

**DEBATE/DEBATE:** A LOOK AT ADOLESCENCE FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES /UNA  
MIRADA HACIA LA ADOLESCENCIA DESDE TRES PERSPECTIVAS

# Spanish Adolescence: A Political and Socio- Emotional Characterisation

La adolescencia española: una caracterización política y  
socioemocional

**Iván Rodríguez Pascual**

COIDESO – University of Huelva, Spain  
ivan@dstso.uhu.es

**Received/Recibido:** 21-10-2025

**Accepted/Aceptado:** 23-3-2026



## ABSTRACT

To contribute to the characterisation of Spanish adolescence in political and socio-emotional terms, we draw on microdata from the latest INJUVE survey (2023), extracting the subsample corresponding to the population aged 15 to 19 ( $n = 1,228$ ). Overall, the findings portray a tolerant population that is highly engaged with a broad range of social concerns, strongly critical in political terms, yet not predominantly conservative in its ideological orientation. Adolescent boys are somewhat more conservative and more critical of democracy, less supportive of the feminist movement and considerably more likely to consume pornography. Girls show greater exposure to unwanted sexual experiences, a more pronounced sense of loneliness and appear to be more sensitive to certain social issues.

**KEYWORDS:** sociology; adolescence; Spain; survey research; gender; age.

**HOW TO CITE:** Rodríguez Pascual, I. (2026). La adolescencia española: una caracterización política y socioemocional. *Revista Centra de Ciencias Sociales*, 5(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.191>

Spanish (original) version can be read at <https://doi.org/10.54790/rccs.191>

## RESUMEN

Para tratar de aportar una caracterización de la adolescencia española en términos políticos y socioemocionales hemos usado los microdatos de la última encuesta del INJUVE (2023), extrayendo la submuestra que corresponde a la población de 15 a 19 años ( $n = 1.228$ ). Los resultados generales muestran un colectivo tolerante, volcado hacia una serie amplia de preocupaciones sociales, muy crítico en el plano político, pero no conservador. Los varones adolescentes son algo más conservadores y críticos con la democracia, reacios a apoyar la lucha feminista y frecuentadores en mucha mayor medida de pornografía. Las chicas muestran mayor exposición a las relaciones sexuales no deseadas, una sensación más acusada de soledad y parecen estar más sensibilizadas ante ciertos problemas sociales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** sociología; adolescencia; España; encuesta; género; edad.

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is an age category that has not always received adequate attention from a sociological perspective, owing to the ambiguity of its boundaries, which tend to overlap with the end of childhood while also merging into early youth. At the same time, it occupies a discursive space rooted in the psychosocial sphere and sociocultural analysis, without a corresponding status in the normative realm, where the only formal distinction is between minors and adults. As a result, within adolescence itself, the crossing of the threshold into legal adulthood means that both categories coexist, reinforcing the inherently ambivalent nature of this stage, situated between adulthood and childhood subordination.

Nevertheless, adolescence is a phase of the life course that is receiving growing attention from a global perspective. Various studies warn, for example, that mental health problems among adolescents are widespread across the world, with increases in depressive symptoms and anxiety-related conditions. Adolescent girls are disproportionately affected, although these issues are also shaped by broader social determinants linked to poverty and social exclusion, educational pressures, family dynamics and peer relationships (Shorey and Wong, 2021; Tamarit *et al.*, 2021). It should also be noted that adolescents, including those in Spain, appear to be facing a range of interconnected global challenges, such as managing the impact of the pandemic on their emotional well-being and educational development, transitioning into employment, and exposure to violence and other risks associated with the digital environment (Jafar *et al.*, 2025; Ventura, 2025).

It is also important to recognise that scientific knowledge regarding adult social representations of adolescence in Spanish society has not been sufficiently updated over the past decade. Nevertheless, some evidence is available on how such representations are often shaped by adult prejudice. For example, Casas

(2010) describes the construction of an image of adolescents based on the pathologisation of many of their behaviours and lifestyles, portraying them as a group characterised by confrontation with adults and resistance to social norms. Similarly, Oliva (2003) highlights the contrast between representations of childhood, which centre on vulnerability, and those of adolescence, where young people are more often portrayed as self-sufficient, transgressive or even as potential aggressors. Scholars specialising in the study of adult-centric biases, such as Duarte (2012), argue that adolescent and youth practices and discourses are frequently interpreted by adults through a lens of conflict and viewed as a threat to social order and social cohesion. This intergenerational tension also extends to key aspects of adolescent life, including young people's attachment to new forms of digital interaction and their use of technological devices, as more recently demonstrated by Larrañaga and Monguí (2021).

This framework invites us to consider that the social reality encompassing Spanish adolescence, as we seek to illustrate in this article, is complex and cannot be reduced to a headline. It requires a broad perspective that remains attentive to the specificities of adolescent life.

