Working paper:

Ruiz-Ramos, Carlos & Castro Torres, Andrés F. (2024). "Immigrants' modes of incorporation in Spain. A multivariate quantitative approach". *SocArXiv Papers*

Immigrants' modes of incorporation in Spain. A multivariate quantitative approach.

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Abstract

Analysing immigrants' incorporation patterns into host countries is essential for understanding social inequalities in contemporary societies. This study examines the living conditions of immigrants in Spain, moving beyond univariate approaches to social stratification by assessing the interaction between categories of privilege and disadvantage. As the second-largest recipient of immigrants in Europe, Spain offers valuable insights into the relationship between migration and social inequality. Using Geometric Data Analysis and clustering methods, we provide a structural and multidimensional perspective on social cleavages, revealing segmented assimilation patterns related to housing, employment, and education, influenced by age, origin, and social class. Our findings also show that second-generation immigrants experience only partial assimilation. This comprehensive analysis offers a deeper understanding of how various social categories shape immigrants' integration, shedding light on the complex interplay of factors that influence their experiences in Spain and potentially other European countries with similar immigration trends in recent decades.

Key words: inequality, social stratification, immigration, segmented assimilation, social space

Introduction

Understanding how immigrants integrate into host societies is essential for examining contemporary social inequality (Portes and Zhou 1993; Domingo 2015). From a material perspective, integration is conceptualised as full participation in societal institutions, recognition of rights and duties, and the enjoyment of economic and social benefits stemming from development (Fraser 1998). In the context of European societies, immigrants' integration entails access to healthcare and education systems, participation in the labour market, housing availability, and freedom of movement. Immigrant communities around the world exhibit diverse patterns across these domains, falling short of what might be considered optimal integration (Castles et al. 2014). As migration's demographic and economic significance continues to grow for both receiving and sending countries, suboptimal integration will persist in driving social inequalities (Therborn 2013; Canales Cerón 2021).

Macroeconomic dynamics and unequal relations among countries are strong drivers of international mobility and factor into between-nations and within-country social inequalities (Piore 1979; Canales Cerón 2021). In the case of Spain, for example, the growing expenditure capacity among the middle classes and the rise of income and wealth inequalities of the recent decades are both part and parcel of increasing immigration (Alonso-Villar and del Río 2013; Prieto et al. 2018; Domingo and Singh-Garha 2022). At the same time, these dynamics factor into segmented assimilation patterns, particularly regarding immigrants from former colonies in Latin America and geographically close African nations (Bueno and Vidal-Coso 2019; Gastón-Guiu et al. 2021).

In Spain, the foreign-born individuals make up a moderate share of the population, with social and economic profiles that differ significantly from those of immigrant populations in other wealthy countries (Castles et al. 2014). At least 1.5 of every ten people residing in Spain is foreign-born and this fraction can rise to two in certain metropolitan areas, occupations or among young age groups (Domingo and Bayona-i-Carrasco 2024).

Spanish immigrants' are very diverse ranging from highly privileged groups, such as high-tech nomads, to socially disadvantaged ones such as food-delivery or domestic service workers (Herrera 2013; Bueno and Vidal-Coso 2019). This variety is often obscured under broad labels such as "immigrants," or national and regional origins (De Haas 2014). Masking heterogeneity under broad categories is not unique to migration studies; it is also common in labor and social stratification research. For example, categories such as "unemployed" or "homeowner" fail to capture the vast differences within these groups. This becomes evident when comparing the living conditions of high-tech immigrants to those of immigrants working in the food delivery sector—two groups with drastically different socioeconomic realities. Likewise, the consequences of unemployment for these groups are not comparable, underscoring the need for a more nuanced analysis that recognizes such disparities rather than assuming homogeneity within broad labels. More generally, Individuals' living circumstances lay at the intersection of multiple categories; in conjunctures or configurations, so to speak (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2011 Introduction).

The socially privileged immigrants often hold positions such as expatriates or highly skilled/specialised workers, enjoy access to formal, secured and well-paid employment, and have little if any issue for access housing. The socially disadvantaged immigrants, on the contrary, typically provide essential services such as personal care, cleaning, and domestic

work often under informal conditions which in turn limit their rights, income, and access to housing (Herrera 2013). This diversity depends on and likely reinforce existing social inequalities.

Against this background, our work aims to measure the distinct configurations of privilege and disadvantage among native- and foreign-born adults in contemporary Spain through clustering variables and individuals using nationally representative quantitative data. We use these clusters to characterise contemporary Spanish society and to examine how national, second-migrant-generation, foreign-born adults integrate and fare within the Spanish stratification system. Our work draws inspiration from the Bourdieusian tradition, which emphasizes analysing social phenomena as practices embedded within social spaces (Lebaron and Le Roux 2015).

More specifically, we utilise data from the 2021 Spanish Survey of Essential Living Conditions and Housing to map immigrants' positions within the Spanish social space at different stages of life. These positions, and their relationships relative to the native-born population, highlight the structural dimensions of immigrants' incorporation into Spanish society, beyond individual outcomes. We measure the social space by combining information on educational attainment, occupation, income, housing access, multiple properties, geographical location, and parental educational background. We correlate this social space with individuals' age and country and region of birth to understand how life course and migration dynamics relate to stratification.

We then employ a data-driven multivariate clustering method to identify clusters of material living conditions among working-age adults, grouped by ten-year age groups: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60 to 65 (60s hereafter). These clusters range from highly privileged configurations, where economic, social, and familial advantages coincide, to highly disadvantaged configurations, where most or all socially disadvantaged categories and outcomes converge. Finally, we measure the proportion of immigrants, categorised by region of origin, and the proportion of native-born according to the parental place of birth (Spanish-born vs Spanish-born second-migrant-generation), within each of these clusters.

Our results serve to argue that unidimensional analyses of immigrants' incorporation overlook critical features for understanding the social and economic consequences of migration. Our structural and multidimensional approach reveals not only the often-overlooked disadvantages and deprivations among certain native-born segments, but also the privilege and comfort that

some foreign-born groups experience, which is even less frequently acknowledged. This multivariate analysis of Spanish society, along with the clusters and the distribution of immigrants by origin across these clusters, offers a comprehensive understanding of how immigrants integrate into Spanish society and how these patterns shift across the life course.

Context

The relevance of international migration for societies has to do with the potential multiplicative nature of migration in a context of enhanced physical mobility and connectivity (Canales Cerón 2021). Immigrants today do not leave their life behind, or at least they have the possibility not to do so. When they move, immigrants carry their culture and traditions along with their social and economic resources. In addition, increased mobility makes migrations a connection between origins and destinations; a connection with economic, social, and political implications.

Emigration and immigration in contemporary Spain

In recent decades, the Spanish society has undergone profound social, economic, and demographic transformations (Esping-Andersen et al. 2013; Martín-García 2013; Harrison and Corkill 2016). During the 20th century, Spain transitioned from being a "country of emigrants" to becoming the second-largest recipient of immigrants in Europe (Van Mol and de Valk 2016). In the early 1900s, Spain's underdeveloped economy was unable to absorb the country's growing population, prompting about 5.5 million Spaniards towards the Americas. Similarly, the 1960s were characterised by the emigration of 1.5 million people from rural areas to the industrialised economies of Central and Northern Europe, mainly France, Germany and Switzerland. This wave of emigration was halted by the oil crisis of the mid-1970s (Alonso Pérez and Furio Blasco 2007).

