Regional Political Elites in Newly Federalized Countries: The Case of Spain (1980-2005)

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By Xavier Coller
Georgetown University and Universidad de Barcelona
Abstract: The field of political elites has been consolidated as a fruitful area for research. The social background of politicians is one of the most known features of political elites in most of the countries. There are some regularities that need to be systematized. One of them being that there is a gap between society and elite in what gender, profession, and education level is concerned. Elite composition follows the agglutination model suggested by Laswell and put forward by Putnam. Some social features that are scarce in society are quite common in the elite. This paper explores the disproportion between elite and society presenting the social bias index and concludes that contrary to what is expected, in some respects the social disproportion index has been reduced largely because society has been transformed in a way that typically elite features are also becoming common in society.

This is a work in progress paper. The author apologizes in advance for any grammar or spelling mistake. Comments and suggestions are welcomed.
Political elites in federalized countries: The Case of Spain (1980-2005).

By Xavier Coller

Federalization and regional elites

Spain is the country that most successfully completed the transition to democracy from an authoritarian regime. This transition involved the enactment of a constitution that consecrated the dismantlement of a centralized state whose modern origins go back to the beginning of the 19th century. Democratization and federalization were parallel political processes. To be true, there had been other decentralizing experiences during the first third of the 20th century, but they failed. The last one took place during the Second Republic (1931-36) with the Estado Integral consecrated in the 1931 constitution. Different leftist governments granted autonomy to Catalonia (1932), Basque Country (1936, at the beginning of the Civil War) and Galicia was on its way. The transferring of power to some regions was soon perceived as the break down of Spain and experts list this perception as one of the causes contributing to the bloody civil war (1936-39) that put an end to the democratic and decentralizing experiment in Spain. The current federalization process might be considered the heir of the 1931 attempt.

The 1978 constitution created what is known as the State of Autonomies. That is, a quasi federal State that transfers powers and resources to the newly created regions and regional governments. The resulting system has been called “imperfect federalism” (Moreno 1994) or “semi-federalism” (Lijphart 1999:189). It should be recalled that we are dealing with a process of federalization, not devolution. Certainly, there were two autonomous

1 The author would like to thank Helder Ferreira Do Vale for his dedication and help to build the database on which this research is based. Also, Alberto Robello, Xavier Campmany, Neus carreras, and Sofia Marban, students of mine in Barcelona and now beginning their international career, helped with the accountability of laws and the votes they received. Maria Jose Bello allowed me to use some of her data for the case of Asturias. Chris Meissinger and Julio Lopez, were very efficient and devoted research assistants at Georgetown University. Officials of different parliaments have been very helpful providing information to complete this work. I thank their understanding and cooperation. President Jose Maria Aznar was kind enough to write some letters that helped me to obtain information I needed on different parliaments in which his party was the majority group. Prof. Germa Bel, former Congressman, also helped in the data gathering process and put me in contact with Juan Manuel Eguiagaray, President of Fundacion Alternativas, who kindly wrote some introductory letters to some socialist presidents of regional parliaments. This research would have never been possible without the funds provided by the Spanish Minister of Education and Culture, project BSO2003-02596. Thanks are also due to the audiences of several workshops in which this research was presented at Georgetown University, Universidad de Alicante, International Political Science Association (Fukuoka), Universite de Montpellier (CEPEL), and University of Pennsylvania. Their comments were helpful and contributed to improve this paper.

2 At the beginning of the transition, before the constitution was written, Suarez’s government enacted some decrees that meant the creation of some regional governments that paved the way to the institutionalization of regions during the constitution writing process (see Suarez 1978:59). For the transition to democracy and the federalization process, see Linz (1989), Linz and Stepan (1996), Powell (2001) and Maravall and Santamaria (1986).

