



# Prostitution Under Debate in Spain: Citizens' Perceptions of Its Prohibition

Marta Méndez-Juez<sup>1</sup> · Sandra García-Santamaría<sup>1</sup> · Sergio Pérez-Castaños<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

**Introduction** The debate about prostitution within Spain's feminist movement has recently, and recurrently, been transferred to the social and political sphere, but without arriving at a clear and shared position. The aim of this research is to verify the characteristics of those who are in favor of banning prostitution in Spain and to what extent there are differences between men and women.

**Methods** To do so, we will use our own collected data during 2022 through a prestigious social research company, 40 dB, and by applying advanced statistical techniques—Logit model.

**Results** The analysis illustrates three types of profile. The first one depicts the prohibitionist's supporter profile in general terms. The second and the third ones demonstrate how women and men share similarities but also underlying differences, showing how women are more inclined than men to the prohibitionist approach.

**Conclusions** This paper comes to validate, once again, most of the previous theoretical supported evidences, but not the religious element as a defining variable for being a banning supporter. The data also shows the possible consensus of those surveyed on this issue across different political parties.

**Policy Implications** The implications of all kinds that arise around prostitution generate different public perceptions about its existence and practice, with its prohibition being one of the most important issues on the Spanish public agenda in recent months. This article depicts how the Spanish society positions itself in this policy agenda.

**Keywords** Transactional sex · Attitudes · Survey · Quantitative research · Prostitution · Spain

## Introduction

Prostitution, defined by Collins dictionary as “the act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money,”<sup>1</sup> is a complex phenomenon to address, given the fact that it is the result of unequal social and gender structures, or a patriarchal culture (Moran & Farley, 2019). Acts perceived as “immoral” (Weitzer, 2020) have sometimes been explained by historical and cultural differences between nations (Kuosmanen, 2011) that have produced polarized legislative approaches (Abel, 2018) and complex debates on how to deal with it at

international, European, or state level (Crowhurst et al., 2012; Rodriguez & Gillies, 2018).

Specifically, the debate on prostitution is a dilemma within the feminist movement and which is recurrently transferred to the social and political sphere in Spain, but without arriving at a clear and shared position. Prostitution, and its implications, generates varying public positions about its existence and practice, with its prohibition being prioritized on the Spanish public agenda in recent months. At the same time, scientists must determine its true scope and design public policies to address the phenomenon in states.

The main objective of this research is to evaluate the characteristics of people who are in favor of banning prostitution in Spain. Additionally, and based on this objective, it is important to investigate whether there are differences between men and women when it comes to taking a stance on this issue.

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✉ Sergio Pérez-Castaños  
spcastanos@ubu.es

Marta Méndez-Juez  
mmjuez@ubu.es

Sandra García-Santamaría  
sandrags@ubu.es

<sup>1</sup> Department of Private Law, Fac. Derecho, Universidad de Burgos, Hospital del Rey S/N, 09001 Burgos, Spain

<sup>1</sup> Definition obtained from the web version of the Collins dictionary available at the following link: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/prostitution>

In order to achieve the objectives, an advanced statistical analysis of logistic regression is carried out, based on data obtained from a nationwide survey. This allows us to confirm the key variables that can be included in the model, and which allow us to identify the characteristics of citizens who are in favor of prohibition. It is hoped to obtain relevant information regarding this, so that public decision-makers can have a rough idea of public support for potential prohibitive policies on this issue.

## Prostitution as a Public Problem

As prostitution is predominantly a gendered social practice, with most women on the supply side and men on the demand side, it has been central to debates in feminist movements. There are two theoretical positions—and not at the legislative level—where the debate about prostitution has been fostered: abolitionist and regulatory.

The abolitionist position (Armstrong, 2020; Danna, 2012; Wylie, 2017) argues that prostitution is one of the most harmful forms of sexual violence, which deepens gender inequality, and is a flagrant violation of human rights. At all times, the female sex worker is treated as a victim, without differentiating between forced and the free exercise of prostitution, as it is argued that free choice is always determined by a series of economic and contextual factors, which make it a fallacy to consider that a woman has chosen freely. It rejects outright the idea of regularizing or legalizing prostitution in any way and penalizes “pimping” and any facilitating role, as well as clientele (Corbera, 2009).

At the opposite extreme is the regulatory position (Hayes-Smith & Shekarkhar, 2010; Östergren, 2017). From this perspective, prostitution itself is not considered a mechanism to control women, but the stigma around it is. The “free choice” of women is defended, and prostitution is considered a legitimate economic activity that requires recognition of rights and labor obligations adapted to this activity. Regulators differentiate, in this case, between forced prostitution and free exercise, arguing the need to develop policies that pursue and eradicate trafficking, as well as measures for labor market and social reintegration for those who decide to leave prostitution (Corbera, 2009).

These positions are shaped, always, by the normativity and ambivalence from which prostitution is observed (Gimeno Reinoso, 2012). Morality, religion, and patriarchy are imbricated in discourse about this social practice. And, although the argument on this side has gradually shifted from viewing sex workers as “vicious” to them being “a threat to public health”—with the stigma and burden of shame falling on women—it is only in the last decade that academic studies have begun to focus on client demand, the

trivialization, and possible regulation of the practice (Heim, 2011; Villacampa, 2012).

