

Bulletin of Advanced Spanish



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Bienvenidos al Boletín – otoño de 2024

Welcome to the Bulletin's eighth year of celebrating all things Spanish and Spanish American.

This Autumn 2024 edition brings the results of our Sixth Form Essay Competition, run in conjunction with the University of Glasgow. Our [judges' verdict](#) looks at some of the topics chosen by this year's competitors, and what strategies were – and were not – effective in their entries.

Suitably enough for this season of Hallowe'en / Día de los Muertos, the [winning entry](#) in the Competition relates a supernatural mystery from Mexican folklore (in Spanish).



You don't have to be a Sixth Former to find the Spanish-speaking world inspiring. A British author who has been living out his enjoyment of Spanish for over 50 years assesses the enduring [benefits of being a Spanish speaker](#).



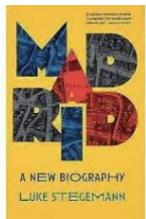
Hispanists of all ages have appreciated the way in which [También la lluvia](#) brings together aspects of Spain and Spanish America's past and present. We analyse its time-bending narrative (in Spanish).

Also relating to film, we conclude our three-part series on *lo visual* with a sneak preview of new research to devise a globally applicable [theory of film studies](#).

Are Latin America's supposedly 'progressive' left-wing leaders undermining democracy and letting down their people? Our America's editor offers a personal opinion (in Spanish).



The cultural legacy of both Spain and Latin America infuses the work of Joaquín Sabina. What Spanish language lessons are embedded in his fabled verse, and what can we learn from his writing technique? We look at three particularly effective lyrics.



Sabina is one among many who moved to Spain's capital to draw on its creative energy. A new 'biography' of Madrid gives compelling insights into the city, whether you know it well or not at all.

Meanwhile in Barcelona, a unionist administration has returned to power after 14 years of pro-independence regional government. We assess the new normal in Catalonia seven years on from the illegal referendum, and ask whether this 'normality' will last.

The Bulletin of Advanced Spanish is a free resource, read on every continent, written by and for enthusiasts at all stages of their exploration of the language and culture of the Spanish-speaking world. Please see the Guidelines tab if you would like to write for us. The deadline for the next edition is the end of January.

Deseándoles felices fiestas,

The BAS editorial team



Essay Competition 2024: the verdict

The Bulletin of Advanced Spanish / University of Glasgow Sixth Form Essay Competition has become a highlight of the hispanists' calendar. For the Bulletin's readers and editors it provides a snapshot of the topics that are finding traction with this year's pre-university hispanists. For students, it allows them to express themselves on aspects of their studies that they find inspiring, but that are not necessarily part of the exam syllabus.

Judges were again faced with a difficult choice, given the variety of topics and different approaches taken. After much deliberation, Esa Sharaf emerged as our 2024 winner. Esa duly receives an Amazon voucher kindly donated by the University of Glasgow's School of Modern Languages and Cultures. The judges called his entry 'an original topic which achieves good reader engagement with its combination of fact and personal opinion, effective use of secondary sources and strong, narrative-style opening, with a good sense of drama'. Read it in this edition of the Bulletin.

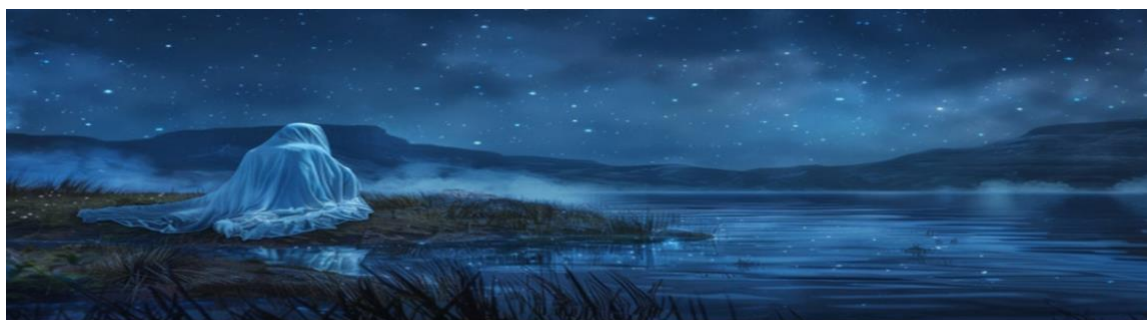
The judges commended the following short-listed entries:

- the Camino de Santiago: how its popularity squares with the decline of formalised religion. (Alastair Maynard)
- Lazarillo de Tormes: the social-historical context. (Johnny Byng)
- Carlos V's failure to defeat Lutheranism from 1529-1555 (Finn Murphy)
- La ley de memoria democrática (Marisa María Silva)
- ¿Se debe continuar venerando a Eva Perón como figura histórica y política? (Aashna Bhojwani)

The judges also commented on ways in which entrants might be able to improve their chances, eg:

- paragraph to the max. A number of competition entrants were reluctant to divide up their text, despite the refreshing effect of doing so. In general, shorter paragraphs draw the reader in; long ones can be off-putting.
- a number of entrants provided helpful bibliographies or footnotes, though not all footnotes included worthwhile detail.
- if there's a word limit, stick to it. A number of entries exceeded the specified 700-850 word length for this year's competition.

Our thanks to all who took part (and those who encouraged them along the way). We welcome feedback on format and scheduling of future competitions.



BAS / University of Glasgow Essay Competition 2024: Winning Entry

This year's winning author is Esa Ashraf, a Year 12 student at City of London School. He writes:

I was introduced to the story of La Llorona while watching TV. I found the story interesting, and after researching it further, I learnt it was of Mexican origin. I have always been interested in Mexican folklore, ever since hearing about el Día de los Muertos as a child, and took this opportunity to learn more about the story of La Llorona as well as Mexican folklore overall.

La Llorona: ¿ficción o realidad?

Hace muchos años, en la Ciudad de México, los vecinos se despertaron sobresaltados de madrugada al oír los tristes lamentos de una mujer.

‘Ay mis hijos!’ llamó una voz perturbadora.

Por sus gritos los temerosos vecinos se encerraron en sus casas hasta que la voz misteriosa desapareció. Según un testigo que vio a la mujer, llevaba un vestido blanco, y un velo que le cubría el rostro. Mientras caminaba por las calles, agitó los brazos con mucha fuerza, como si buscara a alguien. Vagaba por la ciudad, hasta llegar a un río, en el que desapareció. Nadie entendió cómo lo hizo. Además, nadie supo la razón por sus lamentos.

Al cabo de un rato, los vecinos empezaron a hablar de la mujer extraña. Le dieron el nombre de ‘La Llorona’. Se cree que La Llorona es el espíritu de una mujer muerta, que antes, vivía felizmente con su familia, hasta que se enteró de que su marido la engañaba con otra mujer. En un ataque de rabia, le llevó los niños al río y los ahogaron. Cuando volvió en sí, se dio cuenta de lo que había hecho, y se ahogó también. Desde entonces, vaga por las calles de la

ciudad como un alma en pena, buscando a sus hijos. Unas versiones de la historia dicen que se enfada cuando no encuentra a sus hijos, y lleva otros niños al río para que se ahoguen.

