Title
Territorial Dimension as Political Strategy: Elite-driven Center-Periphery Cleavage in Spain 1977-2008

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On Friday, June 27th 2008, the Basque Country’s Parliament passed by only one vote a referendum initiative promoted by the Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe—Basque President—to ask the Basque people “if they want to use their right to decide regarding their own future.” This initiative, deemed unconstitutional by the government in Madrid, represents the latest and probably the most serious challenge to the Spanish state’s democratic legitimacy in many years. Ironically, two days later, Spain’s national soccer team won the Europe Cup final for the first time in over forty years, provoking an unprecedented national celebration.

Spain represents one of the most successful modern transitions to democracy in the world and yet it is also one of the clearest examples of political tensions between the peripheral regions and the capital. One could probably say that the territorial issue is the major unsolved problem to an otherwise consolidated democratic system (Uriarte 2002). While the 1978 Constitution created a decentralized ‘State of Autonomies’ dividing the country into what are now 17 Autonomous Communities, the Basque Country and Catalonia are regions with exceptional relevance in the national political system. Ignacio Lago and José Ramón Montero suggest that “[…] no European region (apart from the quite exceptional case of Northern Ireland) surpasses the regional voting levels of the Basque Country or Catalonia, and no European country has as many regions in which sub-national parties are as significant as in Spain” (2007: 18). The two regions have the strongest and most durable ethno-territorial movements in Southern Europe and, along with the Flemish and Scottish, are among the most influential and electorally successful ethnic groups in Europe (Lancaster and Lewis-Beck 1989, Botella 1989, Lancaster 1997, Llamazares and Marks 2006). In fact, the level of autonomy reached by the Comunidades Autónomas is quite considerable (Moreno 1997, Gunther, Montero and Botella 2004), which makes the territorial conflict puzzling.

The persistent challenges to Spain’s territorial model present political scientists with a problem. There is a well-established view that democracy is more effective than other types of regimes at helping to solve ethno-territorial disputes (Gurr 1993). This is particularly the case in countries where democratic institutions are designed to address conflict in plural societies by way of some form of power-sharing arrangements. Consociational theory has spelled out the key characteristics of power-sharing democracies. Arend Lijphart, in his Democracy in Plural Societies (1977), suggests that democracy can address conflict in divided societies through the accommodation of different interests, including of those of ethno-territorial origin. He further develops his views in Democracies (1984) and Patterns of Democracy (1999), creating a well-known two-fold typology of democratic systems: the Westminster (or
“majoritarian”) type suited for homogenous societies and the “Power-Sharing” type (with two subtypes: consensus and “consociational”), better equipped to deal with—more or less—divided societies along linguistic, religious, ethnic, etc. lines. One would only have to look at the composition of a society and then design an institutional system that would incorporate all different groups and interests into a power-sharing structure. Institutional design and engineering can deliver democracy a la carte.

As is the case with other political science typologies, one should not take the types rigidly but rather flexibly in a continuum in which all systems can be included, as well as allowing for difference among each other. In this vein, Lijphart warns us: “[…] consociational democracy does not mean one specific set of rules and institutions. Instead, it means a general type of democracy defined in terms of four broad principles, all of which can be applied in a variety of ways” (2006 [1991]: 67, emphasis added.). The four principles are 1) grand-coalition, 2) segmental autonomy, 3) proportional representation (PR), and 4) minority veto. The Spanish democracy negotiated by political elites, including most regionalist groups, fits well such a power-sharing ideal. If this is so, why is the territorial model in Spain still widely contested and why is the center-periphery cleavage still of key importance in Spanish politics? This is precisely the question this paper aims to answer.

Theories of Regional Differentiation

There are generally two ways to explain the emergence and persistence of ethno-territorial conflict. The first is bottom-up and the second is top-down. The former draws on culturalist theories emphasizing the transition from materialist to postmaterialist value orientations. By the mid-1970s the modernization euphoria of the postwar consensus era had largely dissolved. The stability and the predictable development of modernity faced a period of major politization and the arrival of new social movements challenging the political institutions and actors claiming a new relation between the people and the politics (Bell 1979, Dalton 2002). According to Thomas Poguntke (1987), these new movements questioned an over-dimensional state that had gone too far in intervening in people’s lives in the name of Keynesianism (Hueglin 1989: 211). In this context, primordialist explanations sustain that ethnic identities, once constructed, are highly durable (Geertz 1973, Gellner 1983). Democracy allows the open channeling of ethnic identities through ad hoc political parties that articulate a feeling that was always there and accordingly collect a stable number of votes (Horowitz 1985: 326-27). Among the most widely accepted explanations for sociopolitical change during these years is Ronald Inglehart’s Silent Revolution. According to Ronald Inglehart and others, value change can account for a good part of the resuscitation of ethnic identities and their political mobilization (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Inglehart and Abrahamson 1995, Inglehart and Welzel 2006). In short, new generations born after 1945 in an environment of extraordinary economic and physical security tend to claim a new sociopolitical order based on superior levels of quality of life and self-realization far from traditional values of obedience and discipline. The new postmaterialist values therefore promote a novel form of sociopolitical protest within which ethno-territorial claims are transformed into anti-centralism according to a process of generalized challenge to traditional authority structures that are outdated as well as inefficient.

A second explanation for why ethnic conflict has resurged in modern societies has to do
with political elites and their capacity to set the political agenda. According to Huelin (1989: 211), we can distinguish two phases in the creation of modern regionalism. The first one, during the 1960s, was the byproduct of unprecedented economic development and it is in this context that postmaterialist values find soil from which to blossom. It is then that the modernization of peripheral regions generated new aspirations and ambitions within the regions. Democracy—through institutional design—had created the term “decentralization”, quite in vogue during the 1960s and 1970s, to produce economic and administrative efficiency and to be closer to a citizen to whom the central government was ultimately accountable for. At that time, constructivist explanations postulated that ethnic identities were easily changeable and highly malleable by political elites (Brubaker 2004, Fearon and Laitin 2002). And that support for ethno-territorial parties, far from being stable, varies according to strategies of mobilization of different regional elites, some more successful than others. Sandra León spelled out the importance of elite strategy in a system of decentralization: “Politicians base their decisions, their choices, on their goals and the incentives that stem from the institutional structure where decisions are taken … Decentralization is therefore the result of a political process in which the strategic behavior of national and sub-national elites plays a crucial role” (León 2006: 11-12). The second phase, during the 1970s, is marked by the economic crisis that forced the new political and administrative regional elite to struggle to retain the material acquisitions obtained during the prior phase. At that point it became clear that the promises of modernization would remain unfulfilled. The created expectations “became first frustrated by the continued experience of deprivation and disparity (despite growing prosperity and regional development programs) and later by the experience of economic crisis and the reduction of such programs” (Hueglin 1989: 212). Regional elites had acquired expertise and affluence had raised power aspirations. Regionalism is therefore a question of identity, as much as of the economic power that elites will not give up. In the short-term, they will try to accommodate through moderate discourse in order to push forward their long-term purpose. As rightly put by Sonia Alonso, “ethnic identities are malleable and nationalist parties make this malleability a centre piece of their political and electoral strategies. Indeed they have moved historically from “ethnicity by birth” to “ethnicity by choice” as a strategic move away from the straitjacket of socio-demographic constraints in those regions where ethnic demography was not an asset but an obstacle” (2005: 4). According to Eric Nordlinger (1972), in some cases, elites will even endanger the political system by producing secession that will reward the elites that promote it with eventual national power.

In sum, there are two explanations for ethno-territorial resurgence and continuation in advanced industrial democracies. The first is closely related to attitudinal and value changes. It implies that the revival of center-periphery tensions comes from the bottom-up, from the people to the political system. The second explanation blames political elites for the revival and maintenance of never-ending ethno-territorial demands. It assumes that regional elites stir up local/regional identities in order to obtain, preserve or increase their share of the lucrative power given away by the central State in the process of political and administrative decentralization. In this sense, the regional elites are responsible, through their political parties, of creating a political climate of confrontation from which they would ultimately benefit. In the following pages, I consider the question of whether territorial contestation in Spain originates from public pressure or from elite action. First, I analyze survey evidence to observe citizens’ attitudes and subjective feelings towards the territorial model as well as the evolution of regional and national identities. Second, I look at voting patterns and regional parties to determine the degree of success of such
parties. Last, I examine the electoral manifestos with which Catalan and Basque parties compete in national elections between 1977 and 2008. Through content analysis of these documents I obtain crucial information about the evolution of the weight devoted by each Catalan and Basque party to the territorial dimension. Since party manifestos are designed by party elites, they should give us a good idea about how much significance each party assigns to center-periphery issues. My hypothesis is that the territorial model in Spain is still widely contested not so much because the Catalan and Basque publics demand it, but rather due to the action of regional political elites fervently pushing the center-periphery dimension into the political agenda.  