However, the country's colonial history and its robust economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s triggered one of the largest migratory processes in contemporary Europe (Cebrián Villar 2009). Between 1998 and 2008, Spain attracted over 5 million immigrants, raising the proportion of the foreign-born population from 1.1% to 11.0%. After the 2008-2013 economic crisis, which temporarily undermined immigration rates, immigration continued to increase, reaching 7.5 million immigrants by 2024, accounting for 18.2% of the total population according to the Spanish National Bureau of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). As a result, Spain absorbed one-third of the immigrant population within the European Union during

the last 25 years, primarily drawing individuals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe.

The migration inflow has not been stable throughout the two first decades of the century. We find three clear stages that mirror Spain's economic cycle. The economic expansion of the period 1996-2008 led to rapid increases of international immigration, peaking at 958,266 arrivals in 2007. The Great Recession reversed this trend, reducing the inflow of immigrants, and fostering the emergence of returning and re-emigration processes, and, to a lesser extent, the emigration of natives to countries less affected by the economic crisis (Domingo and Blanes 2015; Prieto et al. 2018). The last stage coincided with the recovery of the Spanish economy. From 2015 to 2020 Spain experienced a new immigration boom that peaked in 2019 with a net inflow of half million immigrants, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Domingo 2024).

Two of the main drivers of migration processes are the development differentials and the economic cycle, emphasizing the role of social inequalities both within and between countries (Cebrián Villar 2009). Inequalities between countries arise from long standing economic dependencies between Western (former coloniser) countries and non-Western nations, which have contributed to the latter's underdevelopment (Hickel et al. 2024). These unequal relationships continue to persist, creating a set of migration and non-migration drivers that align with macroeconomic cycles (Carling 2002; De Haas 2014). For instance, during periods of economic expansion in wealthier countries, labour demand tends to increase, particularly in sectors that no longer attract domestic workers, such as construction and domestic care (Moya 2007). As a result, labour demand intensifies, and between-countries wage disparities become more prominent as pull factors for migrants.

Migration-related costs exclude by default the poorest people in sending countries, making migration flows relatively selective with respect to migrants' economic resources and educational background (Fussell 2010). Similarly, within-country inequalities in Spain are linked to urbanisation, which has relatively disadvantaged rural populations because economic transformation such as tertiarization have favoured urban settings. Consequently, as migration evolves in tandem with persisting social inequalities, receiving areas become more diverse in terms of national and sub-national origins, and the labour market tends to become segmented, reflecting and reproducing social inequalities (Alonso Pérez and Furio Blasco 2007).

Immigrants in the Spanish social space

Spain's integration into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the adoption of the Euro brought about significant economic shifts. Research by Moreno and Bruquetas (Moreno and Bruquetas 2012) reveals that Spain created nearly 8 million jobs between 1996 and 2007. During this period, the country reoriented its economic structure towards low-productivity and low-value-added sectors such as tourism and construction, while experiencing a process of deindustrialization. The growth of low-skilled labour demand coincided with a rapid rise in the education level among Spanish younger generations (Alonso Pérez and Furio Blasco 2007). As a result, the increasing labour opportunities in elementary occupations, coupled with wage differentials between Spain and the countries of origin, attracting immigrants with lower average educational levels compared to other OECD countries (Arslan et al. 2015). Immigrants in Spain primarily found employment in sectors with high labour demand, such as domestic work, agriculture, and construction—jobs that were often avoided by native workers. Consequently, foreign-born populations were largely confined to precarious jobs, leading to a dual labour market segregated by origin and gender (Moreno and Bruquetas 2012; Domingo and Bayona-i-Carrasco 2024).

The concentration of immigrants in vulnerable sectors made them particularly susceptible to job losses during the Great Recession. Between 2008 and 2013, foreign-born workers were disproportionately affected by the destruction of 2.9 million jobs. In fact, one third of foreign-born workers lost their job in this period. Thus, the economic crisis exacerbated the structural inequalities that characterise the Spanish labour market, consolidating immigrants' higher unemployment rates and greater prevalence of fixed-term and part-time contracts. In this regard, research has shown that structural inequalities between natives and immigrants in the Spanish labour market can not be fully explained by education level, sector or occupation, suggesting that ethnic discrimination plays a central role in driving foreign-born modes of incorporation into the Spanish economy (Mooi-Reci and Muñoz-Comet 2016; Gastón-Guiu et al. 2021).

The occupational segregation of migrant workers and their ethnic discrimination limit their horizontal (i.e. between sectors) and vertical (i.e. between occupations) mobility (Fernández-Macías et al. 2015), exposing them to greater social vulnerability. This "sticky floor" effect challenges the narrative of a progressive incorporation into the receiving society, as immigrant workers encounter significant barriers to gradually improve their socioeconomic status

(Gastón-Guiu et al. 2021, 2024). Additionally, the specialisation of different national groups in specific economic sectors reinforces the concept of segmented assimilation among immigrant populations (Portes and Zhou 1993).

The "second generation"

The relatively recent nature of immigration to Spain poses some challenges for studying the descendants of immigrants, often referred to as the "second generation." Only recently, data availability has allowed to analyse their educational and labour outcomes in comparison to both immigrants and natives (González Ferrer and Cebolla-Boado 2018; Portes et al. 2018; Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2020; Rodríguez et al. 2021; Bayona-i-Carrasco and Domingo 2024).

Literature on the second generation has found differing outcomes with respect to natives, but also to immigrants from their parents' country of birth. While they tend to perform better educationally and in the labour market than first-generation immigrants, they still face significant gaps compared to native Spaniards. The second generation shows higher rates of academic failure and unemployment, as well as lower levels of tertiary education (Bayona-i-Carrasco and Domingo 2024). Portes, Aparicio, and Haller (Portes et al. 2018) attribute these challenges to the low socioeconomic status of their parents, but also to persistent discriminatory practices within Spanish society.

A social space perspective into immigrants' incorporation brings together both contextual factors such as macroeconomic conditions and inequalities, and individual-level conditions such as immigrant's demographic, socioeconomic and occupational profiles. These macro and micro-level factors shape contemporary societies in manners that escape single-variable analysis such as looking at differences in educational attainment or labour market outcomes separately. In the following section we describe the data and methods we used to operationalize this perspective and produce empirical evidence for Spain.

Data and methods

With over 300,000 individual records, the 2021 Spanish "Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas - ECEPOV" (Survey of Essential Characteristics of the Population and Housing) is the largest nationally representative survey of the sociodemographic and economic conditions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2021). This large sample size allows for the study of immigrant groups from different origins, and the

comprehensive questionnaire makes it a unique source for the investigation of demographic, and socioeconomic dynamics within Spain.

We focus on individuals aged 20 to 64 (n = 223,568). The population within this age range provides a good representation of those contributing to the Spanish economy. We explore differences across 10-year age groups and across individuals' regions of birth. Among Spanish-born individuals, we distinguish between those with foreign-born parents (Second generation hereafter) and those born to two Spanish-born individuals. The region of birth groups comprise the following categories: Africa; Asia and Europe (excluding European Union countries); European Union (EU); Latin America and the Caribbean (LaCar); Spain; and Spain second generation (Spain-SG).

Table 1 displays the sample sizes across these age groups and place of birth categories. Despite the large sample of the ECEPOV, a few cells in this table display fewer than 400 individuals. All our analyses use sampling weights and we pay particular attention when interpreting results for groups with small cell counts. When appropriate, we report standard error as a measure of estimates' reliability.

Table 1. Number of individuals in the analytical sample size by age groups and regions of birth – Spanish Survey of Essential Characteristics of the Population and Housing 2021.

