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## Women's political representation and transparency in local governance

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the growing interest on the influence of gender in local government, the relationship between women's political representation on municipalities, as council member or as female mayors, and transparency is an under-researched topic. This article analyses the political representation of women in Spanish local councils and their influence on the level of transparency. Results show that women's political representation in municipalities has a positive influence on the level of transparency, increasing information transparency and reducing information asymmetry.

**KEYWORDS** Transparency; local government; municipalities; gender

### Introduction

Women's political representation (WPR) is a core element in gender equality and good governance<sup>1</sup> at local level (OECD 2014). International organisations recommend governments to adopt public policies which promote gender equality (EC 2013). Some countries have already made efforts to promote gender diversity with equality laws, quotas and other initiatives (OECD 2014). For instance, across the European Union (EU) important steps have been taken concerning WPR. In 2012, women accounted for nearly a third (32%) of members of regional assemblies in Europe, the same share for municipalities in 2011 (EC 2013).

In the case of Spain, WPR at local level is above the average of EU countries, with a value of about 35% in 2011 (EC 2013), which seems to reflect the societal and gender equality changes after the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975. With the advent of democracy, the traditionally male-dominated society is giving way to a more liberated order that has allowed women to climb to the highest positions of professional life. Urban areas and the quotas introduced by leftist parties were the first step responsible for this increase. The 'fast track' for WPR started in 2007 with the approval of

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the Law 3/2007. It established a mandatory presence of women close to the principle of parity in all institutional representation bodies (public and private), including municipal council (MC). It also established that political parties had to draw up lists of candidates which respected gender equality and establish consultative committees and women's participation councils. At local level, this last innovation favoured the setting up of local equality councils (Rodríguez-García 2015).

This study focuses on gender equality in municipalities because it is a crucial element in local representative democracy, linking ordinary citizens to local decision makers. It is at municipal level that the most important interactions between citizens and government happen (Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-García 2012). Municipalities are taking on a greater and more interactive role in citizens' well-being, reinforcing trust in government. Gender equality also raises good governance issues and helps to improve relationships between government and citizens (OECD 2014). Since WPR at local level in Spain is growing, it is worth analysing women's role on municipality's good governance.

The increase of women's presence in formal political representation, as council members (*concejala*) or as mayors (*alcaldesa*), has influenced the structure of power and the functioning of organisations (Batista-Medina 2015). Women's access to power, decision-making and political leadership can also have a positive impact on economic and social outcomes (OECD 2014). Research suggests that female leaders tend to adopt a leadership style distinct from male leaders in organisations (Kim and Shim 2003) because men and women 'construe social reality differently' (Gilligan 1982). While men are bound to rules and individualism, women are more inclined to embrace the ideals of responsibility, care and interconnectedness. Women seem to be more communicative, democratic, cooperative and receptive to other ideas, having greater concern for others (Eagly and Karau 2002; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen 2003). Therefore, we expect that more WPR at local level may indicate that municipalities tend to be closer to citizens, aiming to serve them and ensuring accountability and transparency. With this in mind, transparency plays a crucial role in improving municipalities' capacity and establishing good governance by impacting positively on the reduction of corruption and inefficiency (Islam 2006; Newbold 2011).

So, it is worth analysing the influence of differences between women and men in public-sector organisations or if gender plays an influential role in information disclosure and the transparency level (Rodríguez-García 2015). Researchers found out that male and female local councillors agreed that the women they worked with were more responsive to their constituencies (Beck 2001). Another study from Fox and Schumann (1999) points out that female mayors encourage, more than male mayors, citizens' participation, communication and input (Rodríguez-García 2015). In female-dominated

settings, such as education and government or social services, women are reported faring better (Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani 1995). Brollo and Troiano (2014) discovered that female mayors in Brazil have better and richer outcomes and less corruption. It is also expected that these different stereotypes may influence the role of women in formal political representation as council members or as mayors, particularly in information disclosure and transparency level.

Empirical studies on the influence of women, as council members or mayors, in municipalities' transparency level is an understudied area which is worth analysing. This research analyses the relationship between the influence of WPR in municipalities and the level of municipal transparency. Specifically, we investigate whether the level of transparency was influenced by WPR in Spanish municipalities. According to Cuadrado-Ballesteros (2014), transparency problems are more frequent at local level as local politicians are usually more discrete when it comes to making decisions.

Previous research has examined the influence of economic and political factors on the transparency index (TI) (Sol 2013; Tejedo-Romero and Araujo 2015). This study goes a step further by analysing the role of gender in the level of municipal transparency. Thus, from this point of view, it is important to know whether the changing Spanish institutional context, which is favouring gender equality on political representation, also involves an improvement of the effectiveness in information disclosure and the transparency level. The aim is to contribute to the growing literature on WPR in municipalities and, more specifically, analyse the effectiveness of their influence in enhancing the level of transparency.