A number of very recent studies support this analytical picture, in which highly positive signs of resilience and strength among adolescents coexist with warning signs regarding specific issues that warrant further examination. For instance, the latest report based on the international *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (HBSC) study depicts a landscape characterised by high levels of life satisfaction, good health and a well-informed population that is also highly engaged and aware of issues such as climate change. At the same time, it identifies a clear gender and socioeconomic divide, with many mental health problems concentrated among girls and adolescents from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Moreno *et al.*, 2025). Another prominent issue linked to adolescent mental health and emotional well-being is the clear prevalence of unwanted loneliness (Ruiz *et al.*, 2023). Other studies have also drawn attention to a widening gender divide among adolescents in perceptions of the importance of the struggle for equality and related issues such as gender-based violence (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2021).

Against this complex analytical backdrop, our aim is to shed empirical light on several selected aspects of contemporary Spanish adolescence that frequently feature in public debate and have generated media headlines since at least the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we focus on how this population is characterised in ideological, romantic, sexual and emotional terms, as well as in relation to its civic concerns and commitments. More specifically, drawing on an analysis of the microdata from the latest Spanish Youth Institute (INJUVE) report (2024), with particular emphasis on the influence of gender and age, we examine adolescents' political and ideological orientations and their views on democracy; their emotional, sexual and relationship experiences, including pornography use; and, finally, their concerns regarding a range of social issues, together with their commitment to civic causes, including feminism and the pursuit of gender equality.

## 2. Methodological Note

The analysis presented below is based on a secondary analysis of the microdata provided by INJUVE for its survey conducted as part of the Youth in Spain 2024 Report, with fieldwork carried out between October 2023 and January 2024. This was a large-scale national survey based on a semi-proportional, multi-stage and stratified design targeting male and female residents of Spain aged between 15 and 34 years.<sup>1</sup>

Of the slightly more than 5,000 interviews conducted, only those corresponding to the population aged between 15 and 19 years were selected, reducing the sample size to  $n = 1,228$ . Thus, the lower age limit (15 years) is determined by the characteristics of the available dataset, while the upper limit follows the age boundaries proposed by institutions such as the WHO, which defines adolescence as spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years, thereby avoiding excessive overlap with the category of youth.

For analytical purposes, this population was divided into two broad age groups: 15–17 years and 18–19 years. Although the first group covers a wider age range, it accounts for just over 39% of the sample (421 cases), while the second comprises 747 cases. This subdivision into age groups is also analytically relevant, as it incorporates the age of majority as a natural boundary. The analysis also presents information disaggregated according to a binary gender variable. Consideration was given to distinguishing respondents according to their household's economic situation. However, this variable proved less precise and involved a very high level of non-response, and was therefore ultimately excluded from the analysis.

## 3. Spanish Adolescence on the Ideological Spectrum

One of the most widely debated aspects of the adolescent profile in a social context marked by concern over the electoral growth of parties representing ultraconservative political positions is adolescents' ideological orientation. In the media, this population is frequently portrayed as sympathetic to such political formations. Here, we present evidence relating to the adolescent population concerning a possible ideological shift among young people towards the political right which, as Díez (2025) argues, conceals a far more diverse and complex reality. To begin with, it is important to note that adolescents do not identify strongly with the formal functioning of politics and its institutions. Among respondents aged 15–19 years, 53.2% reported having little or no interest in politics, while almost a quarter (22.1%) stated that they have no trust at all in political parties. This context should be borne in mind when interpreting the remainder of the information provided by respondents.

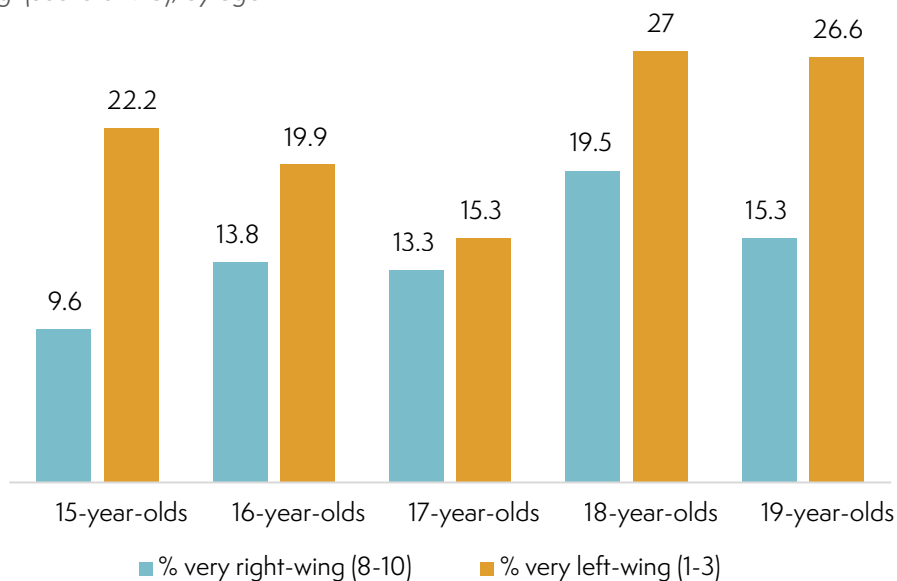
Although adolescent ideological positioning is complex, the data clearly indicate that it is not founded on a broad base of sympathy for conservative ideology. In