Age groups	**Country / Region of birth**						
	Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - Second generstion	**Total**
20 to 29	362	423	306	1,362	29,130	2,546	34,129
30 to 39	1,017	1,194	591	2,526	30,887	660	36,875
40 to 49	1,341	1,627	1,318	3,644	52,346	517	60,793
50 to 59	756	1,215	1,552	2,590	56,997	459	63,569
60 to 64	233	384	365	819	26,198	203	28,202
Total	3,709	4,843	4,132	10,941	195,558	4,385	223,568

Note: The category "Asia and Europe" includes all Asian, Oceanic and non-EU countries. *Source:* Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

To model the social space, we rely on the first three factorial axes resulting from a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) on the seven following variables along with their categories. Categories' relative contribution to the variance of the first three axes is reported in Table A1 in the appendix.

1. **Educational attainment:** Primary or less (PrimarLo), First stage of secondary education (SeconLow), Final stage of secondary education (SeconMed), Secondary vocational (SeconVoc), Tertiary vocational (TertiVoc), Bachelor's degree (TertiLow), University degree (TertiMed), Postgraduate (TertiUpp).
2. **Homeownership status including the share of the total household income used to pay for the mortgage/rent**: Inherited, Owner <20%, Owner <35%, Owner >35%, Owner other, Owner paid, Tenant <20%, Tenant <35%, Tenant >35%.
3. **Household net monthly income:** <1000€, 1000-1500€, 1500-2000€, 2000-2500€, 2500-3000€, 3000-5000€, >5000€.
4. **Educational discipline and employment status:** Unemployed, Inactive, Students, Housework, Service, Education, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law, Sciences, Technology and Engineering.
5. **Population size of the municipality:** Less than 50k, 50 to 100k, 100 to 500k, 500k or more.
6. **Parent's educational attainment:** Primary or less (PrimarLo), First stage of secondary education (SeconLow), Final stage of secondary education (SeconMed), Secondary vocational (SeconVoc), Tertiary vocational (TertiVoc), Bachelor's degree (TertiLow), Postgraduate (TertiUpp).
7. **Owns more than one real estate property:** Yes, No.

Together, these variables measure a multidimensional socioeconomic and occupational profile of the adult population. Individuals' experiences are shaped and constructed by the combination of these variables at different times during the life course, from early to late adulthood. The population size of the municipality in which individuals reside captures geographical disparities in employment opportunities and historical development gaps between Spanish cities and rural areas, adding to the individual-level socioeconomic and occupational profile provided by the other variables. This variable is also important when considering immigrants because cities tend to be more attractive for these populations due to labour opportunities and demands.

Divergent socioeconomic and occupational profiles among the young adult population (i.e., 20-29 and 30 to 39 age groups) underline the existence of current social inequalities, for example for accessing education, rapidly acquiring housing or employment. Divergent profiles among older adults reflect cumulative inequalities over the life course shaped by past

opportunities among older generations. Together, younger and older adults' socioeconomic and occupational profiles constitute the Spanish social space, i.e., metaphorically, the set of social positioning of individuals within the Spanish society (Bourdieu 1996).

Existing correlations among these seven variables are the basis for measuring typical living circumstances and strategies across groups of people. For example, typically, individuals from rich families are likely to have early access to homeownership due to inheritances or donations, high educational attainment, and well-paid occupations (León et al. 2024). The reverse is true about individuals from socially disadvantaged families. The particularities of the Spanish society with respect to homeownership and employment have created groups of "insiders" and "outsiders" that have benefited from and suffered the consequences of the Spanish economic model, respectively (Blavier 2023). Beyond cumulative categories of social privileges or disadvantages, we aim to detect complex interactions between the two, providing a nuanced perspective on contemporary structure of inequalities in Spain.

Given the bottom-up (data driven) nature of our approach, we borrow the term *probable social classes* to refer to the groups that emerge from cumulative and complex interactions between privileges and disadvantages observed in our data (Bourdieu 2005). More specifically, we rely on a global MCA on the seven above-mentioned variables to empirically measure the multivariate correlations among them via factorial axes (Le Roux and Rouanet 2004; Lebaron 2009). Factorial axes are numerical individual-level variables that summarise the main differences and disparities across socioeconomic and occupational profiles. Given the MCA properties, the first three MCA-axes capture the main cleavages across educational, housing, income, wealth, occupational and intergenerational resources. The MCA is global as it includes all age groups. We implement MCA using the R-packages ade4 and FactoMineR (Dray and Dufour 2007; Lê et al. 2008).

Next, we conduct six age-group-specific cluster analyses to identify individuals with similar characteristics and living conditions. We rely on 10-year age groups to favour comparability across individuals and we set to six the number of clusters. This predefined number of clusters favour comparability across age groups. The cluster analyses were conducted in two steps. First, we implement a hierarchical clustering via the Ward method followed by a cluster consolidation via K-means using the hclust and WeightedCluster R-packages, respectively (Studer 2013; R Core Team 2017). Following Bourdieu (2005 Introduction) call these clusters *probable social classes*.

To analyse the migration-stratification link, we use the interaction between age groups and region of birth as a supplementary variable within the MCA model. When projected into an MCA model, supplementary variables capture the multivariate influence of active variables on supplementary categories (Pardo 2020). The relative location of age and origin groups along the MCA-axes indicate their differing modes of incorporation.

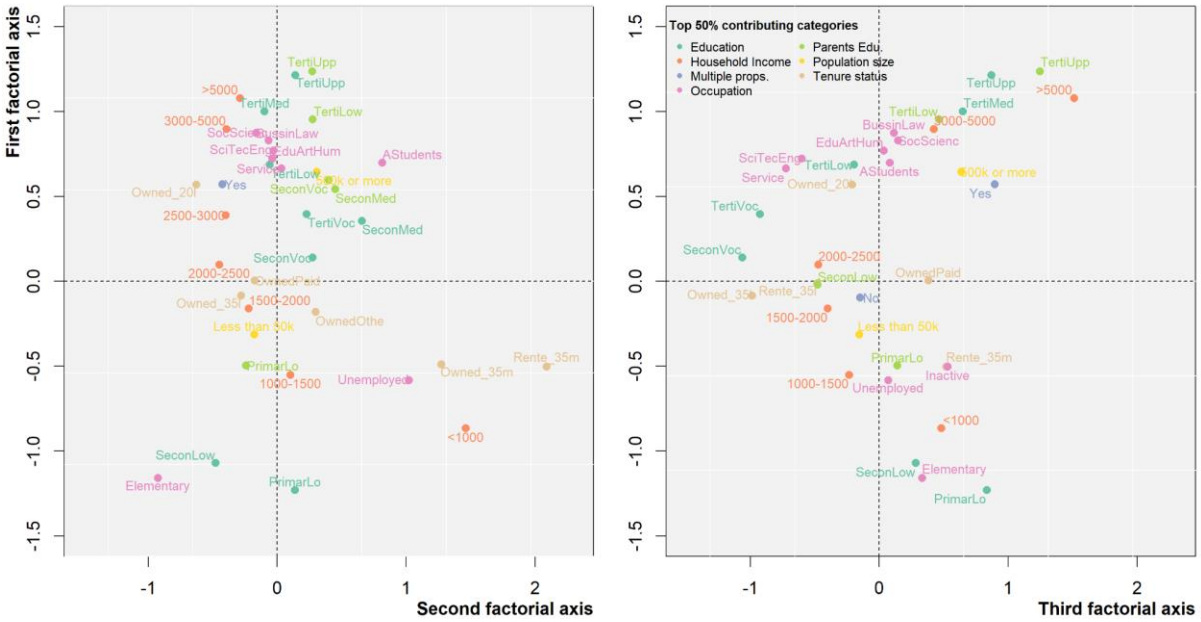
We contrast these results with a cross-tabulation of *probable social classes* and regions of origin to refine our understanding of how origin influences immigrants' incorporation. This approach allows us to identify more nuanced forms of incorporation that go beyond what can be captured by single-variable analyses, highlighting the complex interplay between social class and origin in shaping immigrants' integration experiences, and ultimately, Spanish social stratification.