Esta historia es la leyenda de La Llorona. Es una parte muy conocida de la cultura mexicana, y los padres suelen contar el cuento a sus niños para que eviten los extraños (y los ríos, en que se pueden ahogar). ¿Sin embargo, La Llorona es ficción o realidad? ¿De dónde viene la historia? Vamos a repasar los hechos.

El origen de la leyenda es incierto, pero es probable que tenga raíces prehispánicas. Específicamente, los dioses prehispánicos. Se ha sugerido que la Llorona es una hibridación de tres diosas mexicas: Cihuacóatl (la diosa madre y mujer serpiente), Teoyaomínqui (la vigilante de los muertos) y Quilaztli (diosa de los partos y los gemelos). Este trío de dioses vagaba con el aspecto de una mujer vestida de blanco. Sin embargo, de todos los dioses prehispánicos, la Llorona está más relacionada con Chocacihuatl. El nombre 'Chocacihuatl' se compone de dos palabras, 'choka' que significa llorar, y 'cihuatl' que significa mujer. La primera documentación sobre la leyenda fue hacia 1550, cuando Bernardino de Sahagún, un misionero de España recogió la leyenda de Chocacihuatl en su obra 'Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España'. Escribió el siguiente pasaje:

«...aparecía muchas veces como una señora compuesta con unos atavíos como se usan en Palacio; decían también que de noche voceaba y bramaba en el aire... Los atavíos con que esta mujer aparecía eran blancos, y los cabellos los tocaba de manera, que tenía como unos cornezuelos cruzados sobre la frente.»
– Bernardino de Sahagún

Ahora que hemos establecido las raíces de la leyenda, tenemos que investigar la gran pregunta; ¿es la Llorona ficción o realidad? Al buscar en Google avistamientos reportados, es difícil determinar qué es real y qué no lo es. Hay muchos videos de 'avistamientos de la Llorona' en YouTube y otras redes sociales, pero con los últimos adelantos tecnológicos, y la inteligencia de la AI, hay que tomar en cuenta que no es difícil falsificar un avistamiento. Además, cualquiera puede llevar un vestido blanco y un velo y fingir que es la Llorona. Hay quien cree que la leyenda de la Llorona sufrió transformaciones durante la época de la Nueva España. Debido al miedo a ser castigado por creer en su religión desde antes de la conquista de México, las características de la leyenda fueron cambiando para adaptarse a los nuevos estándares de los conquistadores. Si esto es cierto, prueba que la Llorona es simplemente una leyenda, una historia de ficción, ya que, si fuera real, sus características no podrían ser cambiadas por la gente.

En resumen, la leyenda de la Llorona tiene una larga historia que data de la época precolonial. No es solo una parte de la cultura de México, pero también la historia del país, ya que nos ayuda a entender creencias religiosas antes de la llegada de la influencia española. Por la falta de pruebas, creo que la Llorona es solamente una leyenda, un mito contado para dar aviso y terror. Sin embargo, aun hay una posibilidad, que la Llorona exista, y esté vagando por las calles, a punto de echarse a llorar, en alguna parte de América Latina.



‘Why do you speak Spanish?’

Colin Harding

The young German stared hard at me across the dinner table of our jungle lodge in the Tambopata region of Madre de Dios, south-eastern Peru.

“Why do you speak Spanish?” he demanded.

I felt my hackles rising at the indignant, even accusatory undertone to his question. Or was my British sense of propriety merely caught off-guard by his unfamiliar directness?

I was non-plussed: all I could think of in reply was a defensive “it’s not illegal, is it?”



The German was one of a group of tourists visiting Peru for the first time, whom I had just met that evening. We were now all gathered for our evening meal, and I had been talking to our local guide, who was sitting next to the German. It did not seem to have occurred to the latter, nor to any of his party, that a few words of Spanish might be useful in a country in which it is the main official language. I presumably

appeared to them to be an English eccentric, indulging a rather tiresome affectation. It was natural that he and his companions would address me in English, of course, but Spanish ...?

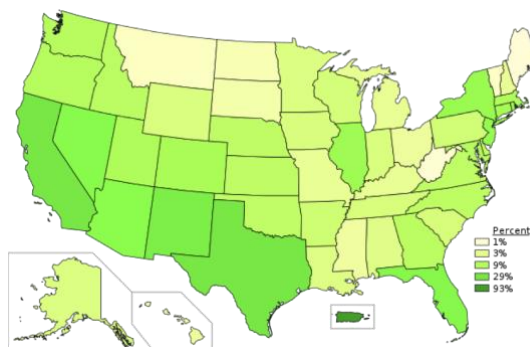
This was in 2019, and it was by no means the first time I had been challenged on my interest in the Spanish language, and not just by young Germans. What use was it, after all? No Spanish-speaking country was a significant player on

the world stage, and if you went to one of those places you were bound to find that many of the locals spoke English, particularly in the big tourist spots. So why bother?

Although these assumptions are not necessarily true, it is perhaps worth thinking about how to answer that question.

English is *the* international language these days, with much the same status that Latin enjoyed in the Middle Ages. However, even in monoglot England it is now widely recognised that some knowledge of foreign languages can be useful. Yet Mandarin, Russian and Arabic would appear to demand more urgent attention.

On the other hand, worldwide there are more native speakers of Spanish than English (496 million, according to the Instituto Cervantes, against perhaps 373 million native English-speakers). Moreover, Spanish is fast growing as an international language, with almost 100 million non-native speakers, according to the Instituto. It is still far behind English as a second language and lingua franca at conferences, sporting events, etc, but this state of affairs is not necessarily permanent.



In addition, there are now about 42 million Spanish-speakers in the United States, accounting for more than 12% of the total population. About half of all US college students are choosing to learn Spanish as a second language. By mid-century, if current trends continue, it is possible that one in three Americans will be speaking Spanish, very many of them

bilingually. Although second- and third-generation immigrants to the US often no longer use the language of their forebears, Spanish has proved remarkably resistant to the melting pot ideal across the generations. It is fiercely defended by many in the large US Latino communities as a badge of identity and cultural continuity.

I recall taking part in business discussions with a couple of Cuban-Americans in Miami a number of years ago, which were conducted in English and Spanish – they were both perfectly bilingual. We later attended a meeting of the local Latin Chamber of Commerce (as it called itself) which was entirely in Spanish. I was told you would struggle to find anybody speaking English on the streets of Hialeah, a city of 220,000 in the Miami conurbation, where last year almost 90% of the inhabitants said they spoke Spanish. The same applies to many parts of Los Angeles and other large US cities.

Florida



I found it natural that my initial interest in the Spanish language would lead me on to find out more about Latin America and the Caribbean, where most of the 33 countries (plus Puerto Rico, a US territory) are Spanish-speaking. I did a post-graduate course on Latin America at Oxford, and then, at the age of 24, went to work at a university in Lima. It was the start of a life-long fascination with everything about the region.



I was not the only one to take an interest. Both Russia and China have been working hard to establish beachheads in Latin America in recent times. China sees the continent as an increasingly important source of vital raw materials, buying quantities of iron ore, oil and soya beans from Brazil, for example, and has been pouring money into mining and energy projects all over the continent. Venezuela has displaced Cuba as Russia's most important trading and military ally in the region, buying billions of dollars worth of advanced weaponry over the past 20-odd years of Bolivarian government. Venezuela, along with Cuba and Nicaragua, can be relied upon to defend Russia's invasion of Ukraine in international forums.