reality, most adolescents tend to position themselves in the more moderate areas of the ideological spectrum or towards the left. On a scale from 1 to 10, where the latter represents the strongest identification with the political right, 12.7% place themselves between 8 and 10, that is, on the far right or in an ultraright position. The proportion identifying as strongly left-wing (between 1 and 3) is higher, at 19.5%, while 23% place themselves at the very centre of the ideological distribution. Consequently, the mean score on this scale lies very close to 5 across all groups considered.

Another interesting point of debate concerns the possible existence of a gender gap in ideological positioning, reflected in a more conservative orientation among boys. The data do not strongly support this impression, however, as the difference is very small: 13.6% of boys identify as ‘very right-wing’, compared with 11.7% of girls.<sup>2</sup> The difference is somewhat more pronounced by age. While 12.6% of those aged 15–17 place themselves in very right-wing positions, the figure rises to 17.4% among older adolescents (18–19 years). Figure 1 shows how the proportion of adolescents who place themselves at the extreme right and extreme left of this ideological self-placement scale varies with age. The results reveal a clear upward trend, albeit with some fluctuation, in identification with ultraconservative positions. Nevertheless, this group continues to represent a minority within the adolescent population as a whole. Thus, although 19.3% of 19-year-olds identify as ‘very right-wing’, a considerably larger proportion at the same age – 26.6% – place themselves at the opposite end of the spectrum, identifying as ‘very left-wing’.

**Figure 1**

*Percentage of adolescents identifying as ‘very right-wing’ (score of 8-10) or ‘very left-wing’ (score of 1-3), by age*



What emerges clearly is the highly critical view that people aged 15–19 hold of the functioning of democracy and political parties. Table 1 presents a breakdown of several indicators in this regard by gender and age group, revealing some marked differences. For example, the proportion giving the most negative assessments of democracy (a score of up to 3 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents a very poor evaluation) reaches 31% among boys and 20.6% among girls, representing a substantial gender gap of 10 percentage points. Similarly, this figure stands at 29.7% among those aged 15–17 and does not increase with age. This disenchantment with the democratic system is likely directed more towards its formal political mechanisms than towards democracy as a system of government itself. It is difficult to argue that this critical assessment reflects a desire to transform the political system, given that only 8% of this population consider it not at all important to ‘always vote in elections’, while just 1.3% believe it is not at all important to ‘always obey laws and regulations’. Consequently, the image that best characterises adolescence is probably not one that challenges the political status quo but rather one that is critical of its outcomes. Other indicators included in the table point to a tolerant population that shows strong support for the idea that people should ‘accept and respect those with different opinions’, as well as for respect for and compliance with laws and regulations, although this tendency is once again more pronounced among girls.

**Table 1**

*Indicators of political positioning and political attitudes among Spanish adolescents, by gender and age group*

	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
% assigning high importance* to ‘Always obeying laws and regulations’	78.8	83.1	74.6	76.7	79.9
% assigning high importance to ‘Accepting and respecting people with different opinions’	84.5	84.9	84.2	83.6	85.3
% giving a negative assessment** of the functioning of democracy	26.5	20.6	31	29.7	29.7
Assessment of the functioning of democracy (mean score)	4.7	4.9	4.5	4.7	4.6
% expressing high concern about disagreements between political parties	30.9	31	31.1	21.3	37.2
Political self-placement (mean score on a 1–10 scale, where 1 = left and 10 = right)	5.1	4.9	5.3	5.1	5.1

\* Score  $\geq 7$  on a scale where 1 = not at all important and 10 = very important

\*\* Score  $\leq 3$  on a scale where 1 = very poor and 10 = very good

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

## 4. The Emotional and Romantic Lives of Adolescents in Spain

### 4.1. Romantic relationships: between commitment and an uncertain sexuality

A very different dimension concerns the romantic and relationship status of Spanish adolescents. The reality of adolescents' romantic relationships and sexual behaviours is diverse and displays significant differences with regard to both gender and age.

