the analysis points to the political consequences of layered lifestyle polarization. The consolidation of Progressive and Conservative blocs suggests a durable cultural underpinning of partisan divides, which may stabilize ideological conflict. At the same time, the presence of *Tepids* and *Disengaged* introduces new challenges. Tepids, with their ambivalence and moderate engagement, may swing electorally between left and right, contributing to volatility in a fragmented party system. Disengaged citizens—older, more religious, and less culturally active—embody the risk of democratic withdrawal from the opposite end of the age/engagement spectrum. Both segments complicate mobilization strategies and may reshape turnout dynamics and coalition arithmetic.

In sum, this study demonstrates that Spain’s polarization is both ideological and cultural. Political cleavages are embedded in the ways Spaniards spend their leisure, engage in *Cultural Leisure*, and relate to diversity through *Minority Sentiment*. These patterns confirm that polarization is not only a top-down process driven by elite discourse but also a bottom-up phenomenon rooted in everyday life. By documenting lifestyle-based polarization in Spain, we contribute to comparative debates on the cultural foundations of political conflict, showing that such dynamics are not unique to the U.S. but are also emerging in European multiparty democracies. Spain illustrates how historical cleavages (“the two Spains”) can be rearticulated in cultural and lifestyle terms, producing a modernized form of social division with far-reaching implications for democratic stability. Future research should explore how lifestyle polarization interacts with media consumption, digital engagement, and regional identities, and whether *Tepids* and *Disengaged* become politically mobilized or remain on the margins. Understanding these processes is crucial not only for explaining Spain’s present trajectory but also for anticipating how cultural practices and

everyday life will shape the future of polarization in Europe.

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Table 2: Sociodemographic and Political Profiles of the Two Lifestyle Clusters

Variable	Progressive	Conservative	Adjusted p
Mean Age (years)	47.6	52.8	$p < 0.01$
% In Couple	51.8%	61.0%	$p < 0.01$
% Parents	52.9%	64.0%	$p < 0.01$
% Catholic	34.3%	61.9%	$p < 0.01$
% Nonreligious	59.7%	31.4%	$p < 0.01$
% Female	52.0%	47.9%	$p = 0.62$
% Heterosexual	83.9%	93.1%	$p < 0.01$
Education			
Primary Education	18.0%	35.3%	$p < 0.01$
Secondary Education	24.4%	27.0%	$p < 0.01$
University Education	57.6%	37.7%	$p < 0.01$
Habitat			
Rural	42.0%	49.0%	$p < 0.01$
Semi-Urban	37.9%	34.9%	$p < 0.01$
Urban	20.1%	16.1%	$p < 0.01$
Income			
Low	39.1%	52.2%	$p < 0.01$
Medium	35.8%	31.0%	$p < 0.01$
High	25.1%	16.8%	$p < 0.01$
Occupations			
Directors and managers	16.1%	12.6%	$p < 0.01$
Scientific and intellectual professionals	29.9%	16.6%	$p < 0.01$
Technicians; support professionals	8.4%	5.4%	$p < 0.01$
Accountancy, administrative, and office employees	16.7%	19.5%	$p < 0.01$
Catering, personal, protection, and sales workers	14.7%	20.8%	$p < 0.01$
Skilled agricultural, livestock, forestry, and fishing	0.1%	2.1%	$p < 0.01$
Craftspersons and skilled manufacturing/construction	2.3%	3.6%	$p < 0.01$
Installation and machinery operators and assemblers	6.5%	9.3%	$p < 0.01$
Elementary occupations	5.3%	10.0%	$p < 0.01$
Mean Ideology (1–10)	3.93	5.63	$p < 0.01$
% Vote Left Coalition	77.7%	39.3%	$p < 0.01$

Notes: All entries are percentages within clusters, except for age and ideology, which are reported as means. Differences in proportions are tested using Pearson’s chi-squared test for equality of proportions with continuity correction (`prop.test` in R). Differences in continuous variables are tested using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test (`wilcox.test` in R). All p -values are Bonferroni-corrected.

Table 3: Sociodemographic and Political Profiles of the Four Lifestyle Clusters

Variable	Progs	Tepids	Moderates	Disengaged
Mean Age (years)	50.6	46.0	46.5	56.0
% In Couple	53.2%	49.3%	56.8%	66.3%
% Parents	57.6%	50.4%	55.4%	69.2%
% Catholic	29.4%	39.1%	52.5%	71.9%
% Nonreligious	65.5%	55.4%	37.6%	21.3%
% Female	53.7%	59.8%	36.5%	42.6%
% Heterosexual	84.7%	87.1%	84.3%	95.2%
Education				
Primary Education	16.8%	27.8%	21.5%	37.0%
Secondary Education	26.7%	24.3%	24.9%	27.0%
University Education	56.5%	47.9%	53.7%	36.0%
Habitat				
Rural	42.9%	46.3%	40.1%	49.6%
Semi-Urban	35.1%	35.5%	42.7%	35.5%
Urban	22.0%	18.2%	17.2%	15.0%
Income				
Low	38.1%	47.2%	40.8%	53.0%
Medium	38.5%	31.6%	32.0%	31.4%
High	23.4%	21.2%	27.2%	15.6%
Occupations				
Directors and managers	17.1%	11.4%	16.4%	14.8%
Scientific and intellectual professionals	27.2%	24.2%	28.3%	16.1%
Technicians; support professionals	7.8%	7.0%	7.3%	5.9%
Accountancy, administrative, and office employees	18.2%	19.8%	16.0%	16.7%
Catering, personal, protection, and sales workers	14.3%	16.6%	17.8%	22.0%
Skilled agricultural, livestock, forestry, and fishing	0.3%	1.2%	0.0%	2.4%
Craftspersons and skilled manufacturing/construction	2.5%	2.2%	2.3%	4.6%
Installation and machinery operators and assemblers	7.3%	9.8%	5.5%	7.3%
Elementary occupations	5.3%	7.8%	6.4%	10.2%
Mean Ideology (1–10)	3.47	4.18	5.50	6.22
% Vote Left Coalition	87.0%	74.5%	45.4%	25.3%

Notes: All entries are percentages within clusters, except for age and ideology (means). Tests and adjusted p -values for all rows are reported in the Supplementary Material. Cluster labels correspond to the $k = 4$ k -means solution.