On the other hand, there are four legislative approaches—or ways of dealing with prostitution as a public and social problem—that can be distinguished, although it is true that, as most authors indicate, they are usually interwoven in the countries where they are implemented: the prohibitionist, regulatory, abolitionist, and legalist. The fact that the numbers and specific problems of prostitution are unknown means that in many cases, “lukewarm” public policies with precepts that amalgamate various positions are implemented.

First, we address the prohibitionist model (Weitzer, 2020). This approach aims at the total eradication of prostitution, since it is based on the ideological precepts of abolitionism, which understands prostitution as a violation of human rights, a denigration of the person, and always carried out through force and coercion (Brufao, 2008; Corbera, 2009). It differs from other approaches in seeking the prosecution of all parties involved, whether they are engaged in demand or supply. This approach, which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and was influenced by positivist criminology, seeks a penal repression of prostitution from the perspective of moral defense and, in all cases in which it has been implemented, female sex workers are prosecuted, although in the case of the clientele there are cases in which they are not prosecuted (Corbera, 2009). In this category, we can include countries such as the USA, with the exception of Rhode Island and Nevada; China, with the exception of Hong Kong; Thailand; the Philippines; and Cuba and, in Europe, Romania, Albania, Malta, and Ireland, among others.

The next approach assumes that prostitution will always exist and therefore it is necessary to regulate it. This model was implemented in most European countries throughout the nineteenth century. Initially, it allowed the practice of prostitution as long as women underwent medical examinations to safeguard their client’s well-being, which was a matter to be regulated for public health and social order (Corbera, 2009; Ulloa, 2011). In this context, the stigma and shame fell on those who offered prostitution. Currently, the regulationist model is characterized by a relatively tolerant package of legislation and policies that regulate the “satellite” elements of prostitution, such as the hours it is practiced, the places to which it should be confined, or the registration of sex workers. Examples of this approach include Mexico, some Australian states, Turkey, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

The abolitionist model (Armstrong, 2020; Wylie, 2017; Danna, 2012) has its origins in the English feminist movement of the late nineteenth century. It understands prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation. Based on the precepts of humanitarianism, proponents argue that the activity violates human rights and deepens gender inequalities and

gender violence (Brufao, 2008; Corbera, 2009). As sex workers in this model are seen as victims, they seek to generate a “normative body” that helps women to escape from the degrading situation in which they find themselves aided by social and labor market reinsertion policies. It aims for the complete disappearance of prostitution, given that forced prostitution cannot be separated from free exercise, with free choice being determined by factors such as the feminization of poverty, coercion, and immigration (Villacampa, 2012). Sweden and Norway are the systems that come closest to a pure abolitionist model.

Finally, there is a fourth “legalistic” way (Benoit et al., 2017; Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Serughetti, 2013). This approach began being implemented towards the end of the twentieth century. Based on the idea that it is possible to draw boundaries between forced prostitution and free exercise, it proposes the generation of labor rights and obligations for those who freely exercise prostitution (Brufao, 2008; Corbera, 2009; De Lora, 2007; Lorenzo, 2008). The legal system will no longer prosecute all prostitution, but only forced prostitution will be punishable, given that it is no longer a legitimate economic activity but a criminal act (De Lora, 2007; Lorenzo, 2008). This model can be observed in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany or in a hybrid implementation in the cases of Switzerland and Austria.

A closer look at the implementation of regulatory systems at European level quickly reinforces the idea that intermediate approaches, or those with characteristics of several approaches, are the most common.

## The Spanish Context

Turning to the specific case of Spain, this country has undergone a change from a more regulatory approach in the nineteenth century<sup>2</sup> towards abolitionist positions in the following centuries.<sup>3</sup> Currently, there is no specific regulation, which has led to an unregulated situation, a space in which prerogatives have been developed at autonomous and local levels that differ from each other. The incumbent Spanish coalition government is negotiating a legal response to this

situation which would involve reforming the current Penal Code, thus abandoning the initial idea of the majority partner of the executive drafting a specific law on prostitution and its regulatory model.<sup>4</sup>

Until 2003, prostitution in Spain was completely unregulated and it was a minor debate and mobilization subject limited to the women’s movement as a whole. Women’s movement groups and women’s policy agencies were neither prioritizing this topic nor included in the policy development process before the 2000s (Valiente, 2004). When Article 188 of the Penal Code was amended in that year, the situation changed, but not substantially. Since then, the free exercise of prostitution has not constituted a crime. It is not even considered illegal, so it can be concluded that the system in force in Spain, while not illegal, does not regulate the way in which it is voluntarily carried out, in what we might call a “legal limbo.” The only conduct that is criminally prosecuted is the exploitation of the prostitution of others, or “pimping,” whether the victim consents to it or not. However, regulation of the exercise of freely exercised prostitution is still absent in state regulations today. In sum, the buying and selling of adult and consensual sex is not illegal in Spain, but it is not recognized as a regular profession either (Villacampa, 2012). Furthermore, although the existence of clubs, hotels, or flats where prostitution takes place is not prohibited, most activities related to prostitution in public spaces, such as the negotiation of sexual services on the street, are criminalized (Schmitt et al., 2013).