3 Lijphart (1999:189, 193) places Spain in the middle category of federal systems below Germany, the US, Switzerland, Canada, Austria, Belgium, Australia, India, and at the same level as Israel, The Netherlands, and Belgium before 1993. Although this classification might not be fully correct, the Spanish case seems to fit in the “semi-federalism” category with a strong tendency towards federalism.
communities that had enjoyed some level of autonomy during the Second Republic, but the 1978 federalization process meant the creation from anew of a territorial structure unknown until then for the large majority of Spaniards. There was no devolution of powers, but a major transferring of power and resources. Even in the cases in which devolution could be a proper name, like Catalonia or the Basque Country, the fact is that there was more “transferring” than “devolving” from the state to the regions.

Federalizing Spain meant the creation of 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla), as it is shown in Figure 1. Some of them had their territorial borders clearly delimited since the 13th century, as it was the case of Valencia, Aragon, Catalonia, Asturias, Galicia, Navarre, Basque Country, Extremadura, Canary Islands, and the Balearic Islands. Some others were newly created for political or geographical reasons, as it was the case of Cantabria, Madrid, Murcia, or La Rioja. Still, the borders of some others were transformed although their existence goes back to the middle ages, like the cases of Castile-La Mancha or Castile-Leon, previously known as the Kingdom of Castile, which included also Cantabria and Andalusia. The process delineated in the constitution meant also the creation of a de facto unequal federal system, very much in line with normal asymmetries in multicultural, multilingual, multinational federacies. Some communities (Catalonia, Basque Country, and Galicia, usually called “historic”, and Andalusia) got more powers and faster than other regions which followed a slow path. This difference has been

Figure 1. Map of Spain, Autonomous Communities, and Provinces.

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4 For a different point, see Guibernau (1999, 2004).
5 Unlike other federal states, Spain’s federal system is asymmetric. There are some areas which are the exclusive responsibility of the central government (defense, international relations, fiscal policy, and the like), some others are controlled by the regional governments, and still others are shared. This arrangement is not stable. Regional governments have been negotiating (some with more intensity than others) with the central government for the transferring of more powers. Thus, not all autonomous communities have the same level of power. There is an asymmetry (inequalities) among three types of autonomous communities. One block is known as the historic communities—Galicia, Basque Country, Catalonia, and Andalusia. The first three are the truly historic communities, meaning that they are those that during the Second Republic (1931-36) were granted autonomy or passed a Statute of Autonomy. Andalusia’s inclusion in this group is the result of a referendum in which citizens
partly overcome over the years thanks to the slow but continuous transfer of power to the new regional governments. Currently, there are still significant differences among the two groups of communities, one of them at the symbolic level being that the presidents of the government of the “historic” regions can dismiss the regional parliaments and call for new elections at their own will. As a result, four autonomous communities have different electoral cycles than the others, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Electoral cycles in Spain.

<table>
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<th>I</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>II</th>
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<th>Seats</th>
<th>III</th>
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<tr>
<td>Canarias</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Castilla y León</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1995</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: For the rest of the analysis it should be taken into account that different regions have different electoral cycles. For instance, legislation III in the Basque Country begins two years earlier than in Catalonia, four years earlier than in Andalusia, and five years earlier than in the rest of regions. We need to be aware of this temporal gap in the analysis of the evolution of; let’s say, presence of women or immigrants in parliaments.

Since its creation, the relevance of the regional structures of power have grown thanks to the transfer of powers and resources from the central government. Regional executives and legislators needed a regional bureaucracy managing the budget.\(^6\) Twenty years after the creation of the Estado de las Autonomías, the regions employed already around one million of civil servants, some of whom were transferred from the central government in the early years of the Estado de las Autonomías and others were hired to fulfill positions created from anew. In the early eighties, according to data presented by López et al. (2006:15), regions received from the central government a total of almost thirteen thousand million of euros (12.762.268.000), while at the turn of the century the money at the disposal of the regional

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\(^6\) For the process of transferring powers to the regions and the building of the Estado de las Autonomías, see Subirats and Gallego (2002). See as well Agranoff and Ramos (1998).
government was sixty eight thousand million of euros (68,276,086,000). In less than twenty years, the budget of the regions had grown by a factor of 5. Put it in another way: In 1981, when the federalization process had just started, the total expenditure of the State was divided between the central government (87.3%), regional governments (3%), and municipalities (9.7%). Twenty years later, in 2001, the proportions had changed and the central government participated in the total expenditure with a 58.8%, regional governments with 27.6% and municipalities with 13.7%. Still, in 2003 the proportions were 54%, 31%, and 15%. The relevance of regional governments in Spain grows and most likely their weight in the total expenditure of the State will keep growing for the central government transfers more powers and responsibilities to the regions.