Contrary to the notion of a population reluctant to form lasting emotional bonds and make commitments, Spanish adolescents continue to broadly subscribe to elements of the so-called 'romantic love' ideal. This is reflected in the fact that just over 48% still believe that there is such a thing as 'the perfect partner' (rising to 51.7% among girls). Although relatively few report being in a personal (rather than virtual) relationship involving 'a shared project and common future' (22.3%), this figure is more than five percentage points higher among girls than among boys (25.6%). It also tends to increase with age as part of adolescents' personal maturation, reaching 30% among 19-year-olds (see Figure 2). In any case, this remains a minority situation within this segment of the population, suggesting a delay in the formation of stable long-term relationships.

**Figure 2**

*Percentage of adolescents reporting a romantic relationship involving a shared project and common future, by age*

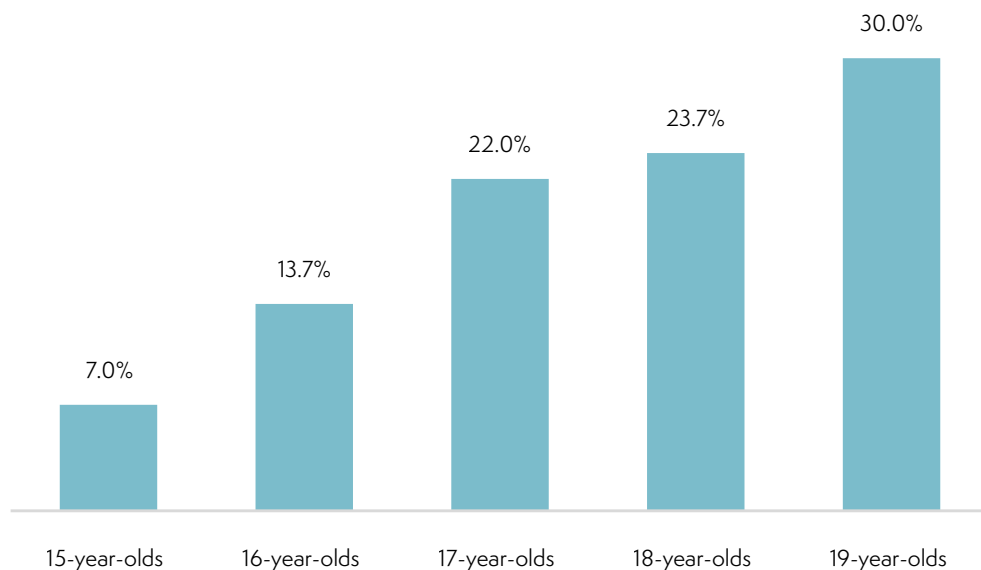


Table 2 presents several indicators relating to romantic beliefs and relationship status among adolescent girls and boys, as well as aspects of their sexuality that have recently attracted considerable media attention, such as access to pornography. We provide information on certain aspects of adolescent sexuality that have become an increasing focus of public concern, including unwanted sexual experiences and access to pornographic content as a potential influence on sexual relationships. In both cases, the evidence calls for careful interpretation.

**Table 2**

*Attitudes towards relationships and sexuality*

	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
% defining themselves as ‘in a relationship involving a shared project and common future’	22.3	25.6	19.2	15.4	26.8
% agreeing that ‘for every person there is someone who is the perfect partner’	48.7	51.7	46	52.2	46.4
% stating that, in their sexual relationships, they have only done things they wanted to do	69.5	65.3	73.2	72.9	68.6
% viewing pornography daily or weekly*	26.7	9.8	42.6	22.9	29.1
% reporting that pornography inspires them ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ in their sexual relationships	8.6	4.1	13	7.1	9.7

\* Sum of: ‘almost every day’ + ‘two to three times a week’ + ‘at least once a week’.

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

On the one hand, it is encouraging that the overwhelming majority of adolescents who responded to these questions (here, the non-response rate was substantial, reaching 39% of the total sample) report having had only desired sexual experiences. This applies to 69.5% of respondents overall, with age introducing no major differences, although the figure is somewhat higher among those aged 15–17. At the same time, it is concerning that girls appear more likely than boys to have experienced unwanted sexual encounters. While 73.2% of boys report never having had such experiences, the figure falls to just 65.3% among girls. This suggests a greater exposure among girls to situations in which they may feel pressured, to a greater or lesser extent, into unwanted sexual practices.<sup>3</sup> This circumstance also appears to become somewhat more common with age, particularly among those aged 18–19.

With regard to access to pornography and its possible influence on adolescent relationships, the picture again requires nuance. The evidence suggests the need for continued attention but does not support the existence of a widespread problem within these age groups. To begin with, the proportion of adolescents who report never viewing pornography is notably high: 46% of the total sample, rising to 53.7% among those aged 15–17. There is, however, a striking difference associated with gender. Only 26.8% of boys report never using pornography,

compared with 66.5% of girls. This is not particularly surprising given the strongly male-oriented nature of this type of content. Table 2 also identifies the groups most likely to consume pornography frequently (daily or weekly): boys (42.6%) and adolescents who have reached the age of majority (29.1%). According to respondents themselves, however, pornography appears to exert only a limited influence on their sexual relationships. Relatively few report using pornography as a frequent model or source of inspiration in their sexual lives, although the gender difference once again emerges. Among boys, 13.1% report drawing substantial inspiration from pornography in their relationships, compared with 4.1% of girls, which is consistent with the previously noted differences in levels of exposure. The figure also rises slightly among the older age group, reaching 9.7%. INJUVE (2024) itself notes that, for the youth population as a whole, this indicator has declined noticeably compared with the previous edition of the survey conducted in 2019.