The lack of an explicit and coherent policy on prostitution at state level (Benoit et al., 2017; Guamán Hernández, 2020) has led other legislators to take the initiative on this issue. Municipal regulators have opted for an abolitionist, punitive policy, in defense of the supposed preservation of public space as an area of coexistence and “civic-mindedness,” with the aim of preventing conduct that could disrupt this coexistence. The offer, solicitation, negotiation, and acceptance of sexual services on the public highway, as well as the practice of sexual relations on the aforementioned space,<sup>5</sup> are prohibited. In addition, some of these ordinances only sanction the conduct of clients, but most of them also sanction sex workers.

In March 2015, the Organic Law 4/2015 on the protection of public safety was passed, which stated that the practice of prostitution or the provision of paid sexual services is a serious offense, and that it is prohibited to solicit or accept paid sexual services in public transit areas or in the vicinity of places intended for use by minors, such as educational centers,

<sup>2</sup> A clear example is the Spanish Penal Code of 1822, which included as punishable, in Title VIII (crimes against “good customs”) of Part One (crimes against society), sexual activity in those places where it was practiced, and sex workers, only when they did not have the necessary administrative permits.

<sup>3</sup> Since the Law of 21 July 1904, there has been a shift towards abolitionism, which was completed with the persecution of sex workers as “dangerous subjects” by the Law on Vagrants and Miscreants of 1933, until it was decided to establish a fully prohibitionist system, by the Decree-Law of 3 March 1956 on the abolition of “centers of tolerance” and other measures relating to prostitution.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this matter: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/08/spain-prostitution-ban-pedro-sanchez-sex-work-feminism-human-rights-psoe-vox/>

<sup>5</sup> Examples include Seville, Murcia, Malaga, Valencia, Madrid, Bilbao, Albacete, Pontevedra, Granada, and Badajoz.

playgrounds, or leisure areas, or when these activities, due to the place where they are carried out, may generate a risk to road safety.

In June 2022, the government approved the reform of article 187 of the Penal Code in an attempt to prohibit pimping in all its expressions, abolish prostitution, fine the clientele, and prosecute the owners of the premises—through what has been called the “third locative.” These measures can be taken regardless of sex workers’ consent, given that free choice is determined by the circumstances in which they find themselves and that they have no real “free will.”

This proposal to ban pimping in all its forms has underlined the positions of each party in the chambers and finds the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, PSOE, and the Popular Party, PP, clearly aligned with the abolitionist approach and Podemos accepting the current text but fighting to differentiate between forced prostitution and free exercise. In this sense, they are closer, therefore, to the legalist approaches also defended by the Basque Nationalist Party or Esquerra Republicana Catalana, leaving Ciudadanos (Spain’s liberal party) as the main standard bearer of the regulatory approach towards prostitution.

The legal and moral ambivalence surrounding this phenomenon makes it almost impossible to determine the scale of global demand or the exact number of people involved in prostitution. However, several studies point to an increase in the total number of people selling sex, especially due to use of the internet and social media (Lanau & Matolcsi, 2022). It is easier to obtain approximate data on the millions generated by the prostitution business and estimates of its contribution to the gross domestic product of different countries. It is also possible to find statistics on victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The bill contemplates Penal Code reform to broaden the type of punishment for pimping beyond the obtainment of profit by any means (whether the sex worker is being “forced”). Thus, the reform contemplates acts of “violence, intimidation, deceit, or abuse” in pimping as aggravating circumstances, but if these or exploitation does not occur because the prostitution is consented to, the pimp can nonetheless be punished. In addition, the reform aims to punish clients or consumers of prostitution.

In sum, the prohibitionist approach to prostitution is currently high on Spain’s political agenda, hence the importance of knowing the basic characteristics of its proponents to measure this policy’s potential success in the future.

## Public Attitudes to Prostitution

In the prostitution debate, public opinion can play an important role, given that policy on this issue is highly morally charged (Benoit et al., 2019; Weitzer, 2020). In this sense,

public attitudes are central to the development of policies that refer to moral issues, insofar as government support for one stance or another depends, to a large extent, on public sentiment towards it (Cao et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2013).

Additionally, while there are more studies that delve into the sexual personality of individuals, which is determined by aspects related to their own perceptions, social position, or socioeconomic variables (Anderson, 2002:775), there are fewer studies that focus on the profile of people who defend a particular stance to prostitution, especially those centered on the prohibitionist model. Further research has assessed regulatory attitudes towards prostitution with one or two normative or evaluative items (Basow & Campanile, 1990; Calvo & Penadés, 2015; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Long et al., 2012). Others, such as Valor-Segura (2011), have developed a self-reported scale to assess attitudes and beliefs about different regulatory approaches among the Spanish population, specifically by using a Legal Stance Towards Prostitution Scale. Finally, authors such as Polk and Cowan (1996) and Basow and Campanile (1990) have found a correlation between feminist ideology and certain attitudes against prostitution.