The Bottom: Citizens’ Attitudes and Identities

Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 show survey data regarding the satisfaction of Basque and Catalan citizens with the functioning of the territorial model. The evidence is solid. In Figure 1, the number of Basques who say that the territorial model has worked well or very well in December 2005 has reached 52.1 percent of the region’s public; in fact, since May 2001 there has been a net increase of more than 15 percent. The percentage of people who were previously hesitant has decreased (39.5 in 1996 to 34.3 in 2005) and the number of unsatisfied Basques remains around 10 percent, quite constant since the turn of the century.

Figure 1. “And, so far, how would you say the organization of the state in autonomous communities has worked?” Basque Country

Figure 2 reinforces the idea that something is changing at the mass level. Since November 1996 to December 2005—our last available CIS data—the number of Basques who think that the territorial model has had a rather positive effect on Spain has gone up almost 15 points (20 points—55.7 to 73.8—from 1998) while the number who believe that it has had a rather negative effect has gone down from 11.8 to a somewhat inconsequential 9 percent.
In Cataluña the evidence is equally striking. Figure 3 shows that from November 1996 to December 2005 the percentage of Catalans who think that the territorial model has worked well or very well has increased by almost 15 percent—20 points (39.8 to 59.5) from 1998—while the number who were not satisfied went down from 8.2 to 7.8 percent. Figure 4 also confirms the trend: 77.4 percent of Catalans think the model has had a rather positive effect on Spain in 2005; a net increase of almost five points since 1996. Conversely, the Catalans who think it has had negative effect were 11.4 in December of 2005 (13.7 in 1996).
Moreover, identity is the traditional indicator of national integration in most studies (Pallarès, Montero and Llera 1997). The existence of groups who reject any identification with the nation-state denotes a challenge, depending on the number and on its evolution, to its legitimacy. However, the study of identity presents some problems. Juan Díez Medrano and Paula Gutiérrez, in an effort to throw some light on the question, use an interesting operational category that they label “nested identities.” These “are lower—and higher—order identities such that the latter encompass the former. My identity in city ‘a’, is nested in my identity as resident of region ‘A’—which includes city ‘a’—which is in turn nested in my identity as a resident of country ‘Alpha’, and so on” (2001: 757). In the same study, they criticize the narrowness of an exclusive hierarchy of identities: “the literature has tended to treat identities as incompatible, as a matter of choice…. This assumption is discernible, for instance, in Inglehart’s opposition between regional identities, which are taken to symbolize parochialism, and national and European identities, which are taken to symbolize cosmopolitanism” (2001: 757). In Spain, Juan Díez Nicolás has also proven that the majority of Basque and Catalan residents define themselves as both Basque/Catalans and Spaniards (1999). The degree of their identification may vary, but most individuals have shown themselves able to juggle different nested identities; such is their common surprise when they are asked as part of a survey to make a choice between a set of nested identities (Díez Medrano and Gutiérrez 2001: 758). Based on this evidence, I have constructed a nested ID proxy in which I have added respondents who declare that they are “more Spanish than Basque/Catalan”, “as much Spanish as Basque/Catalan”, and “more Basque/Catalan than Spanish”. Figures 5 and 6 offer the results.\(^{11}\)

In the Basque Country (Fig. 5) the nested ID line has a turning point around September 2002 and maintains an ascendant trajectory, despite a slight decrease at the end of 2005. The most important factor revealed by the data is that the amount of nested ID respondents goes up to 68 percent of Basques in 2007 versus a 55 percent in 2002. It is around this time that the CIS measures some changes in other attitudes; a net increase of 13 points in only five years. It is true that an important part of that 2007 respondents consider themselves “more Basque than Spanish” (27,7), but that by no means should be interpreted as a rejection of Spain. Instead, w
may deduce that they nest their regional identity within the national one. Otherwise, logically, they would have responded that they are only Basque. The same could be said about the other two categories. The only groups that explicitly reject one identity are the respondents who accept their Spanish or Basque identity exclusively; 5.3 and 20.8 respectively in 2007. The former—“exclusively Spanish”—has shown a consistent decline since 1992, reduced now to almost half of what it was then (9 percent). The latter—“exclusively Basque”—is at its lowest point since 1996 (20) and has shrunk over 8 points since 1990, its highest level since the arrival of democracy (29 percent). These may be the 20 percent of the Basques who form the disciplined core vote for radical pro-independence parties within the region (Pallarés, Montero and Llera 1997).

We may therefore assume that the number of Basques admitting nested identities is also steadily increasing, leading us to wonder once again why Basque regional parties keep insisting on the center-periphery cleavage through their political manifestos. This is especially perplexing in a context of economic prosperity when such parties could be instrumentalising the socio-economic cleavage to gain votes (see Alonso above).

Figure 6 displays the results for Catalonia; the panorama is quite convincing. The number of respondents accepting nested ID in 2007 is at its highest since October 1991 (75 and 78 percent respectively). Three of every four Catalans nest their identity—regional or national—within the other. In other words, it is a remarkable number that has not ceased to grow since 2001. Again, the number of exclusivists—whether Catalan or Spanish—is waning. The “exclusively Spanish” respondents have in 2007 almost halved since March 2001 (14.1 to 7.7 percent respectively). And the “exclusively Catalans” have decreased in number since 2002 (16.2 to 14 percent, respectively).
Thus public attitudes towards the existing territorial model are steadily improving. Similarly, data on identity also seems to contradict the wisdom that political tension over the territorial model derives from society. More and more people in these regions are satisfied with the development of the *Estado de las Autonomías* (between 50 and 60 percent satisfied or very satisfied in 2005), more and more of them claim that the territorial model has had a “rather positive” effect on Spain (almost 80 percent in both regions in 2005), and more and more see their regional identities nested in the national one (and vice versa). The trend is difficult to ignore.

**Voting Patterns: Catalan and Basque Parties (1977-2008)**

The complexity of the different *electoral Spains* is remarkable (Ocaña and Oñate 2000). Parties compete at four levels: national, regional, local and European. In the pages below, only the national and the regional levels will be treated. The level of support for regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country remained relatively stable throughout the first twenty years of democracy. With the turn of the century we can observe some alterations. Figure 7 shows that the year 2000 marked a turning point in voting trends for regional parties in General Elections. From that year all regional parties—except ERC in 2004 but heavily freefalling in 2008—have lost votes in general elections. In the cases of CiU and EA the downtrend is already perceivable in the early 1990s. In fact, CiU has almost halved its share of national vote since 1986.
This is also visible when we break down the nation-wide vote in general elections by regions. Figure 7.1 shows that the PNV drop is more evident from 2004—instead of 2000 as shown in Figure 7—for the effect of the increase of the Spanish census. CiU loses votes steadily in Catalonia in general elections beginning in 1989. The same can be said for EA in the Basque Country. The national trend is reflected also at the regional level.

Oftentimes, when parties are loosing votes some other(s) are receiving them. Figure 7.2 shows the evolution in the regional vote share in general elections of the two dominant nation-wide parties: Socialist PSOE and conservative PP. It is clear that both parties have been losing electoral terrain to the regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country since the first elections in 1977. However, there is one party—the PSOE—that seems to particularly profit from voter volatility in both regions.13
In Catalonia, in 1977, PSOE and PP received little over 32 percent of the vote, in 1993 almost 52 percent, and in 2008 around 62 percent. In thirty years, the nation-wide parties have nearly doubled their joint vote share in Catalonia and have come to threaten the once indisputable hegemony of regionalist parties. Though there is a clear champion between the two nation-wide parties in the 2008 general election; the PSC in Catalonia received over 45 percent of the regional vote, far more than double the amount of CiU (20.93) and almost triple the PP (16.4). In the Basque Country, a rather similar pattern emerges: both nation-wide parties polled over 33 percent in 1977, then 39.2 in 1993, and 56.7 percent in 2008. Again, a clear frontrunner, the PSOE, has in 2008 obtained its regional record share in general elections: 38.14 percent. Or, what is the same, more than 11 percent more than the PNV and nearly 20 percent more than the PP. This evidence is indisputable.