The analysis begins by explaining the influence of gender on the level of transparency drawing on the social role theory (SRT). It is likely that women's stereotype, their qualities and traits (Weyer 2007) predispose them to be more receptive to disclose information and contribute to raise the level of transparency. Women's stereotype, qualities and traits are supported by the agency theory and the legitimacy theory to explain information disclosure as a tool to reduce information asymmetry and increase the legitimacy of municipalities. The presentation of a theoretical framework that combines a socio-psychological perspective with the agency and legitimacy theories helps to explain how the contribution of women and the different personal-social attributes and gender-related values impact on transparency in municipalities.

We contribute by empirically testing a theoretical framework which explains the influence of WPR in Spanish municipalities using information about their level of transparency published by the non-governmental organisation Transparency International Spain (TI-Spain). It analyses the evolution of transparency in Spanish municipalities and evaluates the influence of women on the municipal level of transparency. It aims to answer the following research questions: What was the evolution of the level of

transparency in Spanish municipalities during the analysed period? Did WPR on municipalities augment the level of transparency?

We focus on the relationship between WPR and the level of municipal transparency using a balanced panel data of 100 Spanish municipalities and resorting to the information available for the years 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012.<sup>2</sup> These are all municipalities which have information regarding their level of transparency available and published by TI-Spain since 2008. Coefficients for variables are estimated by a balanced panel data regression method using a generalized method of moments (GMM) estimation system to deal with the potential endogeneity of the explanatory variables.

## Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Research on gender and SRT offers an important contribution by analysing women and men's differences in government organisations. The literature suggests that men and women possess certain qualities and traits that predispose them to the type and nature of roles they typically embody (Weyer 2007). Women are expected to be communal and expressive, whereas men are expected to be agentic and instrumental (Eagly and Steffen 1984). According to Gilligan (1982), women and men have different perceptions, different social constructions of reality and display different sets of values and behaviours. When compared with men, the social reality constructed by women seems to be unique.

Women differ from men in values like representation, equity, sense of community and long-term outlook (Hamidullah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015), and in the way they act, communicate and attempt to influence others (Merchant 2012). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) argue that women tend to be more collaborative and democratic, exhibiting qualities associated with community and caring.

Ethical considerations are central to women's conceptualisation of leadership (Fine 2009). A distinct 'feminist ethics' had its origin in SRT. Women seek understanding, prefer equality and symmetry, and value similarities as they see them as ways to connect with other individuals. Men, on the other hand, seek control, prefer inequality and asymmetry, and value differences between individuals (Tannen 1990).

Women leaders' styles of communication are more open, accessible and transparent (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen 2003). They are more likely to increase transparency, be more responsive to groups excluded from the policymaking process, share power and information (Beck 2001) and encourage citizen's involvement (Fox and Schuhmann 1999). This behaviour is more favourable to the characteristics present on the literature of transparency which stress that public organisations' decisions and actions should be more accountable to citizens. It should also reduce government secrecy and

use several mechanisms to provide information to the public in order to guarantee accountable officials and decisions (Ball 2009). Women's leadership style is a way to improve good governance in public administration (PA) (Sol 2013). It contributes for citizens to have a better understanding of public policies and helps reduce corruption (Park and Blenkinsopp 2011).

Transparency means the ability of citizens to access government information (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007), which includes information disclosure about government activities, public policies activities and its public access (Oliver 2004). As such, transparency allows citizens to know what is happening inside the government through various information disclosure mechanisms (Ellis and Fender 2006). This is a way to improve government outcomes, administrative and managerial effectiveness, and also policy effectiveness by conducting public affairs in the open or otherwise subject to public scrutiny.

Information disclosure, by voluntary or compulsory provision, is the way to reduce information asymmetry and allows monitoring actions of elected officials (Laswad, Fisher, and Oyelere 2005). Agency relationships (Eisenhardt 1989) between public-sector organisations and citizens offer an incentive to politicians and public managers to disclose and increase the information available, which allows control and scrutiny of activities by citizens and society.

Women have more cooperative behaviours in conflict resolution that rely on compromise, collaboration and accommodation (Rosenthal 2000). For instance, women city managers are likely to have attitudes that favour citizen's inclusion and facilitate communication (Fox and Schuhmann 1999). This stereotype makes them more receptive to reveal information in order to legitimise their actions and feel cherished, a way to create connections and have more recognition from citizens. This is a means to reduce the agency problem and regain the confidence of citizens, and at the same time change citizens' perceptions about the functioning of the organisation. To offer an image of good governance in response to general pressure is a way to secure legitimacy and enhance municipalities' reputation (Pina, Torres, and Royo 2010). It legitimises actions for their stakeholders and awards legality to organisations. If organisational legitimacy is threatened, organisations will facilitate communication and disclose information in an effort to promote organisational legitimacy. The diffusion of information may be used to regain the confidence of citizens and may also be an attempt to change their ideas about the functioning of the organisation.