However, all these studies were based on small samples or largely qualitative methodologies, making it difficult to compare and generalize results or conclusions. An example is the initial reliability analysis of the Attitudes towards Prostitution and Prostituted Women scale by Levin and Peled (2011), a pioneer of quantitative methodology. Immordino and Russo (2015) explain that this model, using a dataset that combines information from the World Values Survey with information on prostitution, shows that, if prostitution is legal or regulated, individuals tend to justify it significantly more than if it is prohibited. Moreover, legalization and regulation correspond not only with more tolerant individuals, but also with greater variability in opinions.

## The Spanish Case

Despite its importance, it is striking to note how Spaniards’ opinion towards prostitution has barely been examined in recent years. Some public opinion surveys indicate that between 74 and 86% of the Spanish population do not support the criminalization of prostitution (Calvo & Penadés, 2015; Meneses et al., 2018), while only 25% are in favor of its prohibition (Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017; Torrado et al., 2018).

Just as the political roadmap has been changing, there have also been changes in positions towards prostitution within Spanish society. In 2008, for example, prostitution was perceived as an “unavoidable entity,” and therefore of obligatory legalization, by just under 80% of the Spanish adult population—82% of men and 73.6% of

women—according to the survey on sexual attitudes and practices carried out by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS) in the same year. Barely a decade later in 2017, most of the population sees it as unacceptable and believes that it should be punished and prosecuted in all its forms, as stated in the report on the social perception of sexual violence carried out by the CIS.

Bonache et al. (2021) argue that the relevant literature is too scarce to identify attitudes towards prostitution in Spain. The authors highlight variables such as religiosity, gender ideology, and political orientation (Bretns, 2016; McCarthy et al., 2012) to measure citizen behavior towards one model or another. Women, participants in religious activities, and those who perceive gender equality as important tend to disapprove of prostitution (Calvo & Penadés, 2015; Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017).

For their part, Calvo and Penadés (2015:93) have analyzed the socio-demographic profile of people who are in favor of the regularization of prostitution, reaching the conclusion that being a woman, being relatively young or elderly, being a member of the unskilled working class or inactive in the labor market, and being of foreign origin reduce the probability of supporting regularization. Moreover, when religious attitudes and sexual morality are considered, it is found that holding the socio-demographic characteristics of individual constant, conformity with the Church and intolerant attitudes towards sexuality, significantly increases the propensity to reject the regulation of prostitution. However, their model focuses on looking at the regulation rather than the prohibition approach.

Having set out the basic discursive lines that allow us to analyze the characteristics of people who are in favor of a certain approach—above all, a regulatory approach—to prostitution, this research aims to explore key variables in order to elucidate the specific characteristics of people in Spain who are in favor of adopting a prohibitionist approach to this issue.

## Objectives and Methodology

As stated in the “Introduction” section, the main objective of this research is to clarify the characteristics of people who are in favor of prohibiting prostitution in Spain. In addition, based on this objective, it is important to confirm whether or not there are differences between men and women’s position in favor of this assumption.

In order to achieve this, we carried out an analysis based on the data obtained by the POLCOM research team of the University of Burgos,<sup>6</sup> which has carried out a nationwide

<sup>6</sup> More information can be found at: <https://www.ubu.es/politica-comparada-polcom>

survey of 1202 people to find out the public’s perception of prostitution in Spain and, more specifically, their position on the prohibition of prostitution.<sup>7</sup>

Thanks to this work, the data can be properly analyzed through a Logit model or logistic regression model to state/find out which are the most relevant variables that can be included in the model. In this sense, the dependent variable will answer the question, which was as follows: “Now we want to know something more about a specific issue. In the case of prostitution, to what extent do you agree with its prohibition? (0 being ‘Strongly disagree’ and 10 being ‘Strongly agree,’ on a scale of 0 to 10).” The response options were dichotomized as follows: those who answered between 0 and 5 were classified as being against banning it (0), and those who answered between 5 and 10 were classified as being in favor of a ban (1). Along with our dependent variable, the independent variables included in the analysis can be seen in Table 1. In this regard, we have included the name of the variable, the description of its content, and how it has been coded for use in the Logit model.

As can be seen, a series of so-called socio-demographic variables have been included, which will help us to verify the basic differences between the positions for or against banning prostitution. In this sense, we have included the variables sex, age, size of the habitat in which they live, level of education, social class, and religiosity of the people interviewed. Regarding more political questions, we included ideology, national sentiment, and the degree to which the four main political forces in the country<sup>8</sup> are liked by citizens.

## Results

First, it might be interesting to update the data regarding public opinion towards banning of prostitution. In the Fig. 1, we can observe how the obtained data flows regarding positions towards banning prostitution. The figure also provides a description segmented by sex.

As Fig. 1 shows, there is a huge overall support for banning prostitution, as almost 83% of the people is in favor of this measure. When showing data segmented by sex, we can see how women are more prone to support the banning than men, since there is a 20-point difference among them (91.3% for women vs. 71.3% for men).