Nevertheless, as a rule of thumb, nation-wide parties tend to do better in general elections and regional parties improve those results in regional elections (Pérez-Nievas and Bonet 2008). For instance, we know that parties have different institutional incentives depending on the election level (Lago and Montero 2007). We also know that voters in Cataluña vote differently depending of the arena of competition (Riba 2000, Pérez-Nievas and Fraile 2000). However, the wisdom that voters normally behave differently in national versus regional elections—usually generating lower turnout—should not deviate our attention from testing whether or not the most relevant Catalan and Basque regional parties have been consistently losing ground to national parties at the regional level as well. As a matter of fact, regional elections in Spain generally follow the national pattern” (Pallarés and Keatin 2003: 239). To verify this, we can look at voting patterns in regional elections. Figure 8 illustrates the evolution of the vote to Catalan and Basque parties in all regional elections celebrated until today.
Once again, the trend is clear. The main party in Catalonia (CiU) has persistently lost votes since 1992 from levels of almost 50 percent to slightly over 30 percent in 2006 (31,5). In the Basque Country, if we cancel out the influence of its electoral coalition with EA—since 1998—the PNV would actually be losing votes. The party received almost the same percentage in 2005 as in 1980 (38,1 and 38,5 respectively), after adding the roughly ten percent that EA regularly collects. ERC in Catalonia is the only party that has gained votes, but has shown signs of decay in the last 2006 regional election. This is also evident in the 2004 general elections (see figure 7 above).

Then again, one can argue that politically the most crucial information is given by the number of parliamentary seats and not so much by the percentage of votes, especially considering the well-known disproportionality of the Spanish electoral law. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 show the effects of the regional formulas translating votes into seats. We can see that, although trends continue, they are somewhat more subtle. This fact reinforces the idea that relevant regionalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country benefit from the effects of the electoral systems at the regional level, especially due to the overrepresentation of the rural areas where they are stronger (Llera 1998, Lago and Montero 2004).

By regions, the complexity of the Catalan party system has challenged formal theories of coalition formation (Matas Dalmases and Reniu Vilamala 2003: 109). In addition, Catalonia is the only region with no electoral law of its own; hence uses the Spanish one. Moreover, since 1995 some changes in the sub-national party system—as well as in the national one—can be discerned. In that year, CiU’s leader Jordi Pujol lost the 1980-1995 absolute majority vote in Catalonia, there was a 9 percent turnout increase from 1992, and some remarkable party system movements took place.
As shown by Figures 8 and 8.1, in 1995 the Partido Popular (PP) received most of the new vote (from 7 to 17 seats) and ERC obtained 13 seats up from 11 in 1992. CiU and the PSC both lost 10 and 6 seats, respectively, in 1995. The equilibrium was somehow changing. Votes traveled cross-bloc. Again, Riba writes: “[i]t seems reasonable to suppose that a large part of the new vote [in 1995] went to national parties, PSC, PP and IC” (2000: 25). Further, the 1999 regional election produced some significant changes in the party politics of the region. For the first time CiU was not the most voted political list. The leftist electoral alliance Ciutadans per Canvi (CC) led by the PSC was the winner of the popular vote (37.8 percent, total +13, mainly in the metropolitan area of Barcelona) but fell only one seat short from CiU (37.7 percent, total -3.2), which could again form government, the last of the Pujol era. In 1999 all parties except for the CC socialist alliance lost votes and seats. In this changing scenario, CiU lost in 2003, for the first time since the arrival of democracy, the Generalitat—Catalan Government—to a red-green tripartite of PSOE, ERC and Iniciativa per Cataluña-Verds (IC-V). However, both PSC and CiU lost almost exactly the same percentage of vote share (6.7 and 6.8 percent, respectively) and just the same number of seats (10). Net winners were ERC (+7.8 percent +11 seats), the ecosocialist IC-V (+4.2 percent +6 seats), and the conservative nation-wide PP (+2.3 percent +3 seats). Turnout increased almost 3 points (from 59.2 to 62.5). In 2003, it seems that the two larger parties in Catalonia failed to read the citizen’s demands and were punished accordingly.

Finally, in 2006, one fact gives us an idea of the relative failure of political parties, especially those established by regions with the goal of channeling voters’ demands. Turnout was 56.7 percent, the lowest since the record-breaking 1992 regional election (54.9). According to Lago, Montero and Torcal, the high number of abstention and of null votes as well as the breakthrough of a new political party (Ciudatants per Catalunya) “are all symptoms of both an increasing level of political discontent and a lack of political integration due to a divergence between issues salient to Catalans and the dominant focus of party platforms and agendas” (2007: 221). In other words, parties—national and regional—did not succeed in reading voter’s preferences. Ignacio Urquizu-Sancho suggests that Catalan political parties—especially the ones
in the tripartite (PSC-ERC-ICV) governing the Generalitat—were not in people’s best interest during the regional term preceding the 2006 election (2007: 4-5). The term had been dominated by the debate and approval of the new Statute of Autonomy and by bringing more self-government to Catalonia. However, surveys performed by the IDESCAT (Catalan Institute of Statistics) reveal that the mean percentage of citizens prioritizing those issues in Catalonia during the term was only 8.58 percent while the relationship between Catalonia and Spain was a major concern for an average of 4.76 percent of the region’s population.\(^{21}\) Hence it appears clear a certain disconnect between what worried citizens and what party elites wanted to push to the center of the political agenda.

In the Basque Country, a more severe pattern can be found. The Regional Election of 2001—listed as seventh in Figure 8—appeared as a clear triumph for the regionalist forces (electoral coalition PNV-EA). The one held in 2005—eighth—clearly constitutes a painful defeat to those same forces. The main issues during the 2005 election were: the relationship with the new socialist government in Madrid, the decrease of ETA terrorism, the 2002 Law of Parties that prevented radical ETA-affiliated parties to contest the election, and finally the so-called Plan Ibarretxe, which essentially proposed a reform of the Statute of Autonomy as a peace process plan in which the Basque Country would become a “free associated State” to Spain based on the nature of the Basque nation.\(^{22}\) The arrival of the Zapatero government did not resolve the existing disputes such as the payment of the Basque financial quota and the aforementioned Plan Ibarretxe. Nevertheless, the dialogue was restored and issues such as the reform of the Basque Estatuto de Autonomía returned to the negotiation table. On the terrorist front, ETA had been weakened by the action of the Spanish police and its collaboration with French forces. Terrorism nonetheless continued to be at the center of Basque politics. This was illustrated by the various, mostly unsuccessful, political and legal attempts to allow ETA’s political wings to participate in electoral processes (Pallarés 2006: 3-4). Finally, the so-called Plan Ibarretxe created significant controversy after its ratification by an absolute majority in the Basque Parliament on December 31, 2004. The PNV and its partner EA put forward the 2005 regional election as an endorsement of the Plan and accordingly requested the citizen’s support. Francesc Pallarés summarizes the motto of the election as “consultation or consensus?” (2006: 12). If PNV/EA got good results, then the Plan would be the main dispute of the next term; otherwise, a larger consensus would have to arise. The radicalization of the territorial issue was to a certain extent unnecessary since the political climate had considerably improved and the campaign was smoother than expected. But Ibarretxe had bet a lot on his proposal. Carmelo Moreno del Río analyzes the content of the PNV/EA 2005 campaign discourses pointing towards its belligerent strategy: PNV/EA seeks to consolidate its hegemony through two action logics: the logic of difference—against Socialist (PSE) and Conservatives (PP)—and the logic of equivalence—clearly intended to attract the vote of radical voters unable to appropriately cast their vote due to legal constraints to their parties (2005: 22-23). Risk was a conscious political strategy.
The results of the Basque 2005 regional election speak for themselves: PNV/EA (38.3 percent) won the election but lost four percent of the popular vote (-140,000 votes, which translates to four seats in the Basque Chamber). The PSE—the PSOE branch in the region—witnessed a remarkable increase, having overtaken the PP, it is now the second most powerful political force in the Vitoria Parliament with 22.4 percent of the vote and five more seats (+20,000 votes). The PP (17.3 percent) lost four seats and had been relegated to a more powerless political position (-120,000 votes). Moreover, the more or less radical parties polled together around 15 percent (PCTV 12.5 & Aralar 2.3), which is slightly below the average percentage of votes by pro-independence parties. This may be partly explained by the increase in the abstentions of around ten percent (32 percent in 2005), reflecting the demobilization of part of the electorate due to legal constraints as well as lower political polarization compared with 2001. 23 2005 left a political scenario of continuity but towards change. According to Francesc Pallarés, this change was in the direction of a more open structure of competition (2006: 19). Analysis of electoral results confirms that regional parties are losing terrain to national parties competing in national and, more importantly, in regional elections.