Results

Social Cleavages and Patterns of Stratification in Contemporary Spain

Figure 1 displays the three-dimensional Spanish social space and the top contributing categories to the first and second axes (left panel) and to the first and third axes (right panel). Together, these three axes account for 64.1% of the total inertia.

Figure 1. The Spanish social space. Distribution of top 50%-contributing categories across the first three MCA-axes. Left panel: First and second axes. Right panel: First and third axes.



Note: Table A1 in the appendix shows categories' relative contribution to the first three axes.
Source: Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Each point in the social space represents the mean position of the individuals with a shared characteristic (e.g. unemployed), providing a visual representation of their position in Spanish society. For example, an individual located at the higher end of the plot will be characterised by the confluence of categories of social advantage like high education level (TertUpp), high parental education level (TertUpp), qualified occupation, and high income (3,000 to 5,000€ and >5,000€ per month). Likewise, there is virtually no unemployment or high financial burden due to rent or housing loans at the higher end of the social space. In short, proximity between categories implies positive correlation. Distance among categories implies the reverse.

Thus, according to Figure 1, the first factorial axis (vertical) places individuals on a socioeconomic gradient that increases from the bottom to the top. In the lowest part of axis 1, we find individuals with low educational attainment —primarily those with no formal education, primary schooling, or early stages of secondary education—, whose parents have also reached low education credentials. This group is further characterised by being employed in elementary occupations (or unemployed), and having low-income levels. As previously mentioned, towards the top of axis 1, markers of social privilege become more prominent. Here, we find individuals with higher levels of education and income, and employed in qualified occupations, coupled with the inheritance of cultural capital from their parents. Respondents who declare having more than one real estate property also tend to concentrate towards the higher end of the axis. This pattern aligns with findings from various national contexts, where the first factorial axis often represents individuals' overall volume of capital (Branson et al. 2024; Atkinson and Schmitz 2024).

Homeownership and household income are the two most contributing variables to the second factorial axis. This second factorial axis captures individuals' access to housing and their dwelling conditions. On the right-hand side we find individuals facing high economic burdens to pay for housing, irrespective of their tenure status, i.e., renters and owners using more than 35% of their income to pay for their housing. These include low-income groups and unemployed individuals, but also students, signalling the generational and migration divide hindering the access to the housing market in contemporary Spain (Lebrusán Murillo 2023; Delclós 2023). In contrast, on the left-hand side, we find homeowners whose higher incomes allow them to spend less than 35% of their earnings on housing.

The third axis introduces further distinctions between groups of individuals. The upper-right and lower-right areas of the plot represent socially privileged and socially disadvantaged classes, respectively. The middle classes gravitate around the centre and centre-left areas. A detailed inspection of the cloud of categories reveals that individuals located at the centre and the upper-right quadrant, i.e. those with high and middle income and education levels with educated parents, face lower financial burdens for accessing housing and are the so called "insiders", a concept also associated with older age groups who accessed to the housing market before the start of the housing bubble (Bentolila et al. 2012; Arundel and Lennartz 2020). At the centre left we find younger middle classes with intermediate education and income levels dealing with high housing prices and facing difficulties in becoming "insiders".

Finally, the bottom-right quadrant comprises the "excluded" populations of the Spanish development model. Those with the highest unemployment rates, and the lowest income levels who use a high share of their income for accessing a dwelling.

To sum up, the Spanish social space exhibits an upper-right quadrant that clusters together younger age groups of highly educated students who typically have highly educated parents and reside in large urban areas. Students' proximity to upper social classes indicates that young individuals still reside with their parents, while their position towards the right end of the second axis reflects their challenges in entering the housing market (Lebrusán Murillo 2023). The upper-left quadrant is characterised by highly educated individuals employed in qualified occupations with high-income levels owning multiple housing properties. The bottom-left quadrant largely gathers those in older age groups with low education levels, living in small cities and rural areas with relatively easy access to housing. Lastly, the bottom-right quadrant predominantly includes low-income groups with low education levels, who are notably exposed to unemployment and face strong difficulties for accessing a dwelling.

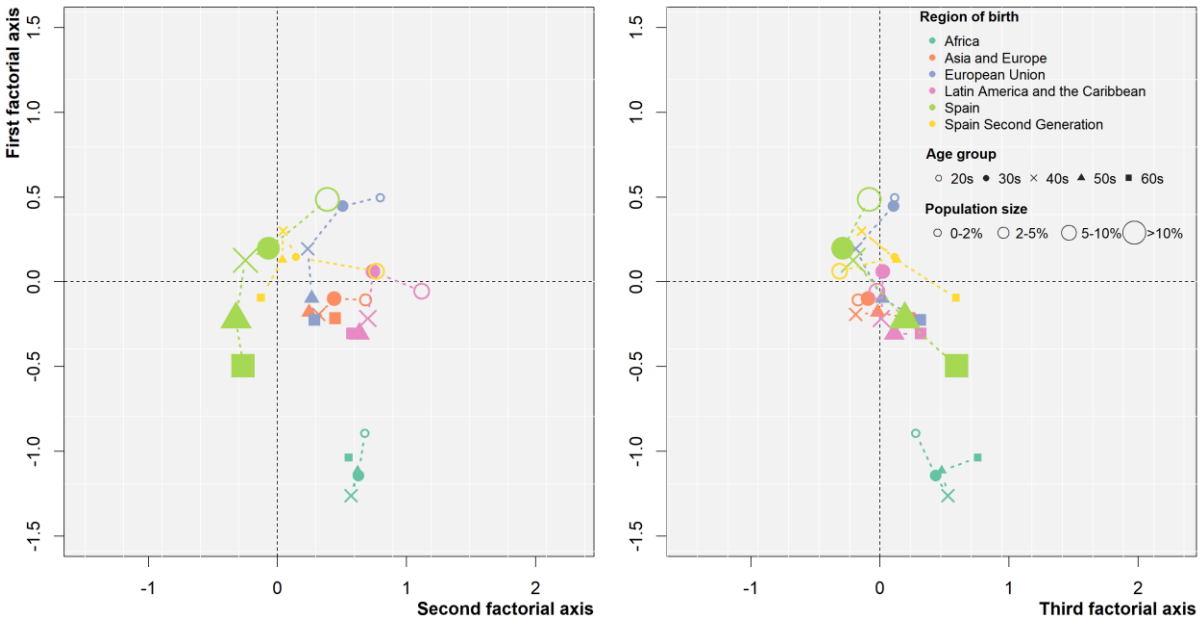
Additionally, these results underscore the connection between parental education and respondents' position in the social space. The inheritance of cultural capital (i.e. parental educational attainment) is associated with respondents' position in the social space, a finding that is in line with previous research showing the limited social mobility in contemporary Spanish society (Cervini-Plá 2015; León et al. 2024).