<sup>7</sup> The fieldwork, carried out by the company 40db, took place between 3 and 16 February 2022. The survey collection technique used was online interviews through a panel of internet users. More information about the company can be found at <http://40db.es>.

<sup>8</sup> These are the *Partido Popular* (PP), conservatives; the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), Labor Party; the coalition *Unidas Podemos* (UP), leftists; and VOX, radical populist right.

**Table 1** List of independent variables included in the model

Variable ID	Description	Coding <sup>a</sup>
Sex	Sex of the interviewee	[D.] 0 (male), 1 (female)
Age	Age of the interviewee	[S.] 18 (min.), 85 (max.)
Habitat	Size of the respondent's habitat	[S.] 1 (< 10 k inhab.), 6 (> 500 k inhab.)
Educ	Highest level of education attained by the respondent	[S.] 1 (elementary school or less), 8 (university or more)
Class	Social class of the interviewee. Middle class as reference	[D.] Lower 1 (lower class), 0 (else) Upper 1 (upper class), 0 (else)
Relig	Religiosity of the interviewee	[D.] 0 (religious), 1 (non-religious)
Ideol	Ideology	[S.] 0 (left), 10 (right)
Sent	National sentiment	[S.] 1 (autonomous community only), 5 (Spanish only)
LPP	Degree of liking for the PP	[S.] 0 (none), 10 (very much)
LPSOE	Degree of liking for the PSOE	[S.] 0 (none), 10 (very much)
LUP	Degree of liking for UP	[S.] 0 (none), 10 (very much)
LVOX	Level of liking for VOX	[S.] 0 (none), 10 (very much)

Source: own elaboration

<sup>a</sup> [S.] indicates scale; [D.] indicates dichotomous variable

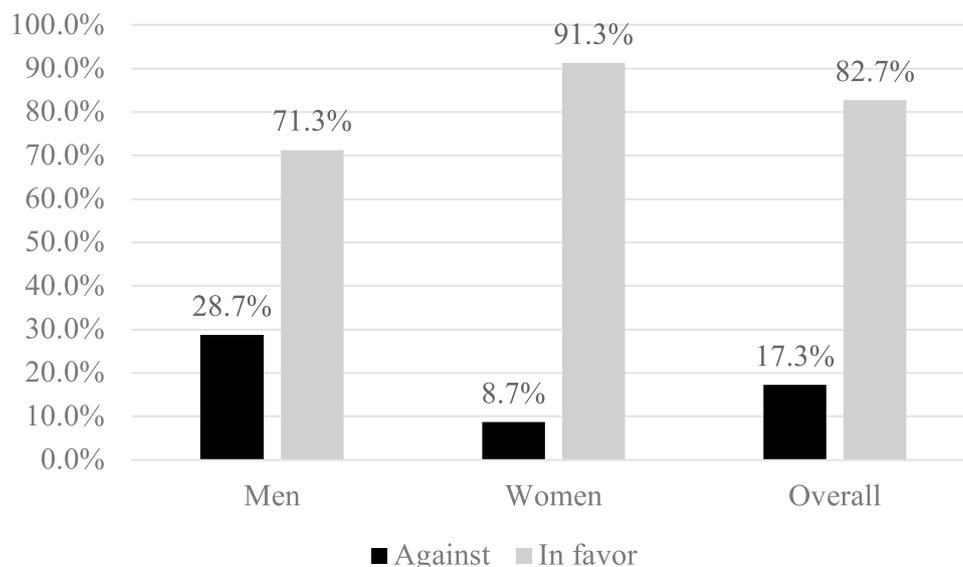
Thanks to the previously described variables and analysis, Figs. 2, 3, and 4 show the results of the logistic regression models applied. The first discusses the coefficients of the general model; and subsequently, the second and third refer to the case of women and men, respectively, seeking to verify possible differences.