My journey with Spanish started at the age of 12, in my second year at a Liverpool grammar school (now a huge academy trust), where the clever boys were selected to study Latin and later Greek, while the also-rans could make do with Spanish as their second foreign language (after French, which was compulsory for everyone).

As it happens, I was happy enough to be passed over for the Latin set. My father had studied Spanish at the same school just after the First World War. He had told me what an absorbing language it was, and how useful it would be in a city that had substantial fruit-importing links with Spain. I never followed that route in my subsequent career, but I did discover that I had an aptitude for the language, and later decided to study it, along with French, at university.

That was in the mid-1960s. Far more students are going down that road these days: Spanish is the fastest-growing foreign language taught in English schools, and now has more A-level students than any other. Spanish is, after all, beguiling both to speak and to listen to, and far more user-friendly than either Russian or Mandarin. And the



countries where it is spoken can get under your skin, for all sorts of reasons. Spain enjoys the mixed blessing of vast numbers of foreign tourists pouring in every year to enjoy the sun, sea and sand of the Costas. Latin America's exotic yet accessible charms draw in a consistent flow of westerners enjoying a break from their studies and their careers.

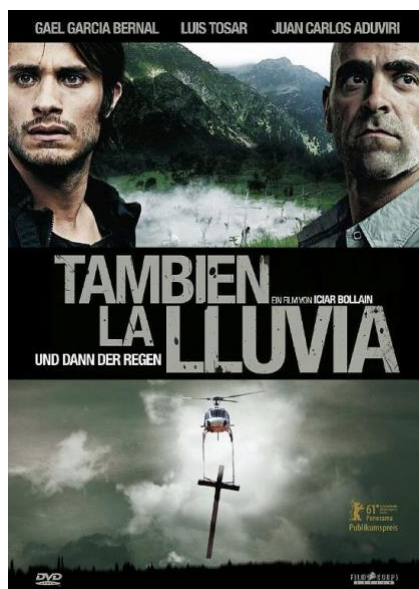
Latin Americans tend to take an idealistic view of their vaunted 'continent of peace' image – there was, after all, a brief border war between Peru and Ecuador as recently as 1995, and constant political changes mean there is an ever-shifting pattern of alliances and rivalries – but the ideal is not entirely devoid of content. Leaving Brazil to one side, their shared language plays a role in this, giving them a sense of a family of nations, and there is a good deal of continental solidarity on a range of issues, such as defence, climate change, and, of course, football.

Colin Harding is a journalist who has been writing about Latin America for more than 50 years.



También la lluvia: análisis

BAS editor Francisco Compán



Dirigida por Icíar Bollaín y con guión de Paul Laverty, *También la lluvia* se ha convertido en un icono cinematográfico que trasciende fronteras y culturas por la universalidad de sus temas centrales.

Este fascinante y complejo guión entreteje las complejidades de la representación histórica con la explotación en el cine, mientras se pone en paralelo la conquista de las Américas con la realidad moderna de Bolivia, un país con una inmensa riqueza en recursos naturales pero con índices de pobreza elevados.

La película sigue a un equipo de cineastas liderado por Sebastián, que llega a Bolivia para filmar una película sobre la expedición de Cristóbal Colón en 1492 y la resistencia indígena. A lo largo de la narrativa emerge un vínculo entre las luchas históricas de los taínos y las protestas de los bolivianos contra la privatización del agua en Cochabamba en el año 2000.

Bollaín rinde homenaje al legado de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas a través del personaje de Sebastián, encarnado por el camaleónico Gabriel García Bernal. Sebastián está profundamente influenciado por los escritos y el activismo de Fray Bartolomé, fraile dominico que luchó por los derechos de los indígenas durante el periodo colonial



español. Actúa de contrapeso moral frente a la falta de escrúpulos iniciales de Costa que, al igual que los colonizadores españoles de antaño, no muestra remordimientos en explotar a los indígenas.

La película hace también referencia a los sermones de otro fraile dominico, Antonio de Montesinos, que en 1511 denunció los abusos cometidos contra los pueblos indígenas en la isla de La Española, ahora Haití y República Dominicana. Estas denuncias iniciaron un debate en la Corona española sobre el trato a los indígenas, destacando la importancia de la iglesia en la discusión sobre la justicia y moralidad de las acciones imperiales.



En *También la lluvia*, Sebastián intenta recrear fielmente este activismo religioso. Uno de los momentos más importantes en su guión es la escena en la que Montesinos pronuncia su sermón en defensa de los indígenas, con Fray Bartolomé escuchando atentamente. La escena muestra la conexión entre ambos frailes, estableciendo su importancia en la historia de la conquista.

Sin embargo, la película también introduce una yuxtaposición interesante; mientras se filma el sermón, dos trabajadores indígenas observan la escena desde el fondo, invisibles para los cineastas. Esta invisibilidad resalta la continua exclusión de los pueblos indígenas, tanto en la historia colonial como en el presente.

Sebastián desea plasmar la resistencia indígena a través de la figura de Atuey, un líder taíno que luchó contra los conquistadores españoles. Para este papel, contrata a Daniel, un indígena local que, por casualidad, lidera protestas contra la privatización del agua en Cochabamba. Daniel, como Atuey, aparece en pantalla vestido con atuendos tradicionales, proyectando una imagen noble que Sebastián considera auténtica. Sin embargo, fuera del set, Daniel se enfrenta a la realidad de la lucha moderna de su comunidad por el acceso al agua, creando así un paralelismo entre el pasado y el presente de Bolivia. Sebastián, obcecado en su visión artística de la historia, no reconoce las luchas contemporáneas de Daniel que resultan en su detención.

Para Sebastián, la película no puede completarse sin el espíritu de Atuey, pero al igual que sucede en la escena del sermón de Montesinos, la causa indígena, en este caso la lucha de Daniel por sobrevivir en su vida real, es invisible para el director. Esta desconexión entre la visión de Sebastián



y la realidad de Daniel subraya la crítica de Bollaín sobre cómo las historias oficiales a menudo silencian o tergiversan las voces de los pueblos indígenas.

En la película de Sebastián, Cristóbal Colón es retratado como el villano; un hombre grosero y despiadado cuya llegada a las Américas resultó en la muerte de millones de indígenas y la introducción de la esclavitud. Sin embargo, la representación de Colón en *También la lluvia*, a través del personaje de Antón (Karra Elejalde), es mucho más compleja. Antón, un actor alcoholístico y cínico, desempeña el papel de Colón en la película, pero su propio carácter sugiere una interpretación más matizada.



En una de las primeras escenas, Antón recita sus líneas, como Colón, de manera tan agresiva que incomoda a los demás actores y a los camareros indígenas que lo observan. Aunque se disculpa al final, la escena establece su carácter como alguien

capaz de representar la avaricia y crueldad de Colón. Sin embargo, a medida que avanza la película, Antón se revela como un personaje más reflexivo e incluso provocador cuando no duda en señalar que incluso Fray Bartolomé tuvo esclavos, lo que provoca un debate agitado sobre la moralidad de las figuras históricas.