Life Course and Regional Origin Differences in the Spanish Social Space

We now turn to the analysis of the supplementary variables to evaluate how age and region of birth interact with the different patterns of social inclusion/exclusion that we have identified in the Spanish social space. In other words, by interacting each origin subpopulation with age groups we show how natives and immigrants incorporate into and constitute the Spanish social space at different stages of life.

Figure 2 displays the mean location of each origin-age subgroup into the social space (i.e., average coordinate in factorial axes). As in Figure 1, the left panel shows the first and second factorial axes and panel right the first and the third factorial axes. Colours represent respondents' region of birth while markers' shapes indicate the age groups, and the markers' size represent the population size of each origin with respect to the age group. Green points representing the Spanish population are the largest because Spaniards represent more than 2/3rds of the population in all age groups. Two immigrant minorities with divergent locations stand out: EU and African migrants; whereas Latin American and Caribbean immigrants represent sizable shares of the young adult and adult populations: 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Figure 2. Average location and relative sizes of origin and age groups within the Spanish social space.



Note: Table A2 in the appendix highlight the population size estimated percentages for each country/region of origin. *Source:* Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

In Figure 2, older cohorts hover around the bottom part of the socioeconomic axis (vertical), whereas those under 40 tend to be located at the top. Given that older cohorts experienced a context of limited access to higher education, they display larger percentages of individuals with low educational credentials and employed in elementary occupations, partially capturing a cohort effect.

These indicators, together with their lower mean income levels, place older age groups close to other socially disadvantaged groups. However, a close look at the data shows that this population group has been able to accumulate larger amounts of wealth, especially in the form of real estate assets. The higher share of retired respondents among these age groups can also partially explain their lower income levels, especially because the only income sources available in the data were labour and pensions.

From a life course perspective, in line with economic theory on the life cycle (Nagatani 1972), our results also show that individuals aged between 40 and 50 tend to be the top-income earners, a feature that is especially salient for natives, second generation Spaniards and individuals from EU countries. In this regard, the proximity between younger age groups (i.e. those under 30) and high-income categories is caused by their shared higher education levels, but also by the protracted transition to leaving the parental home, a common trait in Southern European societies like Spain (Módenes et al. 2013).

The second factorial axis (horizontal), instead, delineates an unambiguous hierarchy in terms of migration background, supporting the theory of a segmented incorporation into the Spanish social space (Zhou 1997; Prieto et al. 2018; Muñoz-Comet and Arcarons 2021). Given the composition of the axis, the hierarchization of migrant groups appears to be associated with patterns of residential exclusion. Native-born individuals on the left, exhibit higher ownership rates, lower financial burdens and higher income levels, whereas migrant populations located along the axis experience harsher dwelling conditions and are the most exposed to the current housing crises (Amuedo-Dorantes and Mundra 2013; Delclós 2023). More specifically, more than 60% of the Latin American and African populations are tenants, and one-fourth pay above 35% of the household earnings for accessing housing. In this context, access to homeownership does not seem to be a possibility for these two origin groups. The positioning of the youngest age groups towards the right end of this second axis further highlights their difficulties in accessing the housing market.

The third axis reinforces the presence of generational differences in social status among the Spanish-born and the second generation by positioning older individuals more prominently in the bottom-right region of the plot. Only individuals of African origin share similar right-hand-side coordinates. Individuals over 60 years old from non-African and non-Spanish regions exhibit much smaller coordinates along the third axis, and those in other age groups from these regions cluster closely together in this dimension. This relative lack of differentiation may reflect the shared experiences of migration, which can obscure generational disparities observed among Spaniards. The distinct position of individuals of African origin represents an extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, illustrating the distortion of generational social status disparities that may arise from the immigration experience.

Our methodological approach posits that in a given social space, two individuals with different living conditions will be located in distant positions with respect to each other by virtue of the different values in the variables used to define the model. Conversely, individuals with similar characteristics will be close to each other. When looking at the interaction between age and region of birth we find that within group age differences are much more salient for Spanish-born, EU and second-generation individuals than in the other groups. For instance, the distance in the first factorial axis between natives in their 20s and those in their 60s is 0.81 standard deviations (SD), while it is only 0.12 for immigrants from Africa and from Asia and Other European countries. These results reveal that migrants share similar living conditions across age groups, while there are notable differences in the case of natives and EU migrants. Age significantly influences the social positioning of natives, but is less relevant for immigrants.

Focusing on the second generation, we find notable differences between descendants of immigrants and those of natives, even among the same age groups. Consistent with previous research (Portes and Zhou 1993; Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2020; Bayona-i-Carrasco and Domingo 2024), the second generation shows a higher prevalence of low education levels. Moreover, their precarious access to housing pulls all age groups within the second generation towards the right end of the second axis. However, compared to immigrants, the second generation occupies a relatively more advantaged position in the Spanish social space. These findings suggest that the second generation also experiences segmented assimilation, hence pre- and post-distributive policies might not be completely successful in guaranteeing similar prospects to both immigrants- and natives-descendants.

The analysis of the origin-age subgroups provides interesting insights into immigrants' and natives' differing processes of incorporation into Spanish society. Nonetheless, focusing solely on these two variables obscures more complex interactions shaping inequalities in contemporary societies. In the next section we propose the use of clustering methods to overcome some of these limitations.

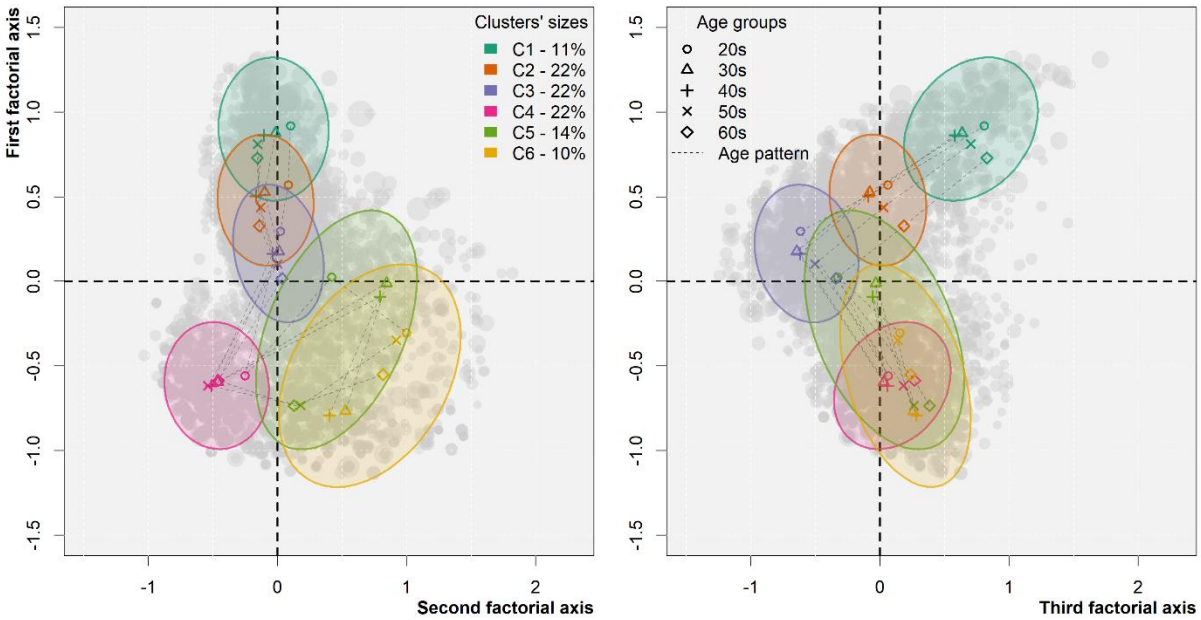
Is it all about age, migrant generation, and regions of origins?