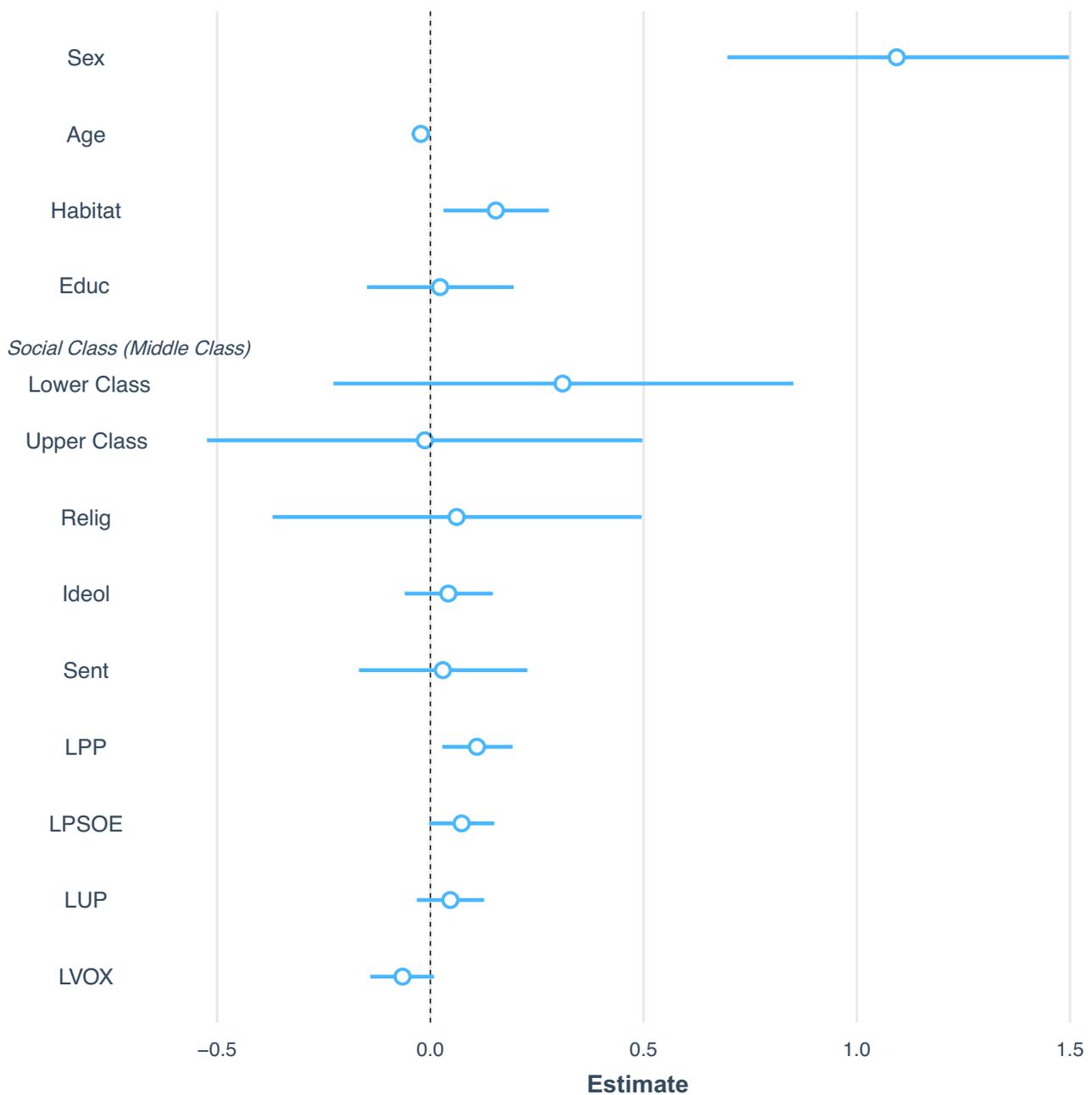
Figure 2 details the estimated coefficients of supporting the prohibition of prostitution in Spain. In this model—whose Nagelkerke's R is 0.200 for the 1202 cases that make up this study—we can see how gender is statistically significant, increasing the probability of being in favor of the prohibition of prostitution if you are a woman than if you are a man. This allows us to carry out an analysis segmented by sex at a later stage.

Other socio-demographic variables that are significant for this model are age and household size. In this sense, younger people are more likely to be in favor of a ban, as are people living in larger municipalities.

Regarding the variables linked to politics, we can see that only those variables that measure how much the different political parties are liked may have an effect. Thus, people who indicate that they most like the PP are more likely to be in favor of the ban. In the same sense, despite being nearly statistically significant, the data shows that liking PSOE and not liking VOX makes people more likely to be in favour of it.

Since Fig. 2 has shown us how women seem to be more likely to support the ban, Fig. 3 reflects the characteristics of