The open flow of information and communication is determinant for citizens' trust in public services, with transparency as a core concept in the relationship between governments and citizens. Transparency is a new challenge when providing information to citizens (Piotrowski 2007), going further than past practices where governments passively provided information only on request and at their own discretion. New times require governments to engage in more active information disclosure. 'Transparency in an organization is not only about what's communicated

externally, but about what's right on the inside, in the guts of its operations' (Oliver 2004, 37).

The presence of women in public life is one of the topics that has generated more interest and controversy over recent years. Women's involvement in the political process has been associated with significant changes in the activities of governments, particularly regarding decisions on the allocation of public resources. Vermeir and Van Kenhove (2008) argue that women have less propensity to commit fraud. Representative democracies seek to improve their legitimacy by opening opportunities to expand WPR in political positions. This opening hopes to reflect, in a more real form, the variety of interests which exist in a community, allowing decisions to reflect that variety more accurately.

These theories help us understand information asymmetry in political contexts and the need for transparency and information disclosure. However, they do not explain whether women and men have the same role on the level of transparency. SRT argues that there are differences between women and men based on their social stereotypes (Eagly 1987; Eagly and Karau 2002; Wood and Eagly 2009). These differences can influence the role of gender in municipalities. Since WPR in politics and municipalities increased in the last decades (Batista-Medina 2015), and the literature recognised differences between women and men based on their social stereotypes (Wood and Eagly 2009), it is worth empirically testing the influence of gender on the municipalities' level of transparency.

### ***Local government in Spain and women's political representation***

There are three government levels in Spain: central government, 17 regional governments and 8,122 municipalities grouped in 50 provinces. The organisation of local government (LG) is mainly ruled by the Law 7/1985 (Regulation of Competences of Local Authorities).

Municipalities are administered and governed by the MC which is composed of municipal councillors, elected in free elections for a mandate of 4 years. The mayor is usually the leader of the majority coalition and is elected by the municipal councillors. The number of council members depends on the municipal size and can range from 3 to 25.<sup>3</sup> In municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants, a LG board can be appointed if agreed through organic regulation or by the MC. The electoral system at municipal level in Spain follows the proportional representation model, which enhances multiparty participation and reduces bipolarisation.

In the last decades, women have conquered importance in Spanish culture and society. WPR has grown since the first democratic local elections in 1979 until the most recent. For instance, in 2011 the rise of WPR was about 30% (Rodríguez-García 2015). Despite this ascending trend, progress

was slow, and it was one of the reasons for central government to establish an effective equality between women and men in Spanish electoral processes with an amendment to the Electoral Law (Article 44, Law 5/1985 altered by the Law 3/2007). The law stated that 'neither sex can have a presence on the electoral lists below 40% in each section of 5 posts' (Law 5/1985 amended by the Law 3/2007). This law represents an innovation in the Spanish electoral system by forcing institutional changes to accommodate women in electoral lists. The introduction of gender quotas may alter or not the existing dynamics of candidate selection. After elections, it can represent a change in the composition of elected officials in municipalities making them more gender equal. According to the SRT, it is expected that the growing number of women in municipal political positions will affect practices and norms, setting a different institutional context for municipalities' operations and governance, and particularly, for transparency. Some scholars argue that the characteristics of public organisations might influence the level of corruption (Rothstein and Holmberg 2012) and, consequently, the level of transparency. Following the theory, changes in the composition of elected official in municipalities through more gender equality will change the institutional setting at municipal level.

Spanish municipalities are adapting to society requirements for more transparency about their activities. This paper explores whether the growth of WPR on municipalities, as mayors or as members of the MC, influences the level of transparency and reduces the agency problem of information asymmetry. Consequently, we expect that women's political participation in municipalities and the role they play may reduce the conflicts between the principal (citizens) and the agent (politicians) by increasing information disclosure to citizens and society. Women's stereotype seems to be more favourable to increase communication and attempt to influence others (Merchant 2012), and at the same time tends to be more collaborative and democratic (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001). So, basing on the above, we examine the following hypothesis:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between women's political representation and the level of transparency in municipalities.*

## **Research design, methodology and results**

### ***Sample, variables and data collection***

Our samples are the Spanish municipalities, which are the lowest level of territorial organisation of the state. The data used corresponds to the 100 largest Spanish municipalities, for which information regarding the level of



transparency has been published by TI-Spain in 2008. It includes all the provincial capitals and almost all the municipalities with a population of over 50,000 inhabitants. We restrict our analysis to those municipalities for which there are no missing values in any variable of interest over the whole time span under study (2008, 2009, 2010 and 2012). Therefore, our sample forms a so-called 'balanced panel' and is composed of 4 years' observations of variables in 100 municipalities; in total, we have 400 observations for each variable. The 100 municipalities were the only ones with transparency information available.