Our bottom-up clustering approach assumes that the answer to this question is no. We posit that *probable social classes* would sharpen and enrich our understanding of stratification beyond the observed patterns by age and region of origin. This is because social classes are built upon shared material living conditions, regardless of individuals' birthplace. In other words, we assume that multidimensionally defined social classes subsume differences by immigration status for certain origin groups.

To operationalize this idea, we implement a six-cluster solution for each age group. These solutions balance explanatory power with comparability across groups. Figure A1 in the Appendix shows descriptively the similarity of goodness of fit for six clusters solutions across age groups.

Figure 3 displays age-specific clusters' centres along the first three factorial axes; we refer to this distribution as the *probable social classes*' location within the Spanish social space. Colours represent the clusters and markers' shapes the age groups (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s). Grey background points represent the study population. Clusters' centres are computed as the weighted mean coordinate of individuals in each cluster. The ellipses represent the 75% confidence interval and follow the overall location of individuals within the social space

Figure 3. Clusters' distribution across the social space



Source: Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

The clusters' centres are comparable to the mean location of age and region of origin groups in Figure 2. A visual comparison of Figures 2 and 3 gives a first insight on the relevance of social classes over demographic markers. The greater distance among clusters' centres compared to age and region-of-origin groups signal the strength of material configurations in constituting the Spanish stratification system beyond age and origin. Especially in top classes, markers for all age groups appear close to one another indicating shared privileged conditions across the life course. At the other end of the clusters' spectrum, age markers are more dispersed indicating variegated forms of disadvantaged across age groups in lower classes.

Clusters 1 to 3 are vertically located along the first axis signalling a clear socioeconomic gradient. Conversely, Clusters 4 to 6 are distributed along the second factorial axis. Therefore, class differentiation among socially disadvantaged *probable social classes* is mostly determined by the urban-rural divide and by the differing modes of incorporation into the housing market.

The size of the ellipses in Figure 3 indicates the degree of concentration of individuals within the *probable social classes*. Clusters 1 to 4 concentrate most of their members in relatively small areas. Accordingly, individuals' profiles and living conditions are more homogeneous among these clusters. On the contrary, Clusters 5 and 6 partially capture manifold dynamics of inequality, leading to a more diverse composition that comprises a wider range of realities within each probable social class.

An examination of the *probable social classes*' composition reveals that in all age groups, Cluster 1 predominantly consists of individuals with the highest levels of education, concentrated in skilled occupations, particularly in social sciences, business, and law. As a result, 70-80% of individuals in Cluster 1 belong to the two highest income brackets. This group lives in large metropolitan areas and has the highest rates of multiple property ownership and mortgage-free homes.

Clusters 2 and 3 exhibit declining educational attainment and parental education levels. In Cluster 2, more than 65% of the individuals have tertiary education, while in Cluster 3, secondary education is the most common. The lower educational attainment in Cluster 3 also contributes to their lower income and higher unemployment rates, which can be twice as high as those in Cluster 2. The most significant difference between the two *probable social classes* lies in their spatial distribution: over half of Cluster 3's population resides in small towns and villages (fewer than 50,000 residents), compared to just 30-40% in Cluster 2. Both *probable social classes* show lower rates of property ownership compared to Cluster 1. Ownership of multiple properties is less common as well.

Cluster 4 has the highest proportion of individuals living in small towns and rural areas. In contrast to other *probable social classes* with similar socioeconomic characteristics, Cluster 4 has a higher percentage of individuals owning multiple real estate properties, and inheriting or owning their dwelling without any remaining debt. Their relatively easy access to housing partially compensates their low levels of education and income and the predominance of elementary occupations. Clusters 5 and 6 represent the most disadvantaged segments. Despite having higher mean education levels than Cluster 4, these *probable social classes* face the highest unemployment rates, and 80% of their members fall into the lowest income brackets. These factors severely limit their access to housing, resulting in the highest tenancy rates and the most pronounced economic struggles in securing housing, regardless of tenure status.

The joint interpretation of Figure 2 and 3 suggest that clusters display non-random compositions according to region of origin. We confirm this visual intuition with the clusters' composition by respondents' origin for all age groups combined in Table 2.

Table 2. Region of birth shares (%) by *probable social classes* for 20 to 64-year-old individuals in Spain.

Probable social classes (Clusters)	**Country / Region of birth**						
	Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - SG	**Total**
1	0.3 (0.1)	2.5 (0.2)	3.3 (0.5)	5.3 (0.9)	86.7 (1.5)	1.9 (0.2)	100
2	0.4 (0.0)	2.8 (0.3)	2.4 (0.2)	4.9 (0.7)	87.4 (1.2)	2.0 (0.1)	100
3	0.8 (0.1)	3.8 (0.2)	2.8 (0.2)	5.6 (0.7)	84.7 (0.9)	2.2 (0.1)	100
4	3.5 (0.2)	4.0 (0.5)	2.0 (0.1)	5.8 (1.3)	82.8 (1.8)	2.0 (0.1)	100
5	2.3 (0.3)	4.1 (0.5)	3.1 (0.3)	10.8 (2.7)	76.9 (3.6)	2.8 (0.2)	100
6	8.7 (0.7)	6.5 (0.4)	3.4 (0.2)	13.8 (2.6)	63.4 (2.6)	4.1 (0.4)	100
Total SEs	2.3 (0.2)	3.8 (0.2)	2.7 (0.2)	7.0 (1.2)	81.9 (1.5)	2.4 (0.1)	100

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors (SEs). Table A3 in the appendix displays age-group specific crosstabulations between probable social classes and region of origin. *Source:* Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

We describe patterns in this table in terms of over- and underrepresentation by comparing clusters' composition vs the marginal distribution of region of origin (Table's last row). A region of origin is said to be over-represented in a cluster if its within-cluster share is larger than the share in the overall population. For example, African immigrants are 2.3% of the study population and 8.7% in Cluster 6 meaning that they are overrepresented in this cluster. The reverse is true for Clusters 1 to 3 where Africans are underrepresented. We take standard errors into account when making comparisons. When the standard errors are large relative to the estimated proportions, we approach conclusions with caution.

Hence, Table 2 shows a gradient in the composition of the *probable social classes* by regions of birth. Social inequality and stratification affect native- and foreign-born populations differently. Spanish-born individuals are over-represented in Clusters 1 to 4, and under-represented in Clusters 5 and 6. In these latter two clusters, immigrants make up approximately one-fourth and one-third of the population, respectively, with African and Latin American and Caribbean individuals featuring prominently. The shares of this latter region display relatively large standard errors which speaks to the uncertainty of the actual size of these groups within the lower classes.

However, despite immigrants' overrepresentation in lower *probable social classes*, Spanish-born make up the majority of the socially excluded. More than 65% of individuals in Cluster 5 and 6 are Spanish born, and at least 60% have Spanish-born parents. Second-generation individuals are present in similar shares across clusters with a slight overrepresentation in the last two clusters. Notably, SEs are relatively low for the share of this group. In other words, social inequality affects native- and foreign-born populations distinctively, the former as a majority population with large shares among socially excluded groups, and the latter by concentrating their individuals into socially excluded groups.

At the other end of the spectrum, social inequality is reflected in the closeness of social classes. The underrepresentation of African individuals in the first three clusters implies their virtual absence in this high-status social milieu for all age groups. Top classes are not accessible for African immigrants, more so when standard errors are considered.