Party Manifestos and Center-Periphery Dimension

Finally, let’s look at party data from the Manifesto Research Group (MRG), a research unit within the framework of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), of which the author is producing the Spanish data. 24 The MRG puts together content analyses of party manifestos across Europe dividing these documents into 56 specific variables and then calculating the percentages of the total manifesto devoted to each issue. The data measures the salience of different issues, making it possible to infer trends across parties, countries and time. 25 Content analysis of party programs undoubtedly provides interesting possibilities to
analyze party as well as elite behavior, although it is not free from critiques.26 Party Manifestos are constructed and launched slightly before every election and offer the official party position regarding the significance of different issues at play reflecting any hypothetical alteration in party position and objectives over time (Volkens 2002). Indeed, according to the theory of prospective voting, party manifestos are the link between political parties and voters (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999). In Spain, a survey by the **Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas** (CIS) from January 2005 showed that the electoral program was among the three most relevant factors that voters take into account when deciding their vote.27 In the same survey, 50.8 per cent of the Spaniards interviewed held that “party programs should be implemented integrally and always”.28

However, some may think that most citizens—or even party members—never read party manifestos. And this is probably true, but one should not forget that it is based to these documents that the mass media trace and air information about parties. Indeed, electoral manifestos enhance political competition, offering different choices for representation. The logic of retrospective voting tells us that voters endorse or punish performance according to the governmental program (Fearon 1999). In fact, behind the study of party manifestos rest many questions concerning the functioning of modern representative democracy. In Budge’s words:

“The kind of questions that can be put to this type of evidence [party manifestos] are practically unlimited, answering points that have been the concern of party analysts and government specialists [...] for many years. Is there a decline of the Left or of the Right? Is it the end of ideology? How have issues changed over the post-war period? How close are members of ideological party families across national boundaries? [...] Are parties getting closer and more consensual or more conflictual and further apart? [...] How do parties relate to each other within coalitions? How do they form coalitions in the first place? How well do they reflect or respond to public opinion?” (Budge et al. 2001: 1-2).

Nevertheless, MRG data is typically used to measure party movements on an ideological scale (Budge 1994, Klingemann 1995, Klingemann et al. 2006). It has never been systematically used to assess the salience of the territorial dimension in Spain.29 This paper presents some novel findings regarding the center-periphery salience in the political manifestos of relevant Catalan and Basque parties.

As for methodology, the main problem was to isolate the variables that measure the territorial dimension in the manifestos among the 56 that the MRG employs. For that, I conducted a principal components analysis using principle axis factoring with the following eight variables: 1) Decentralization, 2) Governmental and Administrative Efficiency, 3) Technology and Infrastructure, 4) European Community: positive, 5) Internationalism: positive, 6) Non-economic Demographic Groups, 7) Multiculturalism: positive, and 8) National Way of Life: negative. Table 1 shows the varimax rotated factor pattern—only with scores exceeding .50.
Table 1. Varimax Rotated Factor Pattern from Principal Components Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Center-Periphery</th>
<th>Int. Relations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism: positive</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National way of life: negative</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Technology &amp; infrastructure</td>
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<td>Governmental and administrative efficiency</td>
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<td>European Community: positive</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalization: positive</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
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Percent of observed variable variance  
35.94%  24.33%

Source: Own calculations from MRG Data.

The two factors “center-periphery” and “international relations” accounted for 60.27% of the observed variable variance. Factor 1 is labeled “center-periphery,” and factor 2, “international relations.” These two labels are reflective of the pattern of factor loadings of the observed variables on the factors. In particular, Factor 1 (center-periphery) indicates that those political parties that emphasize in their manifestos “Decentralization”, “Multiculturalism”, and “National Way of Life”, simultaneously de-emphasize “Technology and Infrastructure” as well as “Governmental and Administrative Efficiency”. Factor 2 (international relations) is even easier to interpret: those political parties that score highly are more likely in their manifestos to write positively about the European Community and Internationalization.

Another series of analyses using the eight observed variables and two factors sought to address three questions: (1) time effect: across time and elections, what is the general trend (i.e., is there a continuous growth of interest in these issues by the political parties?); (2) party effect: in general, are there significant differences between national and regional parties in the degree to which they emphasize these issues; and (3) time X party interaction effect: across time and elections, do the national and regional parties tend to both emphasize these issues, or during some elections periods, do national parties tend to emphasize some issues and regional parties other issues. In order to answer these questions, mixed modeling was used. Mixed modeling, instead of traditional repeated measures analysis of variance, was used primarily for two reasons: (1) the time period between elections was irregular, and (2) most parties did not participate in all elections, thus producing a significant amount of missing data. Table 2 presents these results.

Examining Table 2, a few conclusions can be reached concerning the trend of the variables:

1) Using “center-periphery” as a variable, the median score devoted by regional parties is remarkably higher and positive (.46) than the national parties’ median score (-.73).
2) The five variables used to determine the center-periphery dimension in Figure 10 seem quite robust at measuring what they are supposed to measure: the three variables with positive statistical relation in Table 1 (“Decentralization”, “Multiculturalism: positive”, and “National Way of Life: negative”) show a higher median score for regional than national parties and the two statistically significant but negative (“Governmental and Administrative Efficiency” and “Technology and Infrastructure”) are slightly below the nation-wide parties’ median.

3) Five of the ten variables showed significant change across time.

4) With the exception of “Non-economic Demographic Groups,” change was nonlinear, implying that at some elections, some issues were emphasized, but at others, those same issues were de-emphasized—only to be re-emphasized once again at later elections. That territorial cleavages compete with other lines of conflict is nothing new in political science (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). For the Spanish case, Torcal and Chhibber (1995) have shown that class returns to Spanish politics with renewed energy in the early 1990s.

In order to examine the relationship between the center-periphery and class conflict over time, a class conflict factor was constructed from the first principal component among the three complex variables contained in the Manifesto Research Group data: Planeco, Welfare, and Rile. The time series of the two factors, “center-periphery” and “class conflict,” were then correlated between the years 1977–2008 using state space modeling. The correlation between the two time series was -.73. Figure 9 shows these two time series. It shows evidence that there is an overall negative relationship between these two factors, illustrating the competing nature of cleavages; however, in two election periods—March 2000 and 2008—there is a convergence of the two factors pointing at the elections in which the two dimensions are equally important—or equally inconsequential—at shaping voting preferences. This trend is congruent with the findings of Fernández Albertos (2002) who demonstrated that the ethnic cleavage increasingly represented the basis for voter’s choice since 1979 in the Basque Country. During the first half
of the 1990s, the ideological cleavage gained salience. However, due to the PNV’s strategic, instrumental use of incumbency, the ethnic dimension returned towards the end of the decade to be the most important determinant of voter choice. This finding parallels the increase in the center-periphery salience detected by Figure 10 below.

In terms of national/regional party differences (the party effect in Table 2), one variable—“Decentralization”—showed an overwhelming effect, with regional parties emphasizing this issue far more than national parties. Therefore, one can assume that the significant difference between the national and regional parties concerning the center-periphery factor is largely due to the presence of “Decentralization” as one of its constituent variables. Only one variable, “Governmental and Administrative Efficiency”, showed a significant time by party interaction effect. This means that although, on average, the national and regional parties did not differ in emphasizing this issue across elections, there were some specific elections in which this issue was more emphasized by national parties more than by regional parties.

![Figure 10. Center-Periphery Dimension in the manifestos of Catalan and Basque Parties 1977-2008](image)

*Source: Own calculations based on PNV Data*
Table 2. *Mixed Modeling Results of National/Regional Party Differences in Issue Emphasis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>F-value for Effect</th>
<th>Party Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Nat/Reg. Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-Periphery</td>
<td>3.64***</td>
<td>7.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>5.01***</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>27.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental/administrative efficiency</td>
<td>3.19**</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and infrastructure</td>
<td>4.47***</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Community: positive</td>
<td>4.22***</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalization: positive</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-economic demographic groups</td>
<td>2.44*</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism: positive</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National way of life: negative</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 1 = significant linear trend; 2 = significant quadratic trend; 3 = significant cubic trend; 4 = significant quartic trend.