The Spanish context was chosen because of the important changes in the Law introduced in 1985 and the Electoral Law amendment in 2007, which influenced the composition of City Councils and the number of women mayors. These changes in the law represent an innovation in the Spanish electoral system demanding institutional changes to accommodate women in electoral lists. This represents a major change in WPR and is expected to have influence on information disclosure and the level of transparency. During the period analysed, Spain did not have a transparency law in force.<sup>4</sup>

The option for local-level analysis is a result of the higher number of transparency problems at this level when compared to other levels of government (Guillamón, Bastida, and Benito 2011) as local politicians are usually more discrete when it comes to making decisions (Cuadrado-Ballesteros 2014). Transparency studies are relevant in countries like Spain because the increase of public-sector revenue and expenditure calls for more information disclosure in order to increase citizens' and society's control over municipalities and their activities. Moreover, data from municipalities is more homogeneous and extensive than when comparing different countries (Cuadrado-Ballesteros 2014).

### *Dependent variable*

To explore the level of municipalities' public transparency, the dependent variable chosen was the Spanish municipalities' TI published by TI-Spain. This index was used in some previous studies (Sol 2013; Cuadrado-Ballesteros 2014; Tejedo-Romero and Araujo 2015) and is based on the collection of information and questionnaires sent to municipalities by TI-Spain.

The first edition of the index was in 2008 and evaluated the 100 largest Spanish municipalities through an integrated set of 80 indicators, grouped into five areas of transparency: information about municipal corporations, relationship with citizens and society, economic and financial transparency, information about municipal service contracts bidding and transparency about urban development/public works. The second and third editions took place in 2009 and 2010 and increased the number of municipalities under evaluation to 110. In 2012, the fourth round evaluated the same municipalities, but incorporated a new area of evaluation related to planning, contracts, higher civil servants positions and economic and financial information. Like previous editions, the

80 indicators established a ranking among the assessed municipalities. Each indicator had scores (for more detailed information, see: <http://transparencia.org.es/indice-de-los-ayuntamientos-ita/>).

Depending on the total value obtained by each municipality evaluated, TI-Spain developed a classification or ranking of transparency of those municipalities which takes values between 0 and 100 (with 100 indicating a perfectly transparent municipality and 0 a municipality with no transparency at all).

For purposes of analysis, we used the TI on a scale 0–1. The information was taken from the website of the TI-Spain in 2014.

### *Independent variables*

In order to test our hypothesis, we consider two variables related with WPR:

***Women councillors.*** It is a numeric variable representing the percentage of female members of the MC.

***Female mayor.*** We define female mayor using an indicator variable equal to 1 when the mayor is female, 0 otherwise.

For the years 2008, 2009 and 2010, data was extracted from the results of the 2007 elections; for 2012, data was extracted from the 2011 elections.

### *Control variables*

***Electoral turnout.*** Some scholars point out that higher voter turnout indicates that citizens have a stronger interest in government activities (Caamaño-Alegre et al. 2013), whilst lower levels of electoral turnout may lead to increased levels of municipalities' transparency. Therefore, higher levels of municipal transparency concerning decision-making and activities increase the likelihood of citizens' involvement and regain citizens' confidence. This variable represents the percentage of participation in the last local elections in the municipality.

***Political ideology.*** Several studies show a strong relationship between political ideology and transparency (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007; Sol 2013). This is a dummy variable given the value of 1 if the municipal ruling leader belongs to a left-wing party, and 0 otherwise.

***Investment.*** According to Cárcaba-García and García-García (2010), there is a positive attitude from citizens towards public projects requiring important investment efforts as long as they understand it will improve their living conditions. This variable represents capital investment per capita.

***Fiscal pressure.*** High transparency and accountability is a requirement from taxpayers to allow municipalities to collect and manage high level of

financial resources. This variable represents the total of direct and indirect taxes per capita.

**Unemployment.** This variable has been used as a proxy variable to analyse the relationship between municipalities' economic status and transparency (Cuadrado-Ballesteros 2014). Research shows a positive relation between economic status and transparency in PA (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007). This variable is measured by the percentage of potentially active population.

Data was collected from the Spanish National Statistics Institute, Ministry of the Economy and Home Affairs. For the years 2008, 2009 and 2010, data was extracted from the results of 2007 elections; for 2012, data was extracted from the 2011 elections.

### Research model

The main objective of this work is to analyse the influence of WPR on local politics' transparency during the period of 2008–2012, so we adopted the balanced panel data regression method. Several scholars use this methodology in LG studies (Bastida, Beyaert, and Benito 2013; Cuadrado-Ballesteros 2014; Anessi-Pessina and Sicilia 2015; Tejedo-Romero and Araujo 2015) because it provides more robust results than cross-sectional studies. Both time series and cross section when combined enhance the quality and quantity of data in ways that would be impossible to use with only one of these two dimensions. It allows achieving more accurate inference because of the size of the observation and the higher number of degrees of freedom, which reinforces the efficiency of the model. It also permits controlling unobserved individual and/or time-specific heterogeneity, which may be correlated with the included explanatory variables (Baltagi 2014).