Immigrants from European Union countries display a U-shaped pattern across clusters, meaning an overrepresentation in higher and lower classes potentially reflecting existing inequalities across EU nations (e.g., West-East divergent migration flows). The shares for immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries look like those of the second generation, with greater standard errors.

In sum, top classes are partially open for immigrants from regions other than Africa. These various patterns demonstrate the connection between macro-level forms of inequality as well as within-country within-EU disparities as drivers of immigration. According to these results, it will be hard to understand immigration through univariate analysis and overarching categories such as immigrants, Africans, Latin American and even European migrants.

All in all, *probable social classes* allow us to empirically challenge simplistic narratives that view immigrants as a homogeneous group in constant need of social assistance. While immigrants are overrepresented in socially disadvantaged clusters, some regions of origin are also present in the middle and upper social strata. Conversely, we find socially excluded populations among natives as well, making the case for the persisting role of class divisions from a macro-level perspective. Although racism plays a key role in the exclusion of immigrants and non-white groups (Baker and O'Connell 2022), there are other factors contributing to both natives' and immigrants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion; class is a fundamental one (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991).

Table A3 in the appendix replicates Table 2 for each of the five age groups. While the patterns shown in these tables align with our overall conclusions, they are provided for future research on age-specific trends. Of particular interest is how variations in cluster composition across age groups may reflect life-course dynamics, such as the transmission of inequality or specific aspects of the migration process itself.

Conclusions

Analysing immigrants' incorporation patterns into host countries is crucial for understanding the growing complexity and the emerging inequality trends in contemporary societies (Portes and Zhou 1993; Domingo 2015). The Spanish case is particularly relevant as it has become Europe's second-largest recipient of immigrants over the past two decades (Van Mol and de Valk 2016).

Recent immigration flows to Spain are characterised by highly diverse profiles, spanning from privileged groups to those facing substantial disadvantages. As a result, the generalised concept of "immigration" often masks segmented assimilation processes fostered by the characteristics of the hosting society and the heterogeneous demographic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of the newly arrived population.

In this paper we have provided a measure of the confluence and interaction between categories of social privilege and disadvantage constituting contemporary Spanish society. The placement of native- and foreign-born populations at different life stages in the resulting social space offers a visual representation of their living conditions and of their modes of integration into Spanish society.

Educational expansion increased younger cohorts' mean levels of education compared to older generations. However, their lower income levels and the major economic efforts for accessing the housing market excludes them from fully integrating as independent adults in Spanish society. Authors like Módenes and colleagues (Módenes et al. 2013) have suggested that the delayed emancipation observed in Spain may be a strategy of young adults and a type of intergenerational support to face what is considered to be an adverse environment.

An overarching finding of this study is that age is an especially salient factor influencing the social status of Spaniards, Europeans and second-generation Spaniards, but its importance diminishes for immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and other European

countries and Africa. Immigrants' similar living conditions across age groups can influence young immigrants' actual and perceived structure of opportunities, potentially affecting their desires and expectations and hence their long-term socioeconomic outcomes (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2005; Trinidad 2019).

Consistent with the segmented assimilation theory (Zhou 1997; Portes et al. 2018), we find evidence of stratified patterns of incorporation based on immigrants region of birth. We conclude that a meaningful share of immigrants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and non-EU countries experience social exclusion, and that their worse labour and economic outcomes cannot be fully explained by their socioeconomic characteristics. Additionally, the high cost of accessing housing emerges as a significant barrier to their full development and integration into the host society (Delclós 2023).

Our research also confirms the results obtained by previous studies on second generation immigrants in Spain (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al. 2020). While second-generation immigrants occupy a relatively advantaged social position compared to first-generation immigrants, their socioeconomic outcomes remain worse than those of native Spaniards. This suggests only partial assimilation and raises concerns about the effectiveness of existing redistribution policies (Vtyurina 2020).

This research identifies overlapping categories of social privilege and disadvantage shared by both immigrants and natives. While immigrants are disproportionately represented among socially disadvantaged groups, they also hold significant representation in the middle and upper probable social classes. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the socially disadvantaged population consists of natives. A relevant contribution of our study is that, moving beyond dichotomic perspectives on social exclusion, we find interacting categories of both social privilege and disadvantage converging on social groups. Rather than viewing social groups as simply privileged or disadvantaged, our findings highlight the complex and fluid nature of inequality.

Our study has some limitations. First, we lack information on wealth and income sources, two elements that would provide insightful understanding of the configuration of the social space. Second, the sample size does not allow for a detailed analysis of second-generation respondents' parental origins, limiting the analysis of their segmented incorporation into Spanish society. Additionally, given that immigration to Spain is a relatively recent

phenomenon, our results on the second generation are especially relevant to younger cohorts, but their interpretation for older age groups should be approached with caution.

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Appendix

Table A1: Categories' contribution to the three first factorial axes

Variables and categories	Contribution to factorial axes		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Educational attainment			
Primary and below	**4.82**	0.10	**3.67**
Secondary low	**12.97**	**4.24**	1.49
Secondary medium	0.63	**3.41**	0.63
Secondary vocational	0.09	0.57	**8.92**
Tertiary vocational	0.72	0.38	**6.49**
Tertiary low	**2.21**	0.03	0.30
Tertiary medium	**5.79**	0.10	**3.98**
Tertiary upper	**3.42**	0.07	**2.88**
Tenure status			
Inherited	0.73	0.00	0.02
Owner <20%	**2.64**	**5.21**	0.60
Owner <35%	0.03	0.49	**6.18**
Owner >35%	0.47	**5.17**	0.01
Owner other	0.12	0.52	0.06
Owner paid	0.00	0.65	**3.14**
Tenant <20%	0.01	0.34	0.17
Tenant <35%	0.00	0.04	0.98
Tenant >35%	0.63	**17.85**	1.12
Household income			
<1000	**4.53**	**20.92**	**2.32**
1000-1500	**2.46**	0.14	0.74
1500-2000	0.19	0.59	1.95
2000-2500	0.06	2.02	**2.29**
2500-3000	0.76	1.30	0.55
3000-5000	**5.30**	1.67	1.94
>5000	**2.61**	0.31	**8.43**
Occupation			
Unemployed	**2.19**	**10.89**	0.05
Inactive	0.79	0.01	1.45
Students	1.20	**2.62**	0.03
Elementary	**10.91**	**11.31**	1.48
Housework	1.19	0.00	0.65
Service	1.75	0.01	**3.43**
Education, Arts and Humanitites	2.10	0.00	0.01
Social Sciences	1.87	0.02	0.09
Bussines and Law	2.09	0.12	0.06
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	**3.34**	0.01	**3.83**

Table A1 (cont.)