#### 4.2. Emotional well-being: a complex picture

The well-being and mental health of adolescents have become a frequent source of concern in contemporary society, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. What do the INJUVE survey data tell us about the emotional health of those aged 15–19? Table 3 presents several indicators relating to this issue.

**Table 3**  
*Emotional well-being*

	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
% reporting feeling lonely 'often'	13.0	16.2	10.1	8.1	16.2
% reporting feeling cheerful and in good spirits 'all or most of the time'	59.4	64.2	54.3	65.4	55.4
% reporting that their daily life is full of things that interest them 'all or most of the time'	50.0	46.7	53.1	55.2	46.6

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

The overall picture of this population's emotional well-being cannot, of course, be characterised as wholly negative. A substantial proportion of adolescents report feeling cheerful and in good spirits all or most of the time (more than 59% overall), with this sentiment being more pronounced among girls (64.2%) and among those aged 15–17 (65.4%). Similarly, half of the sample stated that their daily lives were full of interesting things all or most of the time. In this case, however, the proportion was higher among boys (53.1%) than among girls (46.7%), and declined with age, falling to 46.6% among those aged 18–19.

At the same time, 13% of respondents reported feeling lonely often. This proportion increases sharply with age, doubling from 8.1% among those aged 15–17 to 16.2% among those who have reached the age of majority. As previous

research has highlighted, this is a circumstance that affects girls more intensely (16.2%, six percentage points higher than among boys), who generally report poorer emotional well-being (Moreno *et al.*, 2025; Ruiz *et al.*, 2023). It also disproportionately affects adolescents experiencing material and social deprivation (Rodríguez and Berasategi, 2025).

## 5. Main Social Concerns and Civic Affinities

This section examines key indicators that shed light on Spanish adolescents' attitudes towards a range of social and civic concerns, beginning with their positioning on gender inequality before moving on to a broader set of issues.

### 5.1. The feminist question: a contradictory divide

One of the issues attracting the greatest attention in discussions of contemporary adolescence is the apparent decline in support for the feminist movement and for efforts to combat gender inequality. Alongside the shift towards the conservative end of the ideological spectrum discussed above, it is often assumed that support for the goal of equality between men and women is also declining, particularly among boys. We may therefore pose two broad questions: (a) has support for feminism and the struggle against gender inequality declined among adolescents in Spanish society? and (b) does this decline vary according to gender? We seek to answer both questions using the data presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Positioning towards feminism and gender equality*

	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
% strongly identifying* with the feminist movement	47.6	64.9	32	45.5	48.9
% strongly identifying* with the struggle for gender equality	56.4	74.8	38.2	53.5	58.4
% expressing high concern** about inequalities between men and women	63.2	78.9	48.7	59.3	65.7

\* Score  $\geq 7$  on a scale from 1 = not at all to 10 = completely

\*\* Score  $\geq 7$  on a scale from 1 = not concerned to 10 = very concerned

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

With regard to the first question, the proportion of adolescents reporting a strong identification with the feminist movement has indeed declined compared with previous waves of the survey, falling to 47.6%, whereas in 2019 it stood at 64% for the youth population as a whole (INJUVE, 2024). However, it is more difficult to conclude that this lower level of support translates into an equally widespread rejection of the struggle for gender equality. Identification with

this cause rises to 56.4%, while an even greater proportion of those aged 15–19 report being highly concerned about gender inequalities (63.2%), a concern that increases with age. Among this population, therefore, it is feminism itself, as the principal movement mobilising the struggle for gender equality, that appears to command lower levels of support.

In response to the second question, these figures conceal a substantial gender divide. Among girls, strong identification with feminism reaches 64.9%, whereas among boys the proportion identifying strongly with the feminist movement is only half as high, at just 32%. Similarly, girls are more likely than boys to identify with the struggle for gender equality (74.8%) and to express concern about inequalities between men and women (78.9%). This is a clear and substantial divide that undoubtedly warrants more in-depth study and careful analysis. Such analysis must account for what is immediately apparent: the tendency among boys to adopt a position of rejection or, at the very least, disengagement from active support for gender equality. At the same time, it must also address what may prove more difficult to explain: the decline in support for feminism among girls themselves.