La evolución del personaje de Antón se hace esperar hasta el final de la película, cuando se queda solo con los indígenas detenidos durante las protestas por el agua y les ofrece su bebida, humanizando así a su personaje y forzando a la audiencia a reflexionar sobre el pasado colonial y un presente quizá no tan diferente. A través de Antón, Bollaín sugiere que las figuras históricas como Colón son a menudo más complejas de lo que la historia suele representar.

Por su parte, Costa, el productor de la película, también experimenta una evolución significativa. Al principio, se presenta como un hombre pragmático, más interesado en ahorrar dinero que en las luchas locales. Escoge Bolivia como lugar de rodaje porque su presupuesto le permite pagar solo dos dólares al día a los extras, la mayoría de los cuales son indígenas y dispuestos a aceptar un pago tan miserable.

A Costa no le importan la privatización del agua ni las protestas en Cochabamba, ni los derechos de los indígenas, siempre y cuando el rodaje de la película no se vea afectado. Sin embargo, su relación con Daniel comienza a cambiar a medida que la producción avanza. En una escena clave, Daniel le revela a Costa que entiende perfectamente el inglés y es consciente de



las injusticias que enfrenta su comunidad. Esta revelación sorprende a Costa y lo obliga a reconsiderar sus propias suposiciones racistas.

El punto culminante del cambio de Costa llega cuando decide ayudar a Daniel a rescatar a su hija María Belén durante los disturbios en Cochabamba. Esta acción inesperada y peligrosa muestra que Costa ha desarrollado una conciencia sobre la lucha de los pueblos indígenas y su papel en llevar al mundo la historia de su explotación.



A través de personajes como Sebastián, Antón y Costa, *También la lluvia* ofrece una reflexión sobre cómo se narran y representan las historias de los pueblos indígenas, que como un guión de cine, son moldeadas por quien las escribe y vulnerables a sus prejuicios. Sebastián, aunque bien intencionado, está ciego a las realidades actuales de la explotación,

mientras que Antón y Costa, a través de su evolución personal, sugieren una mayor conciencia de las continuidades entre el pasado colonial y el presente poscolonial.

De otra manera, Bollaín critica la industria del cine transnacional y su papel en la perpetuación de formas de explotación económica y cultural. Al mismo tiempo, destaca la resiliencia de los pueblos indígenas, quienes, como dice Daniel, siguen sobreviviendo a pesar de siglos de opresión. La película nos invita a cuestionar las historias que contamos y las historias que aún viven en la lucha diaria de comunidades marginadas.



Visual Theory and the Global South

BAS editor Nathaniel Gardner

Theory often goes hand in hand with the study of literature and film. Sometimes this is literary theory, sometimes it is film theory, sometimes theory from another field is also applied to our area of study. The humanities allow a range of flexibility in this sense that other areas might not. This can be extremely useful and can enable some truly innovative work when it comes to analysing texts.



Classes on literary or film theory often start by taking one book or film and then reading it from that angle to show how a variety of analytical tools can provide different viewpoints onto one particular work.



A friend once told me how his teacher used Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* as a base from which to show his students how over fifteen completely different approaches from literary theory could be used to crack open that classic Mexican text in different ways. When I took the same course a few years later, I read Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur* (a highly recommendable novel on fear and terror during the military regimes found in the Southern Cone in the latter half of the 20th century).

You might be asking if some of those theoretical readings on that one novel might have felt a bit forced. In some cases, they were. However, to a certain extent, that was the point. While many theoretical approaches can be applied to different visual and written texts, not all are the most adequate. You must find what works best. If not, it won't really work to your (and others') satisfaction.

This leads me to my next point. I have noticed for a long time that many well written, highly engaging, impeccably researched critical studies on Latin American literature and photography engaged much less with literary or visual theory than their counterparts in the Global North. I had observed this repeatedly, but had never really given much thought to the reasons behind it until I was undertaking the research for my recent book *The Study of*



Photography in Latin America. While writing it I spoke with many experts on Latin American photography, and one of the points I discovered was that while the experts were well acquainted with visual theory, most did not reference it because they did not feel it was relevant to their work on the Global South. In fact, several pointed out that they felt that these ideas (mostly derived from research done in the USA and Western Europe) were interesting and relevant, but were probably not written with the Global South in mind.

In retrospect, this was a simple and unsurprising explanation of a trend I had noticed many years ago. However, hearing it explained to me so plainly invited a second question: why isn't there any visual theory from the Global South written for studying the Global South?

The truth is, there is. You just have the know where to look for it.



The writing of theory for the Global South is a growing field. To that end, I have been working with researchers in the UK, France, and across Latin America to identify what visual theory is being written in the Global South about the Global South. Our labours have yielded some positive results, the first of which we expect to publish in Mexico in the near future (more details to come!). This project draws on

expertise from across Latin America, the aim being to provide tools from the Global South for working on the Global South. It is a promising endeavour that will bring new insights.

Just as my literary theory teacher taught when applying so many theories to that one Marta Traba novel, some ideas generate more fruitful discussion than others. Our mission, as students of such texts, is to gain enough experience to know which ones work best, even if that means looking beyond the standard answers to find better ones.

Doing so should help our experience be even more fruitful and our outputs all the more relevant.



América Latina, el progresismo orwelliano y el progreso hacia el dolor

BAS Americas editor Clara Riveros

En el último cuarto de siglo el populismo de izquierda en América Latina no solo se ha apropiado del concepto 'progresismo' sino que lo ha redefinido a partir de sus prácticas opacas y cuestionables. Ha desafiado la transparencia y perseguido a quienes hacen control político desde la oposición.



Además, ha obstaculizado la rendición de cuentas, bloqueado y desprestigiado investigaciones periodísticas que desnudan a los gobernantes ante la opinión pública, incluso descalificando e insultando a los trabajadores de medios y, en el caso de Colombia, a las mujeres periodistas que han sufrido y chocado con el machismo, paternalismo y furia presidencial.

El poder político, criminal y mafioso ha convertido esta profesión, la de comunicar e informar, en un oficio de alto riesgo en varios países de la región.

Colombia y Venezuela, a diferentes niveles, viven tiempos recios. El gobierno de Gustavo Petro en Colombia enfrenta una seria crisis de credibilidad y un 58.3 % de desaprobación transcurridos dos años de gestión. Abundan escándalos de corrupción, ya no solo en materia de política interior, sino también en los nombramientos y los casos de corrupción que comprometen a la familia presidencial. Además, los desaciertos de política exterior han puesto al país en una línea opuesta a su tradición afín a Occidente y a las democracias del mundo. Colombia ahora se vincula por cuestiones de ideología con las autocracias cubana y venezolana, y con regímenes parias como el ruso o el iraní.



Entre tanto, en Venezuela, el régimen ha consumado el fraude, acudiendo incluso al terrorismo de Estado. Una vez más impidió deliberadamente la alternancia en el poder en conformidad con la voluntad popular y obstruyó los legítimos derechos de la oposición. La situación es crítica y desoladora. Los gobiernos de Colombia, Brasil y México han

desempeñado un rol vergonzoso, más o menos explícito, en respaldo de la dictadura de Nicolás Maduro. No obstante, para Petro y Lula se hizo cada vez más difícil justificar sus posiciones afines a Maduro: por lo mismo han tratado de posar en un punto medio, presuntamente buscando un rol mediador.