Paralleling this process, the federalization of Spain has meant the emergence and consolidation of a regional political elite occupying the new institutions of representation and government. Each autonomous community has a unicameral parliament and an executive council. For the purposes of my research it is important to highlight that the creation of the State of autonomies meant the opening of 1139 seats in all 17 regional parliaments for each election. Taking into account that since 1980 there have been six legislatures in each non historic region, seven in Catalonia and Galicia, and eight in the Basque Country, as can be seen in Table 1, the total number of regional seats opened to election is 7424 for the period 1980-2005. This number might seem small, but compare the 7424 seats opened for election to the 3906 seats for which politicians have competed at national elections since 1979 when the first legislature after the constitution was opened. In just numerical terms, the regional political-institutional elite almost doubles the national one, although in terms of relevance and importance there are still differences in favor of MPs in Congress but not necessarily the Senate. The results of a recent research indicate that parliamentarians place Congress and regional parliaments above Senate in the ranking of relevant political institutions (Coller 2003a, 2003b:106).

The federalization of the State has created new regional institutions subjected to competition and thus consolidating a regional political elite to which we should pay more attention. We know little about regional politicians and certainly, they are more and more important for their fellow citizens in federalizing countries. They are, in Best and Cotta’s (2000:7) words, at the core of democratic systems. Regional politicians tend to gather more power and responsibilities since they regulate more areas that affect citizen’s lives. This “shaping of society” is complemented by their responsiveness function. Regional politicians are in closer contact with citizens than national leaders and are thus more capable of bringing citizen’s concerns to the regional parliament (it needs to be seen whether they are more or less responsible.) Regional politicians are crucial in the functioning of democracy since their actions, perhaps amplified for their closeness to citizens, affect the quality and legitimacy of democracy. In large part, they set the political agenda pointing at the issues to which mass

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7 See Merry del Val (2005) and Toboso (2005) for the evolution of the economic resources transferred to the regional governments. For the evolution of the growth of the regional bureaucracy, see Ramió and Salvador (2002).
8 I do not take into account the fact that in 2003, regional elections in Madrid had to be repeated because of a corruption scandal few months after the legislature was elected.
9 This amount includes the 350 seats of Congress and 208 seats at the Senate. The first democratic election took place in 1977. The constitution was passed in 1978, and new elections were called in 1979. Experts call the first democratic legislature the “constitutional” one, and the legislature beginning in 1979, the first one. I have followed this tradition.
media and citizens will pay attention. Foremost, regional elites constitute the nursery from which national political leaders emerge. A good number of ministers and national leaders in the government or the opposition began their careers in the regional parliaments in Spain. For instance, according to data presented by Linz et al. (2003:103), 4.6% of ministers during the democratic period (excluding the transition) had also been regional MPs and 7.7% had been regional presidents or councilors. So, a good tenth of the members of the pinnacle of institutional power come from regional parliaments. For these reasons, I think it is worth paying attention to these politicians. Despite their relevance, political elites, and particularly regional elites, are largely unknown. As Linz (1997:123-4) put it once, “interest on public policy and responsiveness has made us forget one of the key elements in democratic politics: The politicians. Except some interesting but not too suggestive about the social features of political elites, we know little of democratic politicians”.