## 5.2. A population engaged with social concerns, though not uniformly

Which social issues are of greatest concern to Spanish adolescents? Table 5 presents a broad range of issues<sup>4</sup> and shows the proportion of those aged 15–19 who express a high level of concern about them.

**Table 5**

*Percentage expressing a high level of concern (score  $\geq 7$  on a scale from 1 = not concerned to 10 = very concerned) about social issues, by gender and age group*

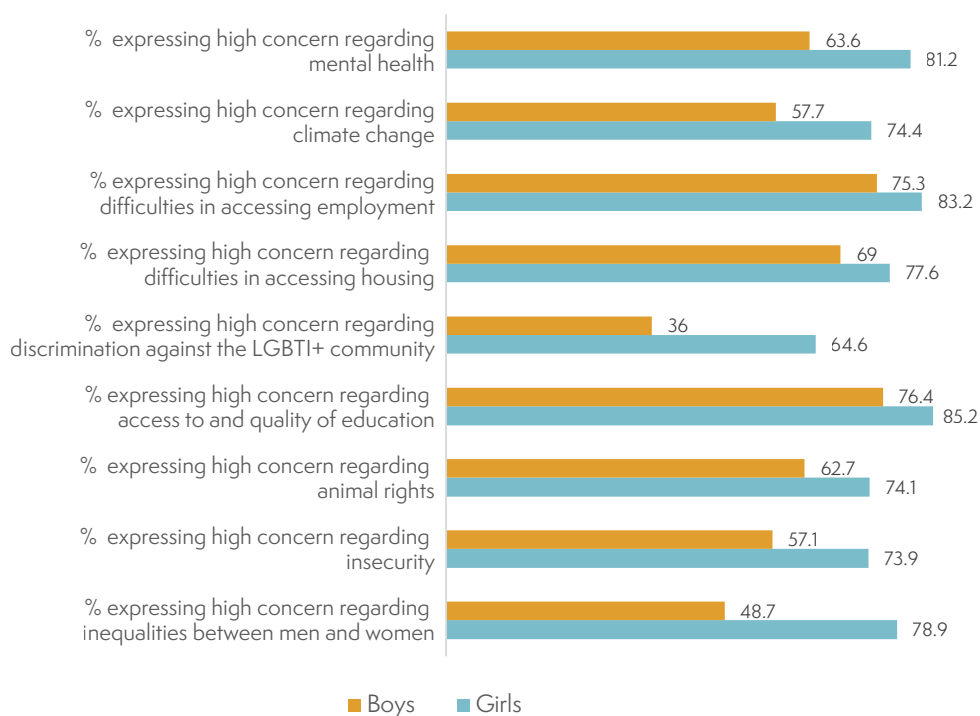
	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
Immigration	48.0	47.9	48.1	42.6	51.5
Disagreements between political parties	30.9	31	31.1	21.3	37.2
The economic situation	78.5	80	77	74	81.5
Insecurity	65.2	73.9	57.1	61.9	67.1
Animal rights	68.2	74.1	62.7	64.8	70.2
Access to and quality of education	80.7	85.2	76.4	77.5	82.6
Discrimination against the LGBTI+ community	49.7	64.6	36	46.5	51.7
Difficulty accessing housing	73.1	77.6	69	68.3	75.5
Difficulty accessing employment	79.1	83.2	75.3	74	82.3
Climate change	65.7	74.4	57.7	62.2	68
Mental health	71.8	81.2	63.6	66.3	75.8

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

With the exception of disagreements between political parties, which, consistent with the low level of interest in formal politics observed among this sample, do not appear to generate widespread concern, all of the issues listed above rank prominently among adolescents' concerns. Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, there are concerns that are broadly shared across the adolescent population, such as immigration and the economic situation. Second, some concerns are clearly shaped by gender and affect girls and boys to different degrees. Girls report substantially higher levels of concern, particularly regarding insecurity, discrimination against the LGBTI+ community, climate change and mental health, as illustrated in Figure 3. Third, some concerns are largely explained by age and tend to become more pronounced after the age of 18, among older adolescents. This is especially true of issues associated with the transition to adulthood, such as the economic situation (81.5%), access to and quality of education (82.6%), and difficulties in accessing housing (75.5%) and employment (82.3%).

**Figure 3**

*Social issues displaying the largest gender differences in the proportion of adolescents expressing a high level of concern*



### 5.3. The logic of civic support: adolescents investing in the future

Contrary to portrayals of adolescence as disengaged from, or indifferent to, the major issues affecting society, the data analysed here suggest a rather different picture. To begin with, adolescents appear to constitute a tolerant population, particularly in relation to civic issues. For example, 74.2% support ‘marriage between people of the same sex’, while 73.3% support the possibility of ‘assisting a terminally ill person to die at their request’. At the same time, adolescents are evenly divided on the issue of the ‘death penalty for people convicted of very serious crimes’, with approximately half expressing support. By contrast, they tend to reject measures such as ‘religious education in schools’ (supported by 26%) and the ‘occupation of vacant dwellings’ (supported by only 18.8%).