**Fig. 1** Positions regarding banning prostitution. Source: own elaboration



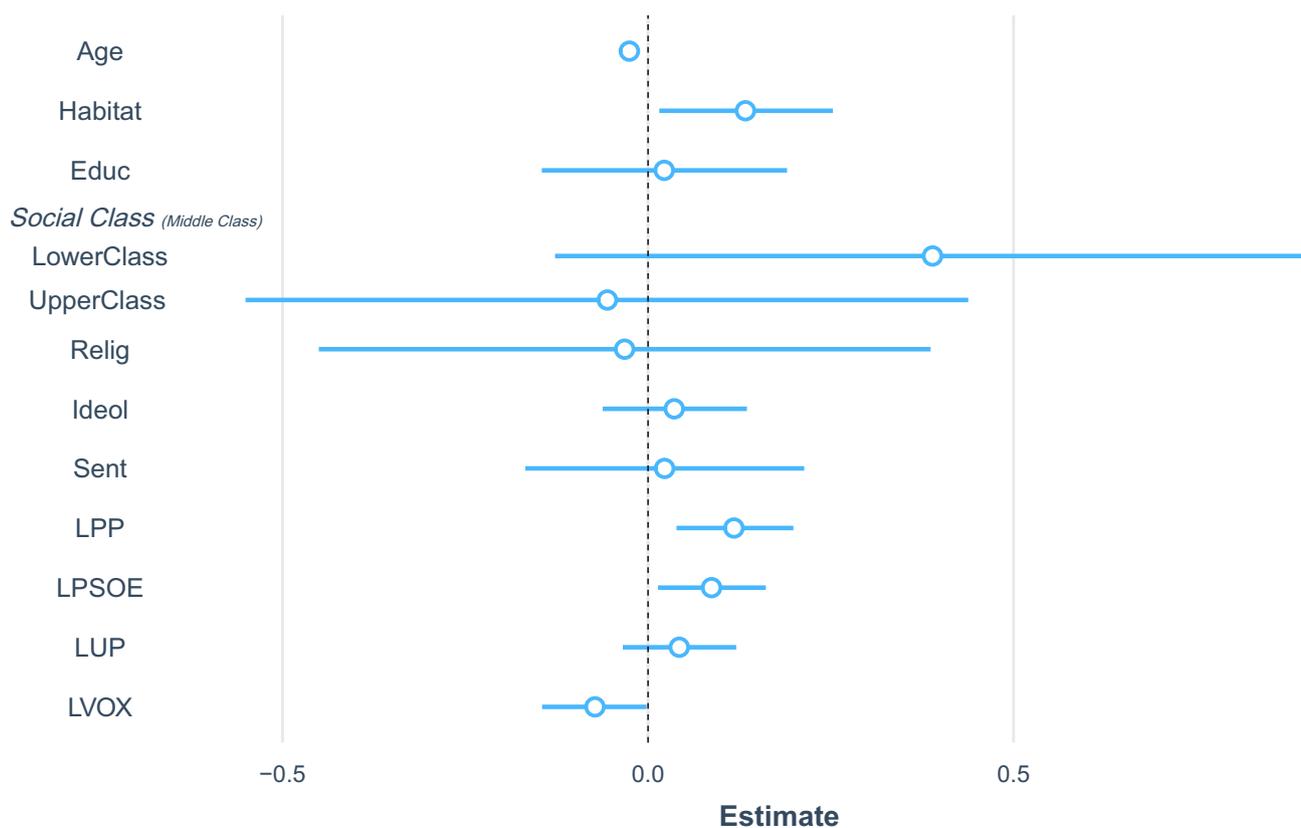
**Fig. 2** Full Logit model analysis. Source: own elaboration

the model for women. Thus, the variables analyzed are the same as those in the previous case, except for the sex variable, and show an explanatory power of 0.131—Nagelkerke’s R<sup>2</sup>—for the 621 cases that make up the sample.

It can be observed how, in this case, the same variables seem to have explanatory capacity for the model, statistically speaking. Thus, according to the coefficient graph, age and habitat size, liking the PP and the PSOE—which gain in statistical explanatory capacity—are the variables

with statistical significance to be analyzed. All of them delve into the same dynamics mentioned above; that is, younger people, living in more populated areas, the more you like the PP and the more you like the PSOE, are the people that are more likely to express positions against the prohibition of prostitution.

Finally, Fig. 4 reflects the same model for men. In this case, the model is more explanatory than in the previous, with a Nagelkerke’s R<sup>2</sup> of 0.165 to explain a sample of 581



**Fig. 3** Logit model analysis for women. Source: own elaboration

cases. Here, we see how the number of statistically significant variables according to the coefficient graph makes no difference from that observed in the previous cases. The variables referring to age and habitat, liking the PP and PSOE, maintain statistical significance and direction, acting as in the two previous models. However, in the men's model, we see how liking VOX achieves special relevance.

Thus, we see how for the first time the variable regarding liking the far-right party VOX acquires statistical significance. In this case, the data shows how the less you like VOX, the more likely you are going to support the banning of prostitution. Or, saying it in the other way around, the more you like VOX, the less in support of banning the prostitution. Other political elements fluctuate in the same patterns as shown both in Figs. 2 and 3.