El hacer progresista latinoamericano evoca la ficción distópica de 1984. Los principios del Partido (la guerra es la paz, la libertad es la esclavitud, la ignorancia es la fuerza), los mecanismos para su funcionamiento (la mutabilidad del pasado, el “doblepiensa”, la

“nuevalengua”) y hasta el hacer de los ministerios, funcionarios y agentes del Estado que se encargan de temas esenciales como la verdad (falsificar la historia y la realidad), la paz (hacer la guerra), la abundancia (asegurar la miseria y administrar el hambre de esa mayoría excluida y despreciada por el Partido) e incluso el amor (mantener el orden instaurado y reeducar a quienes desafían el poder) nos recuerdan ese mundo orwelliano, inspirado



por la realidad de la Unión Soviética de sus tiempos. El líder supremo invade todos los aspectos de la vida de ese pueblo reprimido. Todos cumplen una función y toleran sus condiciones miserables en la creencia de que ahora viven mejor que sus antepasados. Pero lo cierto es que allí reinan la miseria, la pobreza y el atraso. La frustración se disipa en brutales manifestaciones de odio contra el enemigo que viene a ser cualquier disidente, opositor o desertor, todos tachados de criminales.

El lenguaje ha sido transformado y es vital para el triunfo de esos proyectos que propenden a la destrucción del pensamiento crítico. La ortodoxia equivale a no pensar, decía Syme, gestor de la “nuevalengua” en la novela de Orwell. El progreso es el avance hacia el dolor. El odio, la desigualdad, la falta de libertad, la reescritura de la historia, la guerra perpetua contra el supuesto enemigo externo, la vigilancia y la represión son las condiciones necesarias para la estabilidad del régimen. El poder no es un medio, es el fin en sí mismo.



Los gobiernos de izquierda populista en América Latina hicieron del progresismo su bandera, del pueblo y de los pobres su base y, también, su relato. De esta manera exacerbaron la división social a partir de un discurso desfasado y extemporáneo que opone a ricos -denostados como “oligarquías y castas”- y pobres. Han despreciado a las clases medias y eliminado matices y zonas grises en la evolución histórica, política, económica y social de las repúblicas latinoamericanas.

La presunta lucha política contra la desigualdad incluso se tradujo en mayor pobreza de los ciudadanos, promoviendo, en algunos casos, el éxodo masivo por la ausencia de las condiciones mínimas y básicas para asegurar la subsistencia y la vida. El desmantelamiento progresista del Estado se ha traducido en el empeoramiento de las condiciones económicas, políticas y de seguridad en diferentes territorios que han terminado cooptados por mafias políticas y por cárteles de narcotraficantes, muchas veces aliados con élites clanes locales. Grupos ilegales han impuesto el terror y sus reglas de juego se han superpuesto al Estado de derecho alterando la vida y la cotidianidad de los ciudadanos.

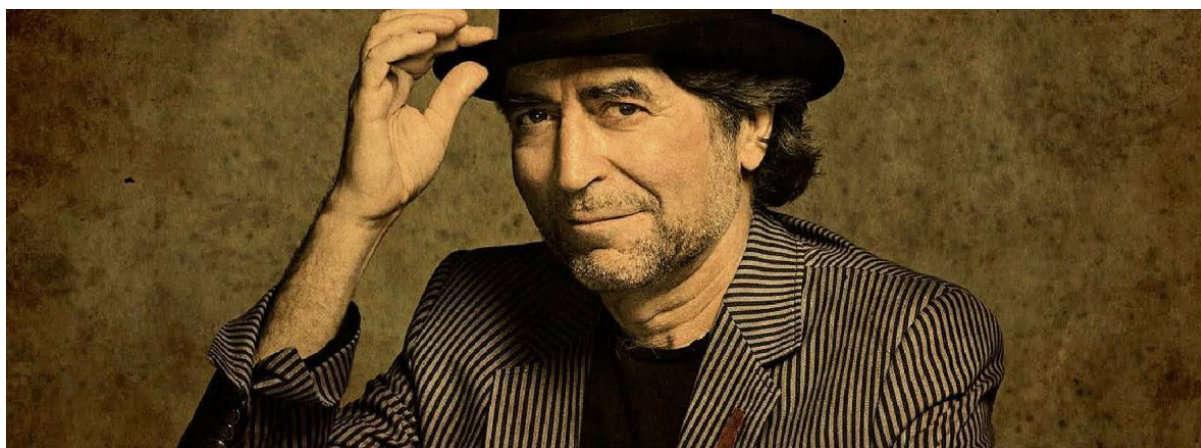
El progresismo, a la usanza latinoamericana, paradójicamente, hizo de la concentración de poder y riqueza un mecanismo para la preservación del poder. Sus líderes amasaron fortuna a partir del erario, destruyeron la institucionalidad, cambiaron las reglas de juego a su parecer y conveniencia, hicieron del saqueo y el derroche de recursos públicos las formas cotidianas de gestionar los asuntos del Estado. Quienes han ocupado altos cargos en los gobiernos de la región no son precisamente los más capaces, muchas veces se

aprecia en las representaciones diplomáticas entre otros cargos del alto gobierno que ni siquiera cuentan con formación profesional o experiencia para ocupar los cargos en los cuales se les designa. Arriban al poder por ser los más leales y fieles al líder supremo que ha devenido en una suerte de mesías y monarca absolutista.

La cleptocracia -el gobierno de los ladrones-, entonces, pasó a ser sinónimo de esta forma de progresismo. El historiador argentino Luis Alberto Romero, explicaba, años atrás, que cleptocracia es un concepto claro y directo que “refiere a un grupo gobernante que utiliza los recursos del Estado para organizar un saqueo sistemático, con el que se llenan las cajas políticas y las privadas, difíciles de distinguir”.



La corrupción no es nueva en la historia política latinoamericana. Sin embargo, la gran crítica a la izquierda populista es que su relato y puesta en escena, aquella que les permitió a muchos líderes acceder al poder, inicialmente por la vía democrática, es que todos ellos venían a luchar contra los órdenes establecidos en lo político y en lo económico. Según ellos, venían a sanear las instituciones atravesadas por las prácticas corruptas y clientelares de sus antecesores, usualmente catalogados a la derecha del espectro político. Pronto quedó evidenciado que se trataba, más bien, de cooptar las instituciones y amasar fortuna. Algunos avanzaron en ese camino con más destreza que otros. Recuérdese, por ejemplo, el lapsus de Nicolás Maduro cuando dijo “los capitalistas roban como nosotros”.



Joaquín Sabina: language and lyrics

BAS editor Robin Wallis, with contributions from fellow-editor Helen Laurenson

A good tune catches our attention and opens our ears to a song. A good lyric achieves a lasting impact, and makes the song worthy of repeated listening.