*p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Figure 10 shows the evolution of the center-periphery dimension in the electoral manifestos of the most relevant regional parties in Cataluña and the Basque Country. The lines reflect the sum of the percentages devoted by parties to each of the variables with statistically significant score as revealed by the factor analysis. A few impressions catch the eye immediately: to begin with, all parties—except for Eusko Alkartasuna (EA)—assign a higher percentage of their manifestos to center-periphery issues today than they did when they started their political life. The trend is of general increase, extraordinary in the Esquerra Republicana de Cataluña (ERC), and more moderate in Convergencia i Unió (CiU) and Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV), parties that were already at high levels already during the transition. Moreover, all parties—except for Eusko Alkartasuna (EA)—devote more than 35 percent of their manifestos in the 2008 General Elections to only this dimension; in other words, one in every three statements in their programs deals with territorial demands in 2008. This is remarkable exactly 30 years after the drawing of the 1978 Constitution. Though the most striking fact is not the quantity of the increase, but instead the fact that well into the democratic consolidation Catalan and Basque parties still reserve an extraordinary portion of their manifestos for the territorial dimension—between half and one third of the total. Why? Sonia Alonso, in a revealing paper, provides an explanation for this. She writes:

“[C]lass-based parties are more severely punished than ethno-nationalist parties when they fail in the pursuit of the citizens’ interests. So voters use different criteria for judging class and ethnic parties […] Ethnic parties tend to be judged by their furtherance of the ethno-nationalist programme of national independence and ethnic homogeneity. Class-based parties tend to be judged according to the economic benefits they produce and the protection of the material interests of particular social strata. Economic interests are more prone to failures, mistakes and criticisms than any other set of interests if only because of the facility to observe them in the everyday lives of citizens. Cultural and ethnic interests, on the other hand, are less tangible and have a less direct impact on the everyday well-being of citizens (2005: 24)”.

According to this, ethno-territorial parties should concentrate on devoting large amounts of their political manifestos to the center-periphery cleavage and leave socio-economic issues to larger national parties. Especially, Alonso continues, when ethnic parties compete in proportional representation (PR) systems and are members of a governmental coalition, which is oftentimes the case in both regions (2005: 25). The reasons for this in the literature usually point to the fact that it is more difficult for voters to assign responsibility because coalition governments obscure accountability (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin 1999). But the question would therefore be: should ethno-territorial parties continue to emphasize the center-periphery cleavage in their manifestos even when suffering electoral loses? And do ethnic parties enjoy the same relative advantage in a context of economic prosperity when voters may reward class-based national parties for good management?

A third observation: during the 1990s the territorial dimension remained stable for most parties, which fits well with Figure 9 and with Torcal and Chhibber (1995) study pointing towards an overlapping of cleavages and a return of class as a major determinant of electoral preference for Spanish voters. The 1990s was marked by minority governments in Madrid requiring the support of regional parties—especially CiU in Catalonia and PNV in the Basque Country. Consensus seemed stable and the process of devolution was essentially working well fueled by institutional incentives (León 2006). The regional parties exercised their blackmailing
power to push their political agendas in Madrid. Then again, this harmony was broken in the year 2000 by the absolute majority achieved by the Partido Popular (PP) under the leadership of José María Aznar. The government in Madrid no longer needed the support of the regional parties and hence the 1996-2000 term agreements were not renewed. The PP governed alone and unilaterally broke up the cooperation with CiU and PNV, launching an anti-regionalist crusade, identifying ETA terrorism with Basque nationalism (Santamaría 2007: 40).

Figure 10 also shows the remarkable increase of the percentage of the manifesto committed to the territorial dimension in the 2004 election. With the exception for EA (-4 percent), all other regional parties notably boosted the center-periphery salience in that year: CiU, ERC and PNV all increased around six points their attention to territorial issues. Most regional parties reacted to the 2000-04 political vicissitudes. Much has been written about the exceptionality of the 2004 election (Barreiro 2004, Colomer 2005, Michavila 2005), although most studies have proven that, “despite the peculiarities of the 2004 election, analysis of the resulting party systems compels us to conclude that there was not so much electoral change” (Ocaña y Oñate 2007: 245; see also Montero, Lago and Torcal 2007). Yet one of the 2004 changes that has not been detected by most studies is revealed by the MRG data presented here: regional parties boosted the territorial dimension in the 2004, manifestos reacting to a political term marked by quasi-authoritarian forms in a good economic context (Fraile 2007).

Lastly, without a doubt, Figure 1 singles out an interesting fact that further research must elaborate in detail: the center-periphery cleavage is activated/deactivated as much from the regions as from Madrid. Not only who occupies La Moncloa, but also how regional issues are treated by national political elites undeniably counts. Interestingly, Luís de la Calle (2005) uses spatial voting models to conclude that regionalist parties—nationalists—mold their separatist discourse depending on which party occupies the central government. This fact poses some puzzling questions about elite strategic performance at both national and regional levels regarding the center-periphery dimension. There are two tentative pictures for the cleavage’s activation from Madrid: 1) the conservative Spanish-nationalist Partido Popular (PP) activates the territorial dimension by emphasizing centralism and openly question the legitimacy of the Basque or the Catalan nations while holding La Moncloa with absolute majority (2000-2004). Once in the opposition, favoring confrontation and instigating poisoned interregional comparison when in the opposition (2004-2008) with its slogan “Spain is breaking up” against Zapatero’s territorial agenda. Belen Barreiro and Ignacio Urquizu-Sancho give an explanation for such a behavior:

“In a country like Spain, with an ideological distribution of voters clearly biased to the centre-left, the right wins votes when political competition does not revolve around the traditional left–right axis of more or less redistribution. Hence the right’s electoral prospects improve when politics focuses on a different axis of competition, such as the territorial issue (more or less centralization) or on valence issues, such as terrorism. Only when ideological voting on the left is weakened due to the presence of non left–right issues can the right win elections” (2007: 4).

2) However, there is a second scenario in which national parties—mostly PSOE—inve the regional parties’ electoral feuds by prioritizing territorial issues in the national agenda. This may be happening since Zapatero won 2004. If this is true, the tentative path to a territorial solution initiated in Madrid may ironically leave fewer of the votes in competition to regional parties in Basque Country and Catalonia. On the down side, this strategy is risking votes for the PSOE in
other regions in which the PP’s “tear apart” discourse has succeeded. Inevitably, this strategic move by the PSOE may put into question the hegemonic power of Catalan and Basque regional elites, forcing them to react with either moderation or radicalization. Evidence from Figure 10 indicates that for the period 2000-2004, Catalan and Basque parties significantly increased the salience of territorial issues in their manifestos. It also shows that since 2004 the same parties have reduced this salience considerably, which can be interpreted as a reaction to Zapatero’s strategy. Interestingly, Catalan parties—especially CiU—seem to have moderated their discourse while the PNV in the Basque Country has pushed the Plan Ibarretxe to the front line of its political agenda.

Conclusion

I began this paper by asking a puzzling question: If democracy is supposed to better address ethno-territorial disputes, why is the territorial model in Spain so widely contested thirty years after the transition to democracy? I anticipated a hypothetical answer: not because of citizen dissatisfaction with the territorial model but because regional political elites are vehemently pushing the territorial agenda in their electoral manifestos in an effort to retain the extraordinary power given by the institutional design of the Estado de las Autonomías. I went further to suggest that this has been a conscious strategy and that it might be electorally suicidal.

I first looked at citizens’ attitudes toward the territorial model as well as their subjective feelings of regional and national identity. The evidence points to a firm improvement in the way Catalan and Basque publics account for the territorial model. Positive opinions are steadily growing and negative ones shrinking. The evidence is solid. As for the evolution of identities, things are slightly more complex but the evidence suggests that more and more people in both regions are able to happily accommodate their regional identity within the Spanish one. Nested Identities, as Diéz Medrano and Gutiérrez (2001) label them, conform over sixty percent of the Basque and almost eighty percent of the Catalan publics. And the trend is upward. If the salience of the center-periphery were measured by the attitudes of the citizens toward the territorial model and the evolution of their nested identities, one would have to conclude that such a dimension is undeniably losing importance.

A second part of the study examined voting trends for these parties since the arrival of democracy, both in national as well as in regional elections. The trend is clear: regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country had a stable—and remarkably consistent—polling capacity during the first twenty or so years of democracy, but have been continuously losing electoral support since the turn of the twenty-first century. This is more evident in national elections, but also clear in regional elections. CiU lost the presidency of the Generalitat in 2003 for the first time since 1980; the PNV lost important ground in the 2005 regional election and it is at serious risk of losing the Basque Presidency in the regional election in the next few months. If the center-periphery cleavage were measured according to electoral support for regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country, we would have to conclude that the relevance of such a dimension is actually diminishing. Indeed, it seems that the message of these parties no longer produces the expected response in voters, at least in the same proportion as during the first twenty years of democracy. The pages above have shown that the phenomenon is not limited to
national elections in which these parties would receive fewer votes, but is also obvious in regional elections. This is noteworthy. Citizens no longer vote for regional parties in the same numbers. It is still too early to say whether this is a temporary phenomenon or a long-term structural trend, but this should not prevent us from making predictions.