## Conclusions

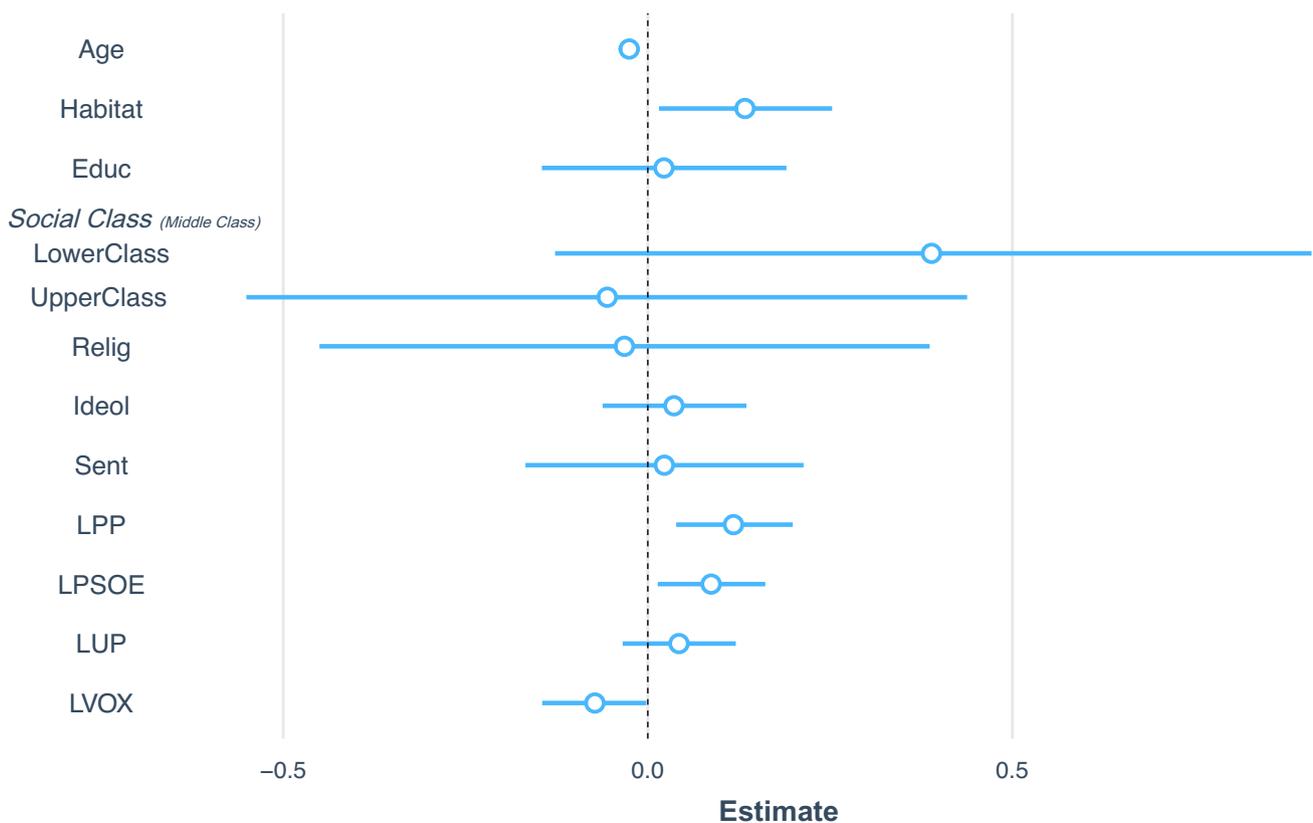
The first of the contributions of this research revolves around the compilation of the different theories and approaches to the treatment of prostitution as a public problem. Thanks to the systematic review carried out, it is possible to summarize what

these approaches are and how they are applied in different parts of the world, although they are usually applied in a hybrid way.

The second contribution we make is the description of the case of Spain. It is a highly topical case insofar as for the first time in the country there is a will to establish legislation that seeks to cover the issue of prostitution in a holistic manner, and not only focusing on one party, despite the target has turned out to be quite ambitious.

Furthermore, this research underlines the need to improve data collection regarding prostitution and its weight in the economy, as well as social stances towards it; further work must be done on citizen perception of specific issues that are discussed on the political agenda, such as prostitution. Thanks to this research, the characteristics of those who are in favor of its prohibition have been identified, as well as whether there are differences between men and women on this specific issue.

In line with previous contributions, this study finds a higher probability of being in favor of the prohibition of prostitution if one is a woman (Calvo & Penadés, 2015; Brents, 2016). As for the socioeconomic profile of these women, those who are younger, have a lower social class, and live in larger municipalities are more likely to be in favor of its prohibition, as established by Calvo and Penadés (2015) and Villacampa (2012), among others. If we talk



**Fig. 4** Logit model analysis for men. Source: own elaboration

about their political profile, those who like the PP have a greater probability of being in favor of its prohibition, while the probability is lower for those who like VOX. In this sense, the theory indicated that political proximity to parties with a feminist imprint provided greater support for being against prostitution, and the data from this research shows a certain consensus in terms of political positions. Furthermore, when we look at the characteristics of men who are in favor of banning prostitution, we find that age has a greater explanatory capacity, as well as liking PSOE.

It is worth noting that, although previous studies indicate that religious variables may have statistical significance in how citizens position themselves in relation to prostitution (Jonsson & Jakobsson, 2017), the results of this research show that this variable, in the Spanish case, does not have any, in relation to the selected sample. An indicative explanation may be the theories that speak of the secularization of Spanish society (García Rabadán, 2019), although this should be explored further.

Even more, due to the low levels of explanatory power of the models presented in this study, it is clear that there are several issues revolving around the idea of prostitution and its banning or regulation that move past the usual variables that might have an effect in classical political

issues. Religion as well as other cultural, social, and maybe economic elements are to be included in further analysis to deepen the knowledge around this topic, helping governments when facing a thorny political issue such as prostitution.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the possible consensus of those surveyed on this issue, insofar as it seems that people who like the PP and the PSOE seem to be in favor of banning prostitution. In this line, the approval process for previous legislation on the subject has specifically shown a broad level of agreement on this issue, as highlighted above.

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**Code Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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