My objective here is to identify certain techniques used by the Spanish songwriter Joaquín Sabina to write memorable lyrics. I hope that this will intrigue readers with an interest in the Spanish language, while also raising awareness of the lyricist's art, an arguably under-explored sub-genre of literature. It is also perhaps fitting to mark the year of Sabina's 75th birthday with an homage to his distinctive style, as represented in the songs *Noches de Boda*, *La canción más hermosa del mundo* and *Ruido* – ending with a reminder of his lighter side.^[1]

Growing up in Andalusia in the 1950s and 60s, Sabina absorbed the musical genres of the Spanish-speaking world while also immersing himself in rock and folk, not least during his exile in London (1970-77). His career as a singer-songwriter thrived on his shrewd selection of songwriting partners to expand his musical repertoire. He also mastered the art of being a *personaje mediático* (thinking person's celebrity) with a refreshing disdain for proprieties, without ever coming across as inauthentic or crude.





Sabina wrote poetry from an early age. His study of Spanish-language verse enabled him to compose lyrics that included inspired re-working of both Golden Age and 20th century canonical poetry. Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo^[2] were a formative influence on him. His admiration for Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen is apparent in his repertoire.^[3]

Noches de boda (1999) typifies the way in which Sabina can build a song lyric around a simple refrain, not to embed a catchy musical hook in the listener's ear, but rather to emphasise particular linguistic phrases for poetic effect. In this case, the repeated 'Que + subjunctive' invites listeners to join with the singer in what amounts to a secular prayer, gently and wistfully expressed in a celebration of conjugal love and resistance to the ravages of time. The repeated *que* structure builds up momentum behind the expressions of hope, heightening the audience's empathy with the singer. Listeners no longer have to adjust to each successive phrase: they focus instead on each new image or association, which becomes all the more personal to them within a wider, universal framework. The juxtaposition of the mundane with the poetic/surreal generates a synergy between day to day reality and higher aspirations – what Helen Laurenson has called the *hibridez sabiniana*^[4]:

*Que el maquillaje no apague tu risa
Que el equipaje no lastre tus alas
Que el calendario no venga con prisas
Que el diccionario detenga las balas
Que el corazón no se pase de moda
Que los otoños te doren la piel
Que cada noche sea noche de bodas
Que no se ponga la luna de miel*



La canción más hermosa del mundo (2002) also plays with language structure to evocative effect, blending Sabina's immersion in popular culture with the lyrical and syntactical tropes of the Golden Age – a hybrid fusion of *lo popular* y *lo culto*.

It opens with a commonplace phrase of everyday language – *Yo tenía* ('I had', or perhaps, 'I used to have'). He follows this with a lengthy incantation of nouns, the next verb not surfacing until line 12 (and that in a subordinate clause):

*Yo tenía un botón sin ojal, un gusano de seda
 Medio par de zapatos de clown y un alma en almoneda
 Una hispano olivetti con caries, un tren con retraso
 Un carné del Atleti, una cara de culo de vaso
 Un colegio de pago, un compás, una mesa camilla
 Una nuez, o bocado de Adán, menos una costilla
 Una bici diabética, un cúmulo, un cirro, una estrato
 Un camello del rey Baltazar, una gata sin gato
 Mi Annie Hall, mi Gioconda, mi Wendy, las damas primero
 Mi Cantinflas, mi Bola de Nieve, mis tres Mosqueteros
 Mi Tintín, mi yo-yo, mi azulete, mi siete de copas
 El zaguán donde te desnudé sin quitarte la ropa*

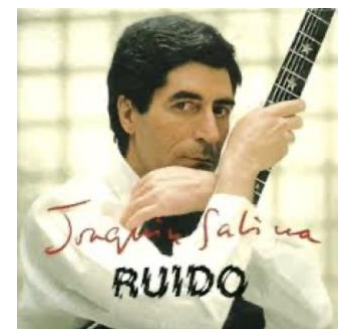
The accretion of disconnected nouns might at first sight appear random or nonsensical. However, as the images mount up, it becomes apparent that they depict a cycle of possession and loss charted through cultural markers and nostalgic associations. The juxtaposition of the mundane, the personal, the abstract and the transcendent throws the opening *tenía* into melancholy relief, and sets up the climactic declaration of loss:

*No sabía que la primavera duraba un segundo
 Yo quería escribir la canción más hermosa del mundo
 Yo quería escribir la canción...*

The *cantautor* has had to face up to his limitations, but has no regrets. His failure is redeemed by the stoicism and dignity with which he acknowledges what he has lost or not achieved. The irony is that, in doing so, he has after all managed to *escribir la canción*.

Ruido (1994) tells the story of a doomed relationship. The first half of the lyric features some of Sabina's most poetic language, set to flowing rhythms, eg:

*Ella le pidió que la llevara al fin del mundo
 Él puso a su nombre todas las olas del mar...
 Todas las ciudades eran pocas a sus ojos
 Ella quiso barcos y él no supo qué pescar*



Despite being so absorbed with each other, the couple's incompatibility undoes them. The melody contracts to a more staccato rhythm for the ten stanzas that track the relationship breakdown. Disorientated by the *ruido* (noise) generated – figuratively or literally – by the overwhelming weight of nouns, the couple stand no chance:

*Ruido de tenazas,
Ruido de estaciones,
Ruido de amenazas,
Ruido de escorpiones.
Tanto, tanto ruido.
Ruido de abogados,
Ruido compartido,
Ruido envenenado,
Demasiado ruido.*

The clamour oppresses them. There is no escape. The bleak but convincing conclusion is...

*Tanto ruido y al final
La soledad.*

In focusing on language structures, I have hitherto chosen examples with wistful and melancholic themes. Yet humour and comic irony are central to Sabina's work and public persona. As a corrective, I would recommend *Pacto entre caballeros* (1987) and *Pastillas para no soñar* (1992) – humorous and ironic takes on surviving the urban jungle, playfully depicting life on the edge. The *mucha, mucha* refrain on which *Pacto....* closes illustrates how a song allows its writer to subvert normal language to comic effect.

Sabina's sense of humour is perhaps most famously showcased in his satire on Spanish machismo, *19 días y 500 noches* (1999), with an extract from which I shall close:

*Tenían razón mis amantes
en eso de que antes el malo era yo,
Con una excepción:
Esta vez yo quería quererla querer
Y ella no.
Así que se fue,
me dejó el corazón
en los huesos
y yo de rodillas.
Desde el taxi,
y, haciendo un exceso,
me tiró dos besos...
uno por mejilla.*



For a definitive overview of Sabina's place in and impact on Spanish culture, see <https://bulletinofadvancedspanish.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/bas-5.3-june-2022-archive.pdf>: Joaquín Sabina: 'Ni juglar del asfalto, ni el Dylan español', by Helen Laurenson.

Footnotes:

^[1] A number of websites carry the full lyrics to these pieces, some with parallel versions in English – though such translations are usually unintelligible and smothered in advertising. Even the few where some effort has been put into the English version serve mainly to illustrate how hard it is to translate song lyrics. They do at least help English speakers to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary without recourse to a dictionary or Google Translate.

^[2] El Comercio 28/05/2015:

“Sabina se refirió al arte de crear mundos a través de los versos, tal y como lo hicieron dos grandes de la poesía: el peruano César Vallejo y el chileno Pablo Neruda.