Lastly, the paper reviewed party manifestos for the parties of Catalonia and the Basque Country for the whole democratic period 1977-2008. This unprecedented analysis of the MRG data reveals that these regional parties devote between half and one third of their electoral programs in general elections to issues related exclusively to the center-periphery dimension. As a matter of fact, if we measured the salience of the center-periphery cleavage based on the attention of these parties to such issues we would have to conclude that democracy has not solved the territorial conflict and that it constitutes one of the most important failures of the Spanish democracy, which is otherwise rather consolidated. Regional parties in the Basque Country and Catalonia have mostly increase their programmatic attention to territorial issues. But although it worked for two decades, this paper proposes that it is no longer working. People in their regions are increasingly satisfied with the constitutional model and their regional identities are nesting within the national one. Perhaps for these reasons regional parties are losing votes. As we have clearly seen with the last 2005 Basque and 2006 Catalan elections, regional party priorities are not quite the same as citizens’ priorities. Parties have this information, but they do not change the direction of their message. Why? Sonia Alonso provided a partial answer: incumbent ethno-territorial parties enjoy a competitive advantage because they tend to be evaluated according to their defense of the ethno-nationalist program. According to her, this type of party is relatively immune against electoral punishment stemming from government performance as conventionally defined in economic terms. They are less severely punished than class-based parties and are more likely to remain in power. The Basque scenario seems to correspond more closely to this explanation. It suggests that PNV and EA, currently in the regional government, would be pushing the nationalist discourse in order to retain supremacy and the Plan Ibarretxe would be a conscious effort to hold on to power. The consequences could be suicidal.43 In the case of Catalonia, Alonso’s argument is less clear since CiU was removed from the Generalitat in 2003. However, the party elites were expelled from office not so much from vote share as from a shift in the forces of coalition formation. The red-green coalition replaced the nationalist government, but ERC lost votes from its position in the regional tripartite government. Therefore, ERC was punished from within a winning coalition and with an extremely nationalist discourse while CiU has suffered from the swing in the pendulum as it moves from center-periphery to left-right.44

Despite electoral decay, regional parties in these two important regions—the richest in Spain—have not significantly changed their discourses; their electoral programs continue to devote similar percentages to the territorial dimension. It is true though that the 2008 national election saw some decrease in the attention given to this dimension, which may be revealing a reaction. However, the overall percentage of regional party manifestos that is dedicated to the territorial dimension is still outstanding with all regional parties (except EA) well above 35 percent. Or, what is the same, one third of their manifestos.

The evidence supports the paper’s hypothesis so far: the salience of the center-periphery dimension in Spain results more from party elite strategy than from citizens’ demands. In a desperate effort to maintain power, party elites push the territorial dimension to the center of the
political debate expecting to gain votes from inflating the problem that they live of. But why it is not working?

A plausible explanation for this might come from the fact that, since the transition to democracy, Spanish political elites have enjoyed high levels of relative autonomy from the public to establish the political agenda (Gunther et al. 1986, Torcal and Chhibber 1995). Forty years of authoritarianism leaves a poorly structured civil society and an almost lack of secondary associations (Linz 1988). In that context, Spanish party elites have benefitted from an almost non-existent public opinion, allowing them to design and take advantage of the linkages between cleavages and the social bases of electoral support. Empirical evidence reveals that the panorama may be changing. The findings in this paper suggest that Spanish civil society may be now challenging that traditional autonomy of political elites. Thirty years of democracy may have trained Spanish voters into holding their governments—and the parties that form them—accountable. The findings in this paper challenge the conclusions of some studies on nationalist voting in Spain. Paloma Aguilar and Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca suggest that nationalist voters tend to exonerate nationalist regional governments when performance is poor and that this is more the case with Basque than with Catalan nationalists:

“[N]ationalists voters forgive a bad regional government evaluation more than nonnationalist voters do. This effect, besides, is more pronounced in the Basque Country than in Catalonia. It would seem that the type of nationalism is a relevant factor because more exclusivist blends of nationalism manage to ensure to a greater extent that negative perceptions of government performance are not converted into punishment votes” (2008: 127).

Finally, a second explanation points to the rupture of the elite consensus characteristic of the first two decades following the transition to democracy. According to this, the crack in the consensus politics is bringing confrontation around the territorial model. This fits the consociational theory:

“The essential characteristic of consociational democracy is not so much any particular institutional arrangement as the deliberate joint effort by elites to stabilize the system. […] Successful consociational democracy requires: (1) That the elites have the ability to accommodate the divergent interest and demands of the subcultures. (2) This requires that they have the ability to transcend cleavages and to join in a common effort with the elites of rival subcultures. (3) This in turn depends on their commitment to the maintenance of the system and to the improvement of its cohesion and stability. (4) Finally, all of the above requirements are based on the assumption that the elites understand the perils of political fragmentation” (Lijphart 2008 [1969]: 29-32).

The development and success of the territorial model depends to a great extent on the capacity and the will of political elites to overcome its contestation. This is, I believe, the main challenge to the Spanish democratic consolidation. If, as proposed in this study, the behavior of political elites gives rise to centrifugal dynamics and polarization rather than to moderation and compromise, voters may start punishing such disloyal manners. Spain is a plural society in which consensus is the bedrock for success.”
References


For clarity and to avoid terminological confusion for non-Spanish readers, in the pages below I label regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country interchangeably as regionalist or nationalist parties and the movement they represent as regionalism or nationalism. The popular wisdom in Spain is to call these parties nationalist since they claim to represent a nation and therefore emerge from feelings of nationalism. There is ample debate, beyond the scope of these pages, about what constitutes a nation and, therefore, what constitutes nationalism. The confusion is almost as ample as the debate. See Mercadé, Hernández and Oltra (1983) for an excellent address on the state of the matter. See also Ferrando, López-Aranguren and Beltrán (1994). These parties are also called Non-State Wide Parties, NSWP (Pallarés, Montero and Llera 1997) which aptly captures their geographical limitation, but obviates the fact that these NSWP do contest general elections in the whole Spanish territory.

Juan José Ibatrretxe elaborates in his website www.ibarretxe.com. The exact wording of the questions is: Question 1) ¿Está usted de acuerdo en apoyar un proceso de final dialogado de la violencia si previamente ETA manifiesta de forma inequívoca su voluntad de poner fin a la violencia para siempre? (Do you agree with supporting a process of dialogued end of violence if ETA previously and unequivocally manifests its will to end violence forever?). Question 2) ¿Está usted de acuerdo en que los partidos vascos sin exclusiones inicien un proceso de negociación para alcanzar un acuerdo democrático sobre el ejercicio del derecho a decidir del pueblo vasco y que dicho acuerdo sea sometido a referéndum antes de que finalice el año 2010? (Do you agree that all Basque parties, with no exclusions, should launch a negotiating process to reach a democratic pact about the exercise of the Basque people’s right to decide, and that such a pact should be voted in a referendum before the end of 2010?).

“Spain is a miracle”, writes Adam Przeworski (1991: 8), regarding the paradigmatic process of democratic consolidation as a model for new democracies in Eastern Europe and Latin America. In this vein, Omar Encarnación states that Spain is “a case uniquely suited for challenging and significantly expanding our knowledge of how different modes of democratic transition affect the prospects for democratic consolidation” (2003: 3).

With regard to ethno-territorial conflict, Ted R. Gurr reaches noteworthy conclusions: 1) such conflicts are by no means intractable; 2) they can usually be accommodated by “some combination of the policies and institutions of autonomy and power sharing”; and 3) democracies have an especially good record of ethnic accommodation (Gurr 1993: 290-92). According to Lijphart, these are exactly the same claims that consociational theory makes (2006: 275).

For the differences between consensus and consociacional democracies see the Introduction in Lijphart (2008).

“While consociational democracy is not incompatible with presidentialism, plurality or majority electoral systems, and unitary government, a better constitutional framework is offered by their opposites: parliamentary government, proportional representation (PR), and, for societies with geographically concentrated ethnic or religious groups, federalism” (Lijphart 2008: 4).

It is the cat-dog problem pointed out by Sartori regarding classification: “[T]o classify is to order a given universe into classes that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. Hence, classifications do establish what is the same and what is not. Same brings together whatever falls into a given class; different is what falls under other classes. Let it be also underscored that classes do not impute real sameness, but similarity. The objects that fall into the same class are more similar among themselves (with respect to the criterion of the sorting) than to the objects that fall into other classes. But this leaves us with highly flexible degrees of similarity. As a rule of thumb, the smaller the number of classes yielded by a classification, the higher its intra-class variation. Its classes incorporate, so to speak, very different sames” (Sartori 1991:21-22).

See Lijphart (1999) for a complete review of the typology.

This is not the place to elaborate on the consensual nature of the post-1978 Spanish democracy. However, enough evidence has been adduced to make us think that the pacted transition responds to such elite-driven spirit. See, for instance, Gunther (1991), Gunther, Sani and Shabad (1986), McDonough, Barnes and López Pina (1986), Linz (1989, 1997), Torcal (1995), Encarnación (2003).
The question asked in the CIS survey is: “Which of the following phrases best expresses your feelings: a) I only feel Spanish, b) I feel more Spanish than [region], c) I feel as much Spanish as [region], d) I feel more [region] than Spanish, e) I only feel [region]”.