Mathematically, the econometric model to examine our hypothesis can be expressed as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 TI_{it} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Women councillors}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Female mayors}_{it} + \beta_3 \text{Electoral turnout}_{it} \\
 & + \beta_4 \text{Political ideology}_{it} + \beta_5 \text{Investment}_{it} + \beta_6 \text{Fiscal pressure}_{it} \\
 & + \beta_7 \text{Unemployment}_{it} + \mu_{it} \\
 \mu_{it} = & \mu_i + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{it}
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{1}$$

where  $\alpha$  is a scalar;  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  are the estimable parameter vectors;  $i = 1, \dots, 100$ ;  $t = 2008, 2009, 2010$  and  $2012$ ;  $\mu_{it}$  is the disturbance term;  $\mu_i$  represents the unobservable municipality specific effect and is time-invariant, such as the ability of municipalities to be transparent;  $\delta_t$  represents the unobservable specific time effect (common to all municipalities) and  $\varepsilon_{it}$  the

remainder stochastic disturbance term. These models are known as *two-way* error component disturbance. Nevertheless, most panel data applications use the error component model  $\mu_{it} = \mu_i + \varepsilon_{it}$ , known as *one-way*, where  $\delta_t = 0$ . We use a *one-way* error component model for the disturbance.

We began by considering two estimators panel for our model<sup>5</sup>: fixed effects (FE) and random effects (RE).

The results of the panel data regression analysis for two estimation models, which are FE and RE, are presented in Table 3. To determine whether the correct estimation method was utilised, several tests were conducted: the *F*-test for FE and the Hausman specification test (Baltagi 2014).

Finally, we estimated the model (1) with the generalised method of moments system (*system* GMM) approach (Arellano and Bover 1995; Roodman 2009), which is widely used in empirical analyses involving panel data (Anessi-Pessina and Sicilia 2015). Since our model has the characteristics listed in Roodman (2009), this approach is more appropriate to account for potential endogeneity issues of the explanatory variables. It is also designed to address autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity.

## Results

### Descriptive analysis

Table 1 summarises the main descriptive statistics for dependent variable *TI* in the Spanish municipalities.

Over the years, there were increases in the value of *TI* in the municipalities analysed, with an average value of the index of 0.651 in the period 2008–2012. A quite remarkable value given that the minimum value of the index in that period was 0.125 and the maximum of 1. In the last year, 2012, the value of the index was 0.714.

Our results are aligned with those obtained in the work of Guillamón, Ríos-Martínez, and Vicente-Oliva (2011), who observed an increase in the *TI* during 2008–2010. Also, for that period, Cuadrado-Ballesteros (2014) obtained an average value for the *TI* of 62.45 for a sample of the 110 largest Spanish municipalities. A value similar to that obtained in our study, 0.651 (i.e., 65.1), a higher value due to the inclusion in our study of the 2012 value. The results are consistent with those obtained by Sol (2013) for 2012.

**Table 1.** *TI* descriptive statistics.

	2008	2009	2010	2012	2008–2012
<i>TI</i>					
Mean	0.521	0.663	0.707	0.714	0.651
Max	0.906	0.988	1	1	1
Min	0.125	0.175	0.288	0.15	0.125
<i>N</i> (observations)	100	100	100	100	400

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for independent and control variables. Panel A relates to the continuous variables, while panel B presents information on the dummies variables.

Panel A shows that the percentage of *women councillors* in municipalities has the same values for the years 2008–2010 as we used the results of 2007 local elections as base. For the year 2012, we based our study on the results of 2011 local elections. This variable increased from one election to the other. However, despite the existence of an obligatory quota, there are municipalities where the minimum percentage of women in 2007 elections was 29.6% and in the 2011 elections it decreased to 25.9%.

Also, *electoral turnout* has the same value for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 considering that we used the results of 2007 local elections as base. For the year 2012, we based ourselves on the results of 2011 local elections. This variable increased from one election to the other, perhaps due to the importance of local elections and the strong interest in government activities (Caamaño-Alegre et al. 2013).

Concerning the *investment*, there is a strong increase in 2009, almost double the previous year. This increase may have been motivated by (a) commitments made in previous years and whose execution takes place in

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for independent and control variables.