Aunque confesó ser un admirador de los dos, aseguró que si lo obligan a elegir solo a uno, preferiría al autor de “Los heraldos negros” (1918), cuyos poemas se sabe “enteritos de memoria”.

Sobre uno de los grandes intérpretes de la música a nivel mundial, Bob Dylan, dijo que es ‘un fuera de serie’ al cual escucha todavía, con el mismo interés que le despertó la primera vez, cuando apenas tenía 17 años.”

^[3] The interface of singer-songwriter with the literary structures and lexis of canonical literature can also be found in the work of Bob Dylan and Dylan Thomas, for example, or Lewis Carroll and John Lennon.

^[4] <https://bulletinofadvancedspanish.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/bas-5.3-june-2022-archive.pdf>: Joaquín Sabina: 'Ni juglar del asfalto, ni el Dylan español'

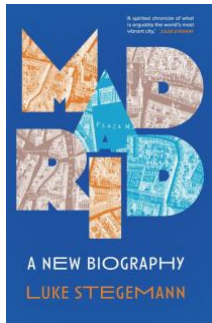


‘Madrid: A New Biography’: a vibrant hymn to the city

BAS editor William Chislett

Which is the only European capital with an Islamic origin? It is Madrid, whose name apparently morphed from the Arabic term *mayrit* (meaning ‘plenty of waterways’) during the Muslim presence in large swathes of Spain between 711 and 1492.

The city’s cathedral and its Virgin, Our Lady of Almudena, take their names from the walled citadel, the *al-mudayna*. The cemetery that bears her name is the largest in Europe: at least 5 million people are said to lie, or have lain, under the earth there.



This and many other generally unknown facets of Madrid make Luke Stegemann’s *Madrid: A New Biography* (Yale University Press) a fascinating and engaging read. The author writes with the detached clarity of an outsider (he is from Brisbane), but the insight of one who has lived for some years in various parts of Spain and still visits regularly.

Not surprisingly, José Luis Martínez-Almeida, the Mayor of Madrid, ever eager to promote the city, invited the author to present the Spanish edition (*Madrid: Historia de una ciudad de éxito*) at a public event, which he did in July this year.



His ‘biography’ of Madrid charts the origins of the city, founded around 865 AD on the site of a Visigoth settlement, and its evolution into Spain’s capital in 1561, when King Felipe II installed the court there, ending the anomaly of having an empire but no capital city. His father Carlos I (Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire) had moved his court between Toledo, the Archbishopric and long-term seat of ecclesiastical power, and Valladolid.



There is no conclusive evidence that explains the move to Madrid. Felipe himself spent most of his time shut away in the stark monastery that he subsequently built in El Escorial, some 45km from the capital. The common assumption for choosing Madrid was that it is bang in the centre of Spain. Stegemann suggests another reason might have been that 'the arrival of the modern state meant it could not be beholden to the Church, vital though that institution was': the royal court needed its

distance from Toledo.

Divided into four sections –Village, Iron Age to 1616; Empire, 1516-1759; City, 1759-1975; and World, Into the twenty-first century– this is a richly detailed book. Stegemann draws on all manner of books, paintings and his own experiences. The bibliography takes up 11 pages and there are 564 notes. The book is as much a sweeping history of Spain as it is of one city, and does for Madrid what Robert Hughes, a fellow Australian, did for Barcelona in his 1992 book *Barcelona: the Great Enchantress*. As a 40-year resident of Madrid, I learned a lot.

Madrid was not part of the Grand Tour, the 17th– to early 19th century custom of travelling through Europe, with Italy as a key destination, mainly undertaken by wealthy young European men. Madrid might not have been given its due because, says Stegemann, it was the capital of a country 'considered an outlier among the civilised on the basis of modes of behaviour or governance common elsewhere'. In other words, he suggests Madrid was a victim of the so-called 'Black Legend', the term used to describe anti-Spanish Protestant propaganda whose roots date back to the 16th century when Roman Catholic Spain's European rivals sought to demonise the Spanish Empire and its achievements.



Even today more international tourists go to Budapest, Valencia, Barcelona and Istanbul than to Madrid, the EU's fourth most populous metropolitan city. Thankfully this has saved it, so far, from the overtourism that is angering the residents of Barcelona and other coastal destinations. Madrid attracted only 7 million of the 85.3 million international tourists that visited Spain in 2023.

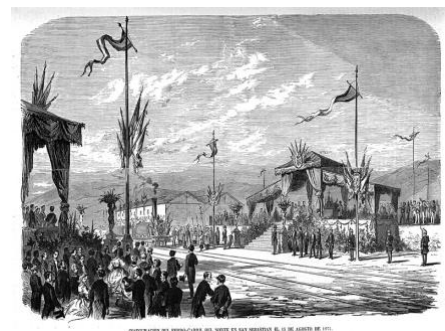


The city has over 1,800 monuments, 200 historic buildings and 70 museums, including the Prado, Thyssen and Reina Sofía, the three art temples within easy walking distance of one another, but

most tourists just want sun, sand and sea.

Medieval Madrid was advanced for its time, with its own *fueros*, or code of laws, which pre-dated King John of England's Magna Carta by a decade. These laws applied only to Christians, as Muslim and Jewish communities followed their own laws, although in cases of conflict the *fueros* took precedence.

The city expanded in the middle of the 19th century, attracting people from other parts of Spain, aided by the arrival of the train. By 1864, the Madrid-Irún line had been inaugurated, linking the capital with the French border. Between 1852 and 1860, the population increased as much as in the previous 50 years, before hitting half a million by the end of the century, 200,000 more than in the 1860s.



Today, foreigners account for 19% of the city's population of 3.5 million, many of them Latinos, earning Madrid the epithet 'European capital of Latin America'. Since 2019 the region of Madrid (population 7 million) has been the main motor of the Spanish economy, overtaking Catalonia, historically the powerhouse.

The city has had more than its fair share of violence, including the entry of the French during the Peninsular War, commemorated in two of Goya's most famous paintings 'The Second of May, 1808' and 'The Third of May, 1808' hanging in the Prado; the brutal bombardment of the Republican stronghold during the 1936-39 Civil War by Franco's Nationalists, which forced the government to move to Valencia; and the killing of 193 commuters in 2004 when bombs exploded on trains to Atocha station in Europe's worst jihadist attack. Madrid also suffered the most killings outside the Basque Country by the terrorist group ETA (123 of the 853), including the assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco, Franco's first prime minister, in 1973.

Unlike Spain, whose national anthem has no words, Madrid put words to music for its official anthem, created in 1983. '*¡...sólo por ser algo, soy madrileño!*' (Just to be something, I'll be a *madrileño*) goes one line. The city is a lot more than 'something'.

Adapted from the version originally published by the Elcano Royal Institute.



Catalonia's new normal

BAS editor William Chislett



Symbols are important and can often say much more than words. Soon after the new Catalan administration took office, the first one led by unionists in 14 years, it restored the Spanish flag to the Generalitat palace, the ancient heart of the region's government.

Salvador Illa, the new Socialist premier, greeted King Felipe VI when he visited Barcelona.