Although relevant, local and European elections will add more complexity to the analysis presented here.

However, the Socialist branch parties in Catalonia (PSC) and in the Basque Country (PSE) are formally independent parties from the nation-wide PSOE. This fact poses some questions regarding party discipline and the possible blackmailing power of sub-national “independent” branches. In fact, as I am writing these pages there is an open dispute between the PSC and the central PSOE government regarding the financial agreement contained in the new Catalan Estatut. Undoubtedly, national and regional electoral levels each demand some double strategies as government and opposition, even when the same party governs in the region and in Madrid. See Uriarte 2002.

The concentration of votes in the two national parties seems to be a powerful trend everywhere in Spain. Ocaña and Oñate report a tendency toward homogenization of different sub-national party systems based on the measure of six dimensions: fragmentation, vote concentration, competitiveness, polarization, volatility and regionalism. They estimate that the Spanish general, moderate pluralism model in Sartori’s terms had already expanded to 13 out of the 17 Autonomous Communities. That is, all of those except Basque Country, Navarra, Catalonia and the Canary Islands. Their analysis stops in 1999. Data in this paper is congruent with a further expansion of the vote share of the two main nation-wide parties also in traditionally “regionalist” feuds. See Ocaña y Oñate (2000).

Clara Riba has shown that Cataluña has two unique electoral characteristics not displayed by any other Autonomous Community. 1) A systematic change in results depending on the level of the election. National level goes socialist and regional level goes regionalist—nationalista according to her terminology; and 2) a higher level of abstention (highest in 1992) in regional elections whilst having a much better turnout in national and, contrary to the norm, also in local elections. The usual explanation for this comes from what has been labeled dual voter, a group normally situated ideologically around the center that habitually votes socialist in national and CIU in regional elections. Her findings in 2000 are congruent with the 2003 and 2006 regional results: exceptionally stable CIU voters at both levels, high abstention of españolista left who vote Socialist in the national elections, and very importantly in the 2006 election, Many voters display dual behavior buy no longer voting in terms of Left-Right or Center-Periphery, but rather based on the image and potential government credibility of a party (2000). However, what she did not predict—although she certainly has a good intuition in the appendix—was that remarkable stability in voting patterns would not preclude change in regional government according to red-green coalition building. Also, there is the very interesting emergence of a Catalan-based non-regionalistic party, Ciutatans per Catalunya.

Lago and Montero conclude that "given the existence of elections for different parliaments chosen with different electoral rules at different territorial levels, this complexity expands the opportunity structure for party elites, forces them to make decisions for the medium- or even long-term, and enlarges the number of incentives at their disposal. Electoral coordination may take place between distinctive arenas of national and sub-national elections, which nonetheless are not completely detached from one another. In the end, voters are one and the same, and these sets of elections are obviously ‘connected’ […] or at least ‘contaminated’ […]. In multi-level countries, there are interaction effects between national and sub-national electoral arenas that qualify the dilemmas parties face for coordinating their efforts and resources” (2007: 28).

In fact, of the 70 electoral systems analyzed by Lijphart (1995: 183), Spanish electoral law ranks ninth in overrepresentation of rural areas. It is documented that, for instance, according to the 2000 census, Soria—a Castilian rural province with low density—elects a Member of Parliament with 26,508 votes whereas Barcelona needs 130,097 and Madrid 126,974 votes. In other words, the vote of a Sorian is worth five times the one of a Barcelonan or a Madrilenian, which normally yields a conservative bias. See Lago and Montero (2004) for details.

However, the majoritarian gains to the first two parties in elections are not as high as in the Spanish general elections. Lago and Montero (2004: 22) rank the Catalan and the Basque electoral laws third and fourth in
proportionality (96.72 and 96.51 in Rose’s index respectively) whereas the Spanish is the 14th (91.43). Francisco Llera places Cataluña (2.7) in a first group of regions with a Lijphart disproportionality index below 4 percent, whereas the Basque Country scores 4.5. Both regions are far below the 6.7 percent of the Spanish legislative elections, although well above the average 2.4 percent calculated by Lijphart for proportional systems (1998: 147).

19 Jordi Pujol was the CiU president of the Catalan Government from 1980 to 2003. He was unquestionably a leader of the moderate catalanism and engineer of the Barcelona-Madrid patterns of interaction during the first 25 years of democracy. Clara Riba suggests three main reasons for this change: 1) the success of the left coalition, 2) selective mobilization, and 3) the existence of a split left list from Iniciativa per Catalunya (IC). The unity of the left bloc as opposition together with the credibility and charisma of the coalition leader, Pasqual Maragall, converted the left list into a real alternative to a CiU government for the first time. In her words, “there was therefore a shift in the assessment of the image and in the governmental capacity and credibility of the two major candidatures, with the leftist coalition around Maragall becoming the most valued option by the citizenry” (2000: 26-27).

20 The Socialist coalition did remarkably well in Barcelona’s industrial belt, but this is the area in Catalonia where seats require more votes as opposed to rural less densely populated areas where the vote for CiU is outsized. Lago and Montero (2004) have spelled out the peculiarities of the Catalan regional electoral law. In Catalonia, such a law has traditionally given manufactured absolute majorities to CiU. But in 1999 and 2003, the same law penalized the PSC, the party with more votes and yet fewer seats. Lago and Montero conclude that the “variance effect” of the district magnitude is behind the disproportional results (2004: 14).

21 Statistics in Urquizu-Sancho (2007). The same author calculates which party had been closer to the electorate in the two basic dimensions that play politically in the region—left vs right, and Spanish nationalist vs Catalan nationalist during the term 2003-06. The closest party was the PSC (Socialist), followed by the ICV, CiU, ERC and PP.

22 See www.ibarretxe.com for a complete description of the proposal. Alberto Pérez Calvo has criticized the democratic legitimacy of the proposal from a natural rights approach. In particular, he has denounced the political manipulation of the concept of nation in the preamble: «El pueblo vasco de Euskal Herria es un pueblo con identidad propia en el conjunto de los pueblos de Europa, depositario de un patrimonio histórico, social y cultural singular, que se asienta geográficamente en siete territorios actualmente articulados en tres ámbitos jurídico-políticos diferentes ubicados en dos estados.» (2004: 24-25).

23 There is also the existence of the so-called “hidden vote” (voto oculto) in Basque elections. According to Urquizu-Sancho (2005), fear and intimidation of the radical pro-ETA followers not only decreases the turnout, but also make people hide their voting intentions and real vote in surveys, making it difficult to predict electoral results in the region.

24 The MRG gather country specialists and also comparativists with the goal of producing studies that analyze party divisions and behavior in each European country to later frame them within a comparative structure (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987). Since the year 2002, I have been involved in the research design and the coding of the manifestos of Spanish parties under the supervision and coordination of Hans Dieter Klingemann at the University of California, Irvine and Andrea Volkens at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (Social Science Research Center Berlin).

25 See Budge et al. (2001) and Volkens (2002) for a list of all variables and methodological details.

26 For a review of the critiques and responses to the MRG data see the Special Issue of Electoral Studies (Vol. 26, Number 1, 2007) or Klingemann et al. (2006).

27 The first one was “party ideology” (28.8 per cent of the interviewed) and the second was “party leader” (14.6). “Party Program” was third with 10.4 per cent (CIS # 2,588; Q# 10).

28 In the original: “El programa electoral debe cumplirse siempre y en toda su integridad” (CIS # 2,588;
A study by Antonia María Ruíz Jiménez on electoral manifestos and democratic representation in Spain uses MRG data but only covers the years until 1993.

Variable 301: “Support for federalism or devolution; more regional autonomy for policy or economy; support for keeping up local and regional customs; favorable mentions of special consideration for local areas; deference to local expertise” (Volkens 2002: 31).

Variable 607: “Favorable mentions of cultural Diversity, communalism, cultural plurality and pillarization; preservation of autonomy of religious, linguistic heritages within the country including special education provisions” (Volkens 2002: 35).

Variable 602: “Against patriotism and/or nationalism; opposition to the existing national state; otherwise as 601, but negative” (Volkens 2002: 34).

Variable 411: “Importance of modernization of industry and methods of transport and Communications; importance of science and technological developments in industry; need for training and research. This does not imply education in general (see category 506)” (Volkens 2002: 33).

Variable 303: “Need for efficiency and economy in government and administration: cutting down civil service; improving governmental procedures; general appeal to make the process of government and administration cheaper and more effective” (Volkens 2002: 31).