Variables and categories	Contribution to factorial axes		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Urbanization			
Less than 50k	1.87	1.01	0.77
50 to 100k	0.00	0.11	0.03
100 to 500k	0.23	0.09	0.19
500k or more	**2.88**	1.04	**4.60**
Parental educational attainment			
Primary and below	**4.87**	1.91	0.64
Secondary low	0.00	0.04	**3.63**
Secondary medium	0.90	1.00	0.98
Secondary vocational	0.90	0.65	0.88
Tertiary vocational	0.76	0.36	0.38
Tertiary low	1.84	0.24	0.71
Tertiary upper	**4.85**	0.38	**8.09**
Multiple real state properties			
No	0.32	0.29	1.31
Yes	1.94	1.76	**7.84**

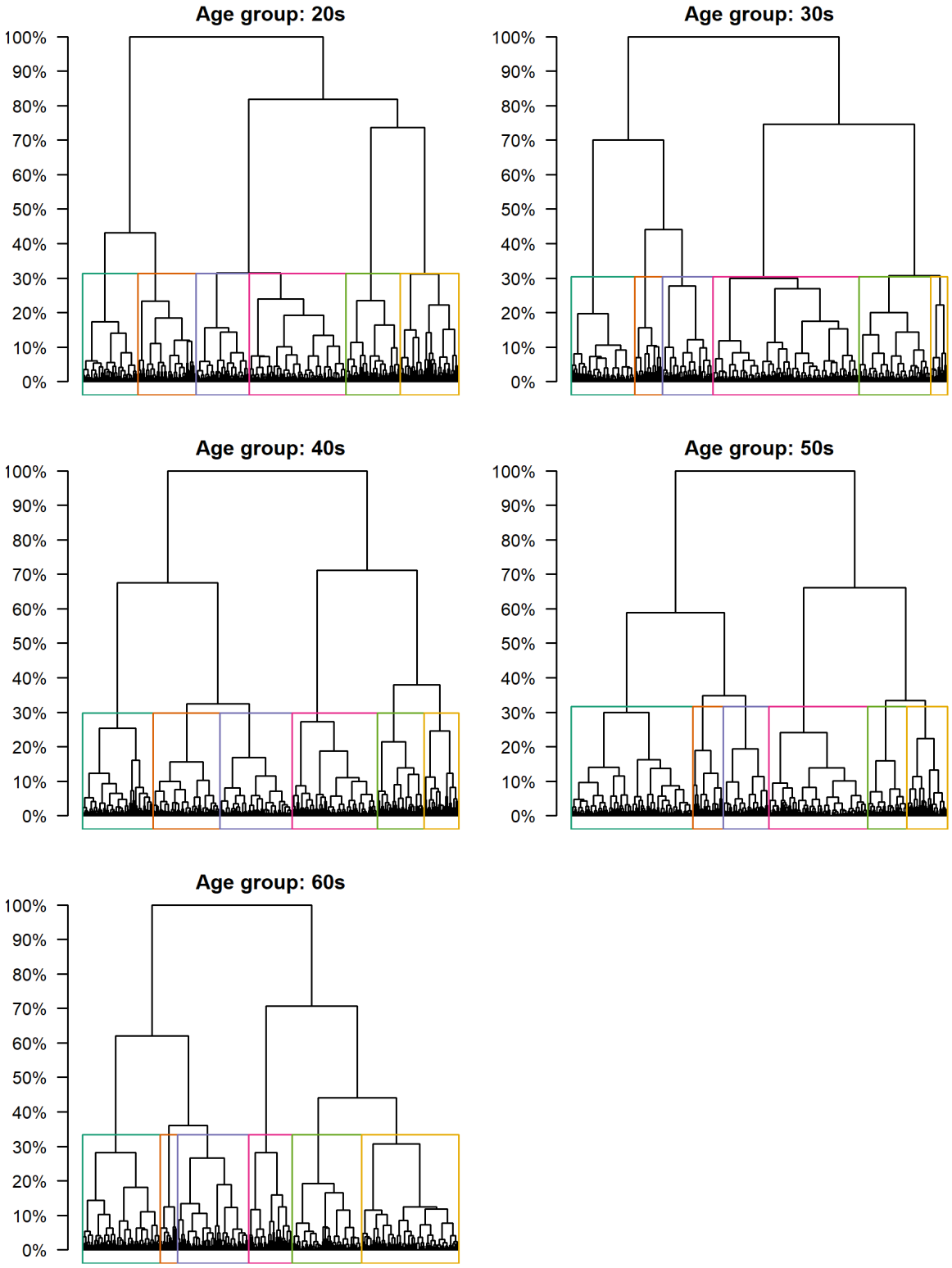
Note: Bold numbers indicate contributions above the mean. *Source:* Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A2: Row and column percentage for the crosstabulation of age groups and regions of origin

Age groups Cell content		**Country / Region of birth**					
		Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - SG
20 to 29	% row	1.7	2.4	1.6	6.4	79.1	8.7
	% column	13.7	11.4	10.6	16.3	17.2	65.1
30 to 39	% row	3.3	5.1	2.7	9.7	77.3	1.9
	% column	29.4	27.4	20.6	28.2	19.1	16.0
40 to 49	% row	3.0	4.3	3.1	8.0	80.9	0.8
	% column	34.9	30.5	30.7	30.6	26.5	8.8
50 to 59	% row	1.6	3.6	3.2	5.3	85.6	0.7
	% column	17.7	23.3	29.7	18.9	25.9	6.9
60 to 64	% row	0.9	2.7	2.2	4.0	89.4	0.7
	% column	4.3	7.4	8.4	6.0	11.3	3.2

Source: Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Figure A1: Dendrograms and cluster solution for each age group



Source: Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A3: Region of birth shares (%) by *probable social classes* and ten-year age groups in in Spain.

Age group	*Probable social classes* (Clusters)	Country / Region of birth					
		Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - SG
20s	1	0.3	0.6	2.3	3.2	90.1	3.4
	2	0.2	1.2	1.3	4.1	86.4	6.9
	3	0.7	2.4	1.5	4.1	82.8	8.5
	4	4.8	4.3	1.3	8.8	70.5	10.2
	5	1.0	1.6	1.3	6.6	80.1	9.3
	6	4.8	5.4	2.5	14.5	57.8	15.0
	Total	1.7	2.4	1.6	6.4	79.1	8.7
30s	1	0.4	3.8	5.0	9.8	78.3	2.7
	2	0.6	3.8	2.6	7.6	84.1	1.4
	3	1.1	3.9	2.0	6.9	84.5	1.6
	4	5.8	6.1	1.8	7.9	76.3	2.0
	5	3.1	7.6	4.6	20.3	62.1	2.1
	6	13.0	7.7	2.0	13.3	61.8	2.2
	Total	3.3	5.1	2.7	9.7	77.3	1.9
40s	1	0.4	3.2	4.0	5.3	86.0	1.1
	2	0.4	2.7	2.6	4.6	89.0	0.6
	3	0.7	4.1	3.1	5.9	85.3	0.9
	4	4.5	4.6	2.2	7.1	80.9	0.6
	5	2.5	7.2	5.3	19.6	64.4	0.9
	6	13.3	5.8	2.7	12.6	65.0	0.7
	Total	3.0	4.3	3.1	8.0	80.9	0.8
50s	1	0.2	2.1	2.6	3.2	90.9	1.0
	2	0.5	3.2	3.1	3.9	88.6	0.7
	3	0.8	4.3	3.8	5.1	85.2	0.8
	4	1.7	3.1	2.4	3.6	88.9	0.4
	5	3.1	2.9	2.7	5.6	85.0	0.7
	6	4.8	7.4	6.8	17.3	63.0	0.7
	Total	1.6	3.6	3.2	5.3	85.6	0.7
60s	1	0.1	2.2	1.1	4.5	90.5	1.5
	2	0.4	2.8	2.4	3.5	89.9	0.9
	3	0.5	3.9	3.6	5.3	86.0	0.8
	4	0.9	1.6	1.5	2.3	93.4	0.4
	5	1.4	1.6	1.7	3.1	91.7	0.6
	6	3.0	6.6	3.4	10.1	76.2	0.7
	Total	0.9	2.7	2.2	4.0	89.4	0.7

Source: Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.