Panel A: continuous variables										
	2008		2009		2010		2012		2008–2012	
<i>Women Councillors (%)</i>										
Mean	41.56		41.56		41.56		41.91		41.65	
Max	55.60		55.60		55.60		56.00		56	
Min	29.60		29.60		29.60		25.90		25.90	
<i>Electoral turnout (%)</i>										
Mean	58.97		58.97		58.97		61.78		59.68	
Max	72.70		72.70		72.70		75.17		75.17	
Min	43.64		43.64		43.64		46.42		43.64	
<i>Investment</i>										
Mean	180		303		219		72.80		194	
Max	680		722		450		313		722	
Min	31.27		127		96		4.27		4.27	
<i>Fiscal pressure</i>										
Mean	568		575		585		595		581	
Max	1,073		1,202		1,299		1,247		1,299	
Min	302		305		328		264		264	
<i>Unemployment</i>										
Mean	7.80		11.38		12.79		14.94		11.73	
Max	14.60		20.40		21.40		23.70		23.70	
Min	3.40		4.90		5.60		6.20		3.40	
Panel B: dummies variables										
	1		0		1		0		1	
Female mayor (%)	20%		80%		20%		80%		22%	
Political ideology (%)	54%		46%		54%		46%		53.25%	
N (observations)	100		100		100		100		400	

**Table 3.** Determinants of municipal transparency.

Dependent and control variables	Hypothesis	Predicted sign	Independent variable: IT		
			FE	RE	System GMM
<i>Women councillors</i>	H1	+	0.005* (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	0.023* (0.013)
<i>Female mayor</i>	H1	+	0.063* (0.036)	0.021 (0.030)	0.208*** (0.071)
<i>Electoral turnout</i>			-0.015*** (0.006)	0.000 (0.002)	-0.016** (0.007)
<i>Political ideology</i>			-0.017 (0.034)	0.045* (0.027)	-0.014 (0.069)
<i>Investment</i>			0.025* (0.013)	0.026** (0.012)	0.033* (0.017)
<i>Fiscal pressure</i>			0.333*** (0.124)	0.224*** (0.060)	0.518** (0.197)
<i>Unemployment</i>			0.031*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.030*** (0.004)
(Constant)			-1.232 (0.872)	-1.241*** (0.425)	-3.122*** (1.182)
Observations			400	400	400
R <sup>2</sup>			0.056	0.291	
F test			5.96***		
Hausman				$\chi^2(7) = 472.27***$	
Number of groups					100
Number of instruments					37
AR(1) (p-value)					0.003
AR(2) (p-value)					0.978
Hansen test (p-value)					0.225

Figures in parentheses are standard errors.

\*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

that year, and (b) an attempt to boost local economy through increased public investment in order to reduce unemployment. With the worsening of the 2008 financial crisis and the pressures from the EU and central government to reduce public debt, public investments were heavily influenced, so there was a drastic reduction in municipal investment in 2012.

In line with the investment, it is observed that, over the period analysed, the average *fiscal pressure* on municipalities increased throughout the years, driven primarily by the need to reduce public debt.

The *unemployment* rate grew over the years. The most significant increase took place between the period 2008 and 2009, when the financial crisis started in Spain.

Panel B of Table 2 shows that the *female mayor* variable increased about 6% in last elections (year 2011) when compared to the last elections. This means a more active role of women in politics.

In the 2007 elections, most of the municipalities in the sample were ruled by left-wing parties (54% vs. 46%). However, after the last elections *political ideology* of the ruling parties in most municipalities changed radically, with 75% changing to right-wing government. The extent of the electors' punishment did not take into account the good performance of left-wing parties at

regional and local level, nor the cases of corruption or bad performance of some local right-wing party governments. It was an expression of dissatisfaction with respect to left-wing parties.

### **Multivariate analysis**

For the validation of the model, we used the  $F$ -test for FE that showed the appropriateness of the FE model ( $F_{(99, 293)} = 5.96; p = 0.000$ ).

To identify the most appropriate model (FE or RE), we used the Hausman test to check the absence of correlation between the individual effects and the independent variables. According to the results (Table 3), an FE model appears to be the most suitable methodological tool in the case of our model ( $\chi^2_7 = 472.27, p = 0.000$ ). Moreover,  $R^2$  indicates that the model explains 30.8% of the variability in  $Tl$  for municipalities in Spain through the independent variables. The value of  $R^2$  is in line with those obtained in similar studies, Sol (2013) with an  $R^2$  value of 23%, Carcaba-García and García-García (2010) with 20.7% and Guillamón, Ríos-Martínez, and Vicente-Oliva (2011) with an  $R^2$  value of 28%.

In addition, we applied Wooldridge's (2002) test for serial correlation to our panel data set. The null hypothesis of no first-order autocorrelation was rejected for both models ( $F_{(1, 99)} = 6.144, p = 0.015$ ). We also calculated a modified Wald test for groupwise heteroscedasticity in the residuals and detected it ( $\chi^2_{100} = 140000, p = 0.0000$ ). Finally, to deal with contemporaneous correlation, we applied the Breusch–Pagan LM test which tests for cross-sectional independence in the residuals ( $\chi^2_{4950} = 7096.396, p = 0.0001$ ) and conclude that there is contemporaneous correlation in our data.