Beyond this general picture, girls and boys aged 15–19 also express substantial support, as shown in Table 6, for three measures aimed at addressing societal challenges, with levels of support varying little by gender or age. Specifically, 58.8% support the use of public funds to promote renewable energy, 61.4% support banning the use of plastics in packaging and 69.1% support increasing awareness campaigns on waste separation and recycling. In the latter case, support is particularly high among girls, reaching 72.7%. By contrast, one issue fails to attract broad support within this population: increasing taxes on petroleum products. This proposal receives support from only 20.7% of respondents and is even less popular among older adolescents, among whom support falls to 16.7%, perhaps because they would be more directly affected by such a measure.

**Table 6**

*Civic positioning: support for policy initiatives, by gender and age group*

	Total	Girls	Boys	15–17	18–19
% in favour of increasing taxes on petroleum products	20.7	21.1	20.3	26.8	16.7
% in favour of using public funds to promote renewable energy	58.8	57.3	60.1	57.2	59.8
% in favour of banning the use of plastics in packaging	61.4	64.1	58.7	65.1	59
% in favour of increasing awareness campaigns on waste separation and recycling	69.1	72.7	65.9	71.3	67.6

Source: own research based on data from the 2023 Youth Survey (INJUVE).

## 6. Conclusion

Following our analysis, it is difficult not to conclude that the Spanish adolescent population is sufficiently diverse to make any attempt to characterise it sociologically through a headline or a simple diagnosis highly problematic. On the contrary, as befits a life stage that is itself complex, situated between the end of childhood and entry into an adult world that is increasingly delayed by a range of social circumstances, adolescence requires nuance and multiple analytical perspectives if its reality is to be properly understood.

For example, with regard to the ideological positioning of Spanish adolescents, it has become clear – although this is by no means a novel finding – that there is a marked lack of interest in, and a highly critical view of, the formal mechanisms of the democratic system and some of its principal actors, such as political parties. What is less clear is whether this criticism extends to a questioning of democracy itself. We have also seen that, taken as a whole, this adolescent population is not characterised by a predominantly right-wing ideological orientation, even though support for such positions increases significantly with age. On the contrary, most adolescents place themselves either in the political centre or towards the left. A gender difference does exist, although not necessarily where one might expect to find it. The gap is relatively small when it comes to preferences for right-wing ideological positions among boys, yet it becomes much more pronounced in relation to critical assessments of the functioning of democracy.

The romantic and relationship landscape of Spanish adolescence is equally diverse. Certainly, only a minority report relationships that conform to the traditional model of courtship, involving commitment or a shared life project, although, as might be expected, the importance of such relationships increases with age. Given that belief in the existence of an ideal partner remains widespread among adolescents, we are probably observing a postponement of commitment-based relationships rather than a rejection of them. By contrast, sexual initiation appears to be occurring at increasingly younger ages, exposing part of this population to the possibility of engaging in sexual practices that are neither wanted nor desired, including coercive experiences. Here, too, there is a clear gender dimension, with girls being more affected. This highlights the need to focus attention on an issue that feminism has brought to the forefront of the political agenda during a critical stage of sexual development such as adolescence: consent. We also identified a particularly pronounced gender gap in pornography use, which remains an overwhelmingly male practice. However, if the impressions conveyed by respondents are accurate, pornography may exert less influence on adolescent sexuality than many adults assume.

With regard to emotional well-being, the evidence relating to those aged 15–19 largely confirms what is already known about young people more generally. Although the overall picture is not negative and a large proportion of adolescents report leading lives that are both happy and meaningful, we cannot overlook

the fact that a significant proportion experience loneliness. This loneliness is not always well understood by adults, who tend to portray adolescents as 'hyperconnected'. However, among these groups, loneliness may be less an indication of a lack of relationships or social contacts than a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the quality of those relationships, and it affects girls more strongly.

Finally, it is important to characterise adolescents in terms of their social concerns and civic orientations. The data show that, far from being disengaged from the social problems around them, adolescents constitute a tolerant population that is particularly aware of civic causes linked, for example, to the climate emergency. Likewise, they express a broad range of concerns that become more pronounced around issues likely to shape their opportunities during the transition to adulthood, particularly housing, the economic situation, and access to and quality of education and employment. These concerns intensify among older adolescents as they move closer to the point of emancipation. Other social issues, however, are less widely shared and are of much greater concern to girls, particularly insecurity, discrimination against the LGBTI+ community and, above all, inequality between men and women.