Variable 108: “Favorable mentions of European Community in general; desirability of expanding the European Community and/or of increasing its competence; desirability of the manifesto country joining (or remaining a member)” (Volkens 2002: 30).

Variable 107: “Need for international co-operation; co-operation with specific countries other than those coded in 101; need for aid to developing countries; need for world planning or resources; need for international courts; support for any international goal or world state; support for UN” (Volkens 2002: 30).

Initially, three components (factors) were extracted, accounting for 68.16 percent of the observed variable variance. These three factors were then obliquely rotated, using the Harris-Kaiser procedure. However, the resulting correlations among the factors were all negligible, and it was thus decided to subject the factors to an orthogonal rotation (varimax) for better interpretability. The varimax-rotated solution showed, however, that the third factor was weakly defined, having only one variable—Non-economic Demographic Groups—loading highly on it (.91, all other loadings below .50). Therefore, in the interest of parsimony, this variable was removed and two factors were extracted from the remaining seven variables. Having coded the manifestoes by hand, I had initially put many hopes in “Non-economic Demographic Groups” as one of the variables measuring the center-periphery dimension. The description of the variable led me to think this way: “Favorable mentions of, or need for, assistance to women, old people, young people, linguistic groups, etc; special interest groups of all kinds” (Volkens 2002: 35). Nevertheless, the presence of linguistic groups is misleading in the coding frame of this variable since most special linguistic provisions to ethnic groups are usually coded on another variable: “Multiculturalism: positive”. “Non-economic Demographic Groups” often refers to gender equality policy proposals and, to lesser extent, to special statements in favor of youngsters and the elderly.

Again, I had put some hopes in the European and international profile of regional parties. It seemed logical to think that regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country would build their connection with the European Union and the rest of the world as a way to avoid operating through Madrid. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine with the available statistical tools how much of the attention devoted by regional parties to the EU and to internationalism in their manifestoes is related to the center-periphery dimension and how much to an international relations factor.
However, it is interesting to notice that the regional governments are not allowed to conduct international relations since it is a prerogative of the central Spanish government according to the Article 149 of the 1978 Constitution.

Mixed modeling, also called multilevel modeling, is generally used when the data have a nested structure. An example would be longitudinal data – the different election years are nested within each political party. In other words, each political party has its own pattern of election years, making mixed modeling particularly valuable. Unlike other statistical methods for longitudinal data, such as ANOVA, mixed modeling does not require that each political party have data for each of the election years. If we were to apply repeated measures obtained through ANOVA to these data, the different pattern of election years for the political parties would generate so much missing data that the analysis would not be feasible.

The MRG has produced some policy scale measures of each party at each election calculating them from the 56 variables in which manifestos are broken down. Planned economy (Planeco), Pro-welfare policies (Welfare), and the ideological position (Rile). Class conflict = planeco + welfare + rile. In order to graph the variables in the same figure, I standardized the variables to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of 1. See Klingemann et al. (2006) for details.

Julián Santamaría points out that one of the main mistakes of the Partido Popular during the 2004 campaign was to believe that the rational vote had replaced the ideological-party vote based on an assessment of the economic situation. He suggests that the political dimension was prevailing over the economic, due in part to the political missteps of the conservative party (2007).

The last Euskobarómetro shows that the PNV would lose significant support to the Socialist party (PSE). The PNV would obtain around 34 percent (-4 from 2005) and PSE would poll around 30 percent (+8), a historic result that would probably take his leader, Patxi López, to the Lehendakaritza (Basque Presidency). EA with around 4 percent would get its worst results contesting elections in solitary (without the PNV). The non-regional parties could for the first time become an absolute majority in the Basque Parliament. See http://www.ehu.es/euskobarometro/ for details.

The last barometer conducted by the Basque Government—known as Sociómetro—shows that the feeling for independence among Basques is at its lowest since 2001. Only 22 percent of them openly defend independence from Spain. 30 percent is against it and 32 percent would support independence depending on the circumstances. What is more relevant, only 26 percent of the PNV and 45 percent of EA sympathizers support the initiative of their party. For details see (http://www1.euskadi.net/estudios_sociologicos/sociometros_c.apl).

Another—rather unexplored—explanation for the behavior of nationalist elites may be related to the pressure from party bases over the party’s programmatic position. Members of nationalist parties are normally more committed and militant than their average voter, making it difficult for party elites to marry the members’ radical discourse with the electoral necessity to appeal to a wider audience.

It is precisely this autonomy and the way in which party elites played down issues that had traditionally divided Spaniards in past democratic episodes—remarkably social class—that make up for the success of the Spanish transition: “[T]he priority to build a viable democracy produced an “arranged” postponement of fundamental economic decisions. To postpone social and economic problems for more stable times constituted a main ingredient of the “general consensus” that characterized the regime change” (Torcal and Chhibber 1995: 12). Bonnie N. Field (2005) also shows that the early period of democracy in Spain experienced a tremendous degree of political collaboration among parties and party elites on the essential legislation regarding the “rules of the game”. During this early period, Field demonstrates that pacted transitions normally depress the level of competitiveness or contestation across political parties. In this context, and according to the so-called elite settlement school, democratic consolidation requires elite consensus and unity, and elite settlements are one way to accomplish this. See Bonnie Field (2005) for details.
According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), the bonds between social cleavages and party systems emerged as a consequence of the mobilization and political organization of the social groups affected by the so-called industrial and national revolutions. However, the concept of cleavage has become confusing and used to mean virtually any social or political conflict in modern societies. Bartolini and Mair establish that a cleavage is constituted by “the social stratification, the corresponding cultural system, and its different forms of political and social organization— including not only parties, but also social networks, professionals and other organizations that are expressions of that cleavage” (cited in Torcal and Chhibber 1995: 10).

In this sense, it can be useful to look at the attitudes of citizens toward political elites and political parties at the regional and at the national level. Mariano Torcal, Richard Gunther, and José Ramón Montero distinguish between “reactive” and “cultural” antipartyism. The former is a “critical stance adopted by citizens in response to their dissatisfaction with the performance of party elites and institutions. It is a product of the inconsistencies between promises, the ideological labels, and the actual rhetoric of politicians, on the one hand, and citizens’ perceptions of the actual performance of democracy and political elites, on the other. […] To some extent, however, it is also a response to actual failures on the part of parties and elites. Many social, political, and economic problems are simply not solved, or even satisfactorily addressed […] (2002: 260)”. Reactive antipartyism is related to temporary changes in political conditions, revealing an activation of civil society rather than passive resignation. On the contrary, cultural antipartyism is more rooted in historical tradition and the core values of political culture, making it relatively autonomous from short-term political cycles. Furthermore, it is stable over time (remarkably linked to socialization experiences and noticeably higher among older people) and associated with lower education and political information. In short, it is connected to a broader syndrome of political disaffection, that in Southern Europe is also interrelated with low levels of involvement in unconventional forms of political participation. See also Dalton (2004) and Torcal and Montero (2006).

Undoubtedly, the work here presented intends to open new avenues of research in this direction. While cultural antipartyism would presumably lose salience as older cohorts are replaced by younger ones, reactive antipartyism towards regional parties may be behind the decadence of their systemic relevance in the Spanish and regional party systems. This would reveal the need for these parties to re-formulate their political strategies to adapt them to voters’ demands. This may well just be a temporary phenomenon in the accordionic relationship between people and elites. Either that or the electoral suicide of certain parties and, with them, the movement they represent.

Aguilar and Sánchez-Cuenca use in their analysis a 1992 survey and therefore could not detect the voting changes in the following years that are collected here. Indeed, their thorough analysis actually confirms that nationalist voters are altering the process of forming their votes, punishing performance of nationalist parties in government. Precisely, the explanation that Aguilar and Sánchez-Cuenca give for the exoneration of accountability to these nationalist parties may offer a clue about the reasons for its change: “In our opinion, these effects [the exoneration of responsibility] are derived of the very essence of nationalism, that is, the fact that nationalists in principle believe that politicians who share their national identity will better represent them. It is not that government evaluation is irrelevant to nationalist but rather that nationalists mix government evaluation with other factors that either soften or intensify its effect. Such factors originate in the idea that nationalist voters perceive the nationalist party in power at a regional level as affirmation of the existence of a distinct demos” (2008: 128). Changes in the attitudes of citizens towards the territorial model, as revealed by the CIS data above, may also affect the relationship between nationalist voters and nationalist parties. This fact reinforces the hypothesis of this paper about the growing distance between nationalist party elites and their voters, as well as the strategic electoral failures of the former pushing the center-periphery dimension to the heart of the political agenda.

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