Thus, in order to overcome all these problems and the potential endogeneity issues, we estimated our model with *system* GMM estimator (Arellano and Bover 1995; Roodman 2009). This estimator allows handling not only the dynamic structure of the model and predetermined or endogenous explanatory variables, but also the unobserved heterogeneity present in the municipality-level data set, heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation of individual observations.

As the limitation of the short time span for our data (4 years only) prevents us from constructing these stock variables using a sequence of lagged information, we adopted only one lagged year. Additionally, we estimated robust standard errors using the *two-step version* of the *system* GMM estimator with a finite-sample correction (Windmeijer 2005).<sup>6</sup>

So, we treat *female mayor*, *electoral turnout*, *political ideology*, *investment* and *unemployment* as potentially endogenous variables, instrumented with one lagged value of the variables in first-differenced, and for equations in levels we instrumented them with their own first differences. Furthermore, as additional instrumental variables,<sup>7</sup> we include *size*, *development* and citizens' *level of education* of the municipalities,<sup>8</sup> which are not part of

Equation (1), to complement the instruments generated by the GMM procedure (Mileva 2007). These instruments use these variables as own instruments for equations in levels, equations in first-differences are instrumented with their own first differences (Mileva 2007), and the time dummies are used as instruments (Roodman 2009). This usually increases efficiency and enhances the robustness of our model (Mileva 2007; Roodman 2009).

The consistency of the GMM estimator depends on the validity of the assumption that the error terms do not exhibit serial correlation and on the validity of the instruments. To address the issue, we use the specification tests suggested by Arellano and Bond (1991) and Blundell and Bond (1998).

Moreover, we follow the rule of thumb saying that the number of instruments should not exceed the number of groups, and Hansen test  $p$ -value below 0.1 and above 0.25 are potential signs of problems (Roodman 2009). The results of the GMM system estimates are presented in Table 3. According to Table 3, the Arellano–Bond tests generally identify high first-order autocorrelation ( $AR(1)$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), and do not provide evidence of second-order autocorrelation ( $AR(2)$ ,  $p = 0.978$ ). The Hansen tests for over-identifying restrictions confirm that the instrument set can be considered valid (Hansen test,  $p = 0.225$ ). The  $F$ -test shows that the overall regression is significant ( $F_{(6, 99)} = 11.93$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). These support our model's correct specification.

These results show that *women councillors* variable is significant at 10% level and positively associated with our dependent variable ( $\beta_1 = 0.023$ ,  $p = 0.088$ ). The *female mayor* variable is significant at 1% level and positively associated with our dependent variable ( $\beta_2 = 0.208$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ). There is a positive relationship between a higher number of women councillors and mayors and the level of transparency. So, we can conclude that our main hypothesis (H1), about the positive relationship between WPR and the level of transparency in municipalities, is confirmed. This is in line with the gender literature, which supports that women have a favourable attitude towards ethical behaviour (Fine 2009) and are less prone to commit fraud (Vermeir and Van Kenhove 2008). These characteristics are important and represent a strong positive contribute for the transparency level.

Regarding the control variables, we can say that lower levels of *electoral turnout* lead to increased levels of municipal transparency ( $\beta_3 = -0.016$ ,  $p = 0.030$ ) as it is a way to promote organisational legitimacy through information disclosure and more transparency (Pina, Torres, and Royo 2010). It also helps to regain citizen's confidence and change their perceptions about public organisations' functioning. Similarly, *investment*, *fiscal pressure* and *unemployment* variables have a positive and significant relationship with the *IT* ( $\beta_5 = 0.033$ ,  $p = 0.053$ ,  $\beta_6 = 0.518$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ,  $\beta_7 = 0.030$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , respectively). The higher the investment, fiscal pressure and unemployment are in a municipality, the more transparent it will be since it is a way to legitimate political



action before society (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007; Carcaba-Garcia and García-García 2010). We did not find a significant relationship between the *IT* and the *political ideology* variable ( $\beta_4 = -0.026$ ,  $p = 0.523$ ).

## Discussion

The *level of municipal transparency* in Spain has been increasing over the years and can be seen as a positive sign of good governance. According to the theory of legitimacy, this suggests that municipalities are increasing the level of information disclosure in order to legitimise their actions to the citizens. This may be due to several reasons: firstly, those who govern and manage the municipality are aware that citizens are demanding more accountable actions from politicians due to the loss of confidence in them. Transparency is a way to recover citizens' lost trust. Secondly, in May 2011 local elections took place in Spain. This new political cycle may have been accompanied by changes in municipalities' information disclosure policy. In line with the agency theory argument, higher information levels reduce information asymmetries that might have existed in the previous political cycle, reducing the potential conflict of interest between citizens and politicians and increasing the degree of trust in politicians. Finally, the probable effect that the public discussion of the draft law on transparency and access of citizens to information (law passed in 26 November 2013) had in the *TI* of municipalities. The discussion of the law may have led many municipalities to try to be more transparent before its publication, so we believe that this increase of the *level of transparency* may have been caused by the public discussion of the bill before being approved.