Pere Aragonès, the previous Catalan premier, not only did not display the Spanish flag along with the Catalan flag, contravening the law, but also avoided having to formally greet the King by not attending the monarch's official events. Illa, however, did not display the Spanish flag in the ceremony when he took over in August from Aragonès, leader of the separatist Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC) whose support was needed to form a government and so avert a fresh election. ERC also supports the Socialist-led central government in Madrid.

The Socialists won the most seats and the most votes in May's snap election (42 of the 135 seats, nine more than in 2021, and 28% of the vote), but far from the 68 needed to govern on their own (see Figure 1). Together for Catalonia (JxCat) and the ERC, the two main separatist parties which are at loggerheads, obtained 35 and 20 seats, respectively, and between them 35.3% of the vote, also not enough to govern. The votes for pro-independence parties dropped from just over 2 million in 2017 to 1.3 million.



The unionist political right did well; the Popular Party won 15 seats on 11% of the vote (three and 3.8%, respectively, in 2021, its worst-ever results), while the hard-right VOX held its 11 seats.

Figure 1. Catalan elections, 2024 and 2021 (seats, votes, % of votes)

		2024			2021	
	Seats	Votes	% of votes	Seats	Votes	% of votes
Catalan Socialists	42	827,959	28.0	33	654,766	22.7
Together for Catalonia	35	674,896	21.6	32	570,539	19.8
Republican Left of Catalonia	20	427,135	13.7	33	605,581	20.1
Popular Party	15	342,584	11.0	3	109,453	3.8
VOX	11	248,554	7.9	11	218,121	7.6
Comuns-Sumar	6	181,795	5.8	8	195,345	6.8
Popular Unity Candidacy	4	127,850	4.1	9	189,924	6.6
Catalan Alliance	2	118,302	3.8	–	–	–
Citizens	0	22,481	0.7	6	158,606	5.5
Voter turnout (%)	57.9	57.9	57.9	51.2	51.2	51.2

Source: Catalan government.

ERC agreed, after almost three months of negotiations, to back Illa, but at the price of a controversial ‘singular’ financing system for the region. In contrast to the pragmatic ERC, the maximalist JxCat is still led by the former premier Carles

Puigdemont, who called the unconstitutional 2017 referendum on independence and remains in self-imposed exile in Belgium.



Puigdemont briefly reappeared in Barcelona in August 2024, despite a pending warrant for his arrest. On the day of Illa's investiture, and flanked by Josep Rull, the JxCat president of the Catalan parliament and the second highest authority in the region, Puigdemont addressed a throng of supporters before returning to Belgium, evading [arrest](#) and making a mockery

of the massive police manhunt for him.

At the national level, after the inconclusive general election in July 2023, the Socialists were only able to stay in power after granting an amnesty for some 400 activists facing charges for their involvement in the 2017 secession referendum. Puigdemont has benefited from the amnesty law as regards holding the referendum, but the Supreme Court ruled that his alleged misuse of public funds was not covered by that law.

The opaque financing pact, to be fleshed out and formalised in 2025 (it is very short on technical details), is the central government's second major concession to the separatists in order to remain in power. The deal would see Catalonia move towards becoming autonomous in collecting and managing all the taxes levied by the state, through its own Tax Agency. This means exiting the common regime of financing for all of Spain's 17 regions except the Basque Country and Navarre, which have their own *conciertos económicos*, similar to that agreed for Catalonia. These two regions, for historical reasons, collect taxes and make a contribution to the state (known as the *cupo*) for the services provided. Most of the taxes raised in the other 15 regions go directly to the central government and are then redistributed.

Critics on the political right and some regional Socialist leaders say the deal clashes with the system of 'solidarity', whereby poorer regions receive a portion of the revenues of the more affluent regions such as Catalonia, one of the richest (20% of Spain's GDP). However, it appears Catalonia will continue to contribute a 'solidarity' quota to other regions.

Ángel de la Fuente, the Director of the respected Fedea research institute, claimed the deal would substantially reduce Catalonia's contribution to the common fund. Based on 2022 data, he said it could see Catalonia increasing its tax revenue by around €30 billion, to the detriment of the state.

The text of the pact says Catalonia has suffered ‘sustained under-financing’, but the latest figures do not bear this out (see Figure 2). The region received slightly more than the average financing per adjusted inhabitant in 2022 and just above the average for the 15 regions. Valencia and Murcia, for example, are much worse off than Catalonia.

Figure 2. Financing of the regions per adjusted inhabitant (1), 2011 and 2022 (€ per person)

	2011	2022	% change 2022/2011
La Rioja	2,634	3,954	50.1
Cantabria	2,615	3,944	50.8
Balearic Islands	2,260	3,877	71.5
Extremadura	2,411	3,809	57.9
Canary Islands	2,100	3,696	76.0
Castile & León	2,397	3,573	49.0
Aragón	2,363	3,529	49.3
Asturias	2,385	3,484	46.0
Galicia	2,325	3,448	48.3
Catalonia	2,187	3,396	55.3
Average	2,196	3,365	53.2
Madrid	2,201	3,364	52.8
Castile-La Mancha	2,158	3,193	47.9
Andalusia	2,105	3,182	51.2
Valencia	2,030	3,089	52.2
Murcia	2,079	3,056	47.0

(1) Population weighted by a region’s needs using criteria such as the elderly population and dispersion. Source: FEDEA, Ángel de la Fuente.

Successive governments have talked of reforming the financing system for years. Many agree it needs to change, but fear opening a Pandora’s Box of competing demands. Starting a reform of the system through an agreement with one region is not the most appropriate way. The PP, which controls 12 of

the 17 regions and opposes the pact with Catalonia, is so far showing little readiness to negotiate a new system.

Artur Mas, a former Catalan premier (2010-16), sought a similar fiscal pact with the PP government of Mariano Rajoy in 2012, which was rejected because he said all regions needed to be involved. That rejection was one factor behind the *procés*. It was followed by a non-binding referendum on independence in 2014 (just over 2 million people out of 5.4 million eligible voters took part and 80% backed independence) and the 2017 referendum and declaration of independence.



The financing agreement also touches on other issues such as the teaching of Catalan in state schools. The central government has yet to respond to the previous Catalan government's refusal to implement the 2022 ruling of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia requiring 25% of classes to be taught in Castilian Spanish, and not just in Catalan.



The disruptive and divisive Catalan independence movement has lost momentum and support, epitomized by the formation of the non-secessionist government. According to the latest survey, published after May's election in the region, 40% are in favour of secession, down from a peak of 43% in 2017, the year of the referendum, and 53% against. The poll on Catalans' preferences for the relation with Spain, which better reflects Catalan sentiment as it is not binary, puts support for independence at 34% (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Preferences for the relation between Catalonia and Spain, 2015-23 (% of respondents)

	Oct 15	Jun 16	Oct 17	Oct 18	Nov 19	Oct 20	Oct 22	Oct 23	Feb 24	Jun 24
A region within Spain	4	4	5	6	6	6	8	6	9	7
A state within federal Spain	22	21	22	22	21	23	20	24	23	22
An autonomous region	24	26	27	24	28	28	29	31	31	31
An independent state	41	42	40	39	37	35	33	31	31	34

Source: Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió.

The *procés* is not over. Only time will tell where Catalonia goes from here.

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