This further gender divide brings us to a final issue that has attracted considerable attention in public debate: the polarisation between girls and boys in relation to support for feminism and the struggle for gender equality. We have indeed identified a very substantial gender gap, with boys being considerably less likely to identify with these causes. However, it would be a mistake to overlook other important nuances. For example, our findings suggest that it is feminism itself, understood as an active political and social movement, that is losing support among adolescents. This decline is not limited to boys; support has also fallen among girls. A similar pattern can be observed with regard to the importance attributed to the struggle for gender equality. Although levels of support remain higher in this case, including among boys, they too appear to have declined relative to previous years. These developments, which point to a potentially concerning future landscape, are almost certainly connected to broader social transformations and reflect the deep political polarisation currently characterising Spanish society, from which adolescents can scarcely remain insulated.

## 7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank INJUVE for granting access to the data from its 2023 Youth Survey (EJ 190) and for making the dataset openly available to the scientific community.

## 8. References

- Casas, F. (2010). Representaciones sociales que influyen en las políticas sociales de infancia y adolescencia en Europa. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria*, (17), 15–28.
- Díez, R. (2025). Los jóvenes en España: ¿se están moviendo a la derecha? Una perspectiva liberal-conservadora. *Revista Española de Sociología*, 34(3), a273. <https://doi.org/10.22325/fes/res.2025.273>
- Duarte, C. (2012). Sociedades adultocéntricas: sobresus orígenes y reproducción. *Última década*, 20(36), 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-22362012000100005>
- INJUVE (2024). *Informe Juventud en España 2024: entre la emergencia y la resiliencia*. INJUVE.
- Jafar, M. F. et al. (2025). Navigating the river of knowledge: two decades of unraveling global trends in adolescent well-being research. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 19(2), 831–845. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i2.21275>
- Moreno, C., Rivera F., Sánchez-Queija, I. et al. (2025). *La adolescencia española analizada desde el Estudio HBSC-2022: estilos de vida, contextos de desarrollo y bienestar emocional. Informe divulgativo de los resultados más significativos obtenidos*. Ministry of Health.
- Oliva, A. (2003). Adolescencia en España a principios del siglo XXI. *Culture and Education*, 15(4), 373–383. <https://doi.org/10.1174/113564003322712947>
- Rodríguez Pascual, I. and Berasategi Sancho, Naiara (2025). *Principales resultados del Proyecto INFAPOST*. <https://infapost.es/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Informe-Proyecto-Infapost-2025.pdf>
- Rodríguez, E., Calderón, D., Kuric, S. and Sanmartín, A. (2021). *Barómetro Juventud y Género 2021. Identidades, representaciones y experiencias en una realidad social compleja*. Madrid: Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud, FAD.
- Ruiz Villafranca, R., Tuñón Jiménez, A., Fresno García, J. M., Del Río Hernández, F. and Sonat, D. (2023). *Estudio sobre Juventud y soledad no deseada en España*. Fundación ONCE–Observatorio Estatal de la Soledad No Deseada.
- Shorey, S., Ng, E. D. and Wong, C. H. J. (2022). Global prevalence of depression and elevated depressive symptoms among adolescents: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61(2), 287–305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12333>
- Tamarit, A., Schoeps, K., Del Rosario, C., Amador Esparza, N. A. and Montoya–Castilla, I. (2021). Estado de salud en adolescentes de España, México y Chile durante la COVID-19: un estudio transcultural. *Acción Psicológica*, 18(1), 107–120. <https://doi.org/10.5944/ap.18.1.29018>
- Ventura, E. R. (2025). Adolescents in various contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic: A commentary. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 35, e13051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.13051>

## Iván Rodríguez Pascual

Senior lecturer in sociology and a member of the Centre for Research in Contemporary Thought and Innovation for Social Development (COIDESO) at the University of Huelva. Since defending his doctoral thesis on the measurement of child well-being and new technological media, he has published extensively on the sociological study of childhood, which constitutes his principal area of research. He currently combines this research activity with his role as Secretary of the first Research Committee on the Sociology of Childhood established in Spain, part of the Spanish Federation of Sociology.

## Notes

1 Full details of the survey, together with the questionnaire used, are available on the INJUVE website: <https://www.injuve.es/observatorio/demografia-e-informacion-general/informe-juventud-en-espana-2024-y-encuesta-de-juventud-2023>

2 This tendency among boys to position themselves further to the right has a long trajectory. As INJUVE itself (2024) notes, it has been consistently identified in its studies since 2004.

3 At least 6% of respondents overall acknowledged that these unwanted sexual experiences occurred 'because I was forced or threatened into engaging in them'. This figure rises to 8.7% among girls, compared with 3.8% among boys.

4 In the interests of keeping the table concise and focusing on less contingent issues, we have not included two additional topics featured in the original questionnaire: 'war' (without specifying any particular conflict) and 'relations between Catalonia and Spain'. In the latter case, moreover, the proportion of adolescents expressing a high level of concern is also relatively low (29.6%).