In this period, *WPR* in municipalities increased. There was a rise in the number of *women councillors* and *female mayors*, perhaps driven by the active role of women in the political sphere and the compliance with the recommendation contained in the electoral law, which establishes a quota for women on electoral lists in order to ensure an effective equality between men and women. According to the SRT, with this increase of women in municipal political positions, it is expected that women's stereotype (Eagly 1987), different social perceptions and social construction (Gilligan 1982) lead to a distinct leadership style (Kim and Shim 2003) which will influence the power and functioning of organisations (Batista-Medina 2015). It is likely that women will be more responsive to their constituencies (Beck 2001) and will demonstrate to be more ethically minded (Latham and Perlow 1996) than men (Fine 2009), an important attitude towards higher levels of transparency. Quotas introduced by the electoral law changed the existing dynamics of candidate selection. The growth of the number of women in municipal political positions seems to affect practices and norms, setting a different institutional context for

municipalities, influencing the level of transparency. As reported by the SRT, changes in the composition of elected official at municipalities with more diversity in gender will change the institutional setting at municipal level. SRT argues that there are differences in social stereotypes between women and men (Eagly 1987) which influence the standards of behaviour of each one. Female leaders have been seen to adopt a more democratic and participative style than their male counterparts (Merchant 2012). These important differences can help to explain the influence of women in the outcomes of public-sector organisations.

## Conclusions and future research

The increase of women on political representation in municipalities since 1970 was the trigger and the aim for such study: to understand the evolution of transparency in Spanish municipalities and the influence of WPR on the municipal level of transparency.

Results show that the influence of WPR on municipalities' transparency established a positive and significant relation between these two variables. Institutional changes introduced by quotas increased the number of women in municipal political positions, setting a diverse context more favourable for the level of transparency.

Data demonstrates the influence of WPR on the municipalities' level of transparency. In the descriptive analysis, we observed an increase in the percentage of women councillors in the last elections. This is an evidence of the increasingly active role of women in political life and the trend of politics of equality between men and women. The results are consistent with the SRT which argues that women's values of representation, equity, sense of community and long-term outlook (Hamidullah, Riccucci, and Pandey 2015) constructed a unique social reality. In this social reality, ethical considerations are central to females' role conceptualisation (Gilligan 1982). Therefore, we are able to confirm our hypothesis.

Furthermore, we found empirical evidence on the influence of certain factors on the level of transparency. Variables such as *electoral turnout*, *investment*, *fiscal pressure* and *unemployment* are factors which have a significant effect on transparency. This result reinforces the discussion that quotas for the representation of women in local political life will increase information transparency and reduce information asymmetry in municipalities. Further research using a larger and different Spanish sample would be an important way to verify the positive effect of WPR on levels of transparency. It would also be beneficial to extend this study to other countries, with similar (and, in fact, dissimilar) cultural and environmental contexts.

A limitation of this study is the use of data only for 4 years because changes in WPR only occur after local elections, which occurred in 2007 and

2011. Future studies could overcome the limitations associated with the data used in the analysis and consider a longer period in order to obtain more robust results.

A practical implication of this study is that politicians seeking to improve LG governance should be encouraged to support stronger political representation of women in local council or as mayors. The findings should be instructive to the political system when setting future local governance requirements related to information disclosure and transparency.

Finally, our conclusions highlight the value of undertaking further research about WPR and gender influence in other government levels (regional and national), and in other countries with similar institutional and cultural contexts (i.e., southern European countries and in Latin America).

## Notes

1. By good governance, we mean the adequate use of the powers conferred by the citizens to their representatives and their use of public resources.
2. Since 2010, data about the TI is biannual.
3. Municipalities with a population from 50,001 to 100,000 have 25 council members. For each additional 100,000, there is one additional council member.
4. The Transparency Law (Law 19/2013) was approved on 9 December 2013. However, for LG, it would only be effective two years later.
5. We have considered the logarithm of the variable investment and fiscal pressure.
6. We estimate Equation (1) using *xtabond2* command in Stata 12.1 with *two-step*, *robust*, *small*, *nomata* (that prevents the use of Mata code) and *h(1)* options. For a discussion of *xtabond2*, see Mileva (2007) and Roodman (2009).
7. Additional instrumental variables can be applied for endogenous variables as well, so the estimator resolves the issues of simultaneous causality and autocorrelation.
8. *Size* is the natural logarithm of the number of inhabitants of the municipality. *Development* is the index of economic activity per capita. *Level of education* is the average citizens' level of education of the municipality, taking values within the range of 0–4.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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