The research in which this paper is based is focused on political elites holding a seat in regional parliaments during the period 1980-2005. Being aware of the problems of the positional analysis applied here, I believe that choosing regional MPs as the object of study helps to set clear limits on who should be considered part of the elite—those who have been at some point members of an institution of representation at the regional level. However, it is true that there might be other people who could be considered part of the political elite and who are not included here because they have never held a seat in a regional parliament. Two notorious cases will illustrate the point. Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, no doubt, are part of the Spanish political elite. They have been Prime Ministers, leaders of their parties, and their decisions have had a huge impact on the Spanish polity. However, since they have not been present in regional parliaments (neither in Andalusia, nor in Castile-León), they are not considered part of the regional political elite. Notwithstanding, some of the ministers of their governments have been included in this elite since they held a seat in regional parliaments, like it is the case of Joan Lerma, Manuel Cháves, Jerónimo Saavedra or Magdalena Álvarez. José María Aznar, his successor in the leadership of the Popular Party, Mariano Rajoy, and some members of Aznar’s government are also included because either before or after participating in national politics were active in regional parliaments. Also, national leaders of the opposition party Izquierda Unida (United Left), like Julio Anguita, Francisco Frutos, or Gaspar Llamazares, are part of the regional elite for the same reason. It could be argued that positional analysis might leave out some people that have been influential in politics as leaders of parties at the local, regional, or national level. However, given the prominent role that parties play in nurturing institutions of representation in Spain, and since party leaders are usually placed in these institutions, except few exceptions like the ones mentioned, most likely the group of 4354 politicians that have held a seat in regional parliaments since 1980 make a good portion of the institutional political power elite in democratic Spain. They are a part of what Suzanne Keller (1963) identified as a “strategic

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10 The point was also stated by Patzelt (2002:96) when after reviewing an impressive number of empirical studies about recruitment in European parliaments pointed out that Italy, Portugal and Spain were way back behind other countries like Germany, Britain, or even France in terms of knowledge of their political elites.

11 In this respect, the political elite analyzed here might be considered an important segment, certainly, the institutional one, of the political elite as defined by Highley and Burton (2006:7), namely, the group of “persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially […] Put most simply, elites are persons and groups who have the organized capacity to make real and continuing political trouble”. For the problems of positional analysis in elite research, see Putnam (1976:16).
elite.” The group, though, also includes MPs that have not been relevant or influential and have had no power at all, although I have tried to introduce some corrections that will help to identify the inner circle of the regional political elite—those people who had enough power to make decisions that shaped society in the period considered.

Social background of politicians

The Spanish regional elite (those people who have held a seat in any legislature of any regional parliament) for the period 1980-2005 is composed of 4354 people. Since there have been 7424 seats open for electoral competition, each member has almost been in at least two legislatures on average. Later on I will discuss the continuity of this elite and its consequences. If I had to summarize the social features of the Spanish regional elite I would have to say that the group is mainly composed of young men born in the region they serve, highly educated, mostly educators and lawyers, and with relevant social differences due to party and territory. In this respect, the Spanish regional political elite is healthily similar to other political elites that have been studied over the years.12

This sort of homogeneous elite clearly contrasts with the heterogeneity of the Spanish society. Certainly, this is not an elite that mirrors the social features and cleavages of the society. No political elite does it for in parliaments we find people with social features that are scarce in society. This situation is the result of what Robert Putnam (1976:33 and ff.) named the law of increasing disproportion: “the higher the level of political authority, the greater the representation for high-status social groups”. These groups share social features that are infrequent in the rest of the population.

The question that still remains open is why some people enter the political elite while others do not and why those who enter the group tend to have some similar social features.13 Actually, political elites tend to fit in what Putnam (1976:22), following Lasswell (1965:9), named agglutination model as opposed to the independence model. In the latter, citizens have similar chances of entering the elite, while in the former, the elite is composed of people sharing some features that go together and are uncommon in society: high educational level, prestigious professions, wealth, and the like. While the outcome of the independence model is

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13 Explanations tend to focus on both the demand and the supply side. Putnam (1976:46) indicates that the process is self-selecting so that only those interested in public matters and with some vocation of public service will devote time to politics if the structure of opportunity is there. See also Uriarte (2000) for an analysis of the motivation of Spanish politicians. Certainly, one of the answers in democratic politics mediated by parties lies in the role played by different selectorates that choose among a pool of possible candidates to make the electoral lists. The strong tendency towards catch-all parties in modern democratic politics accounts as well for the increasing homogeneity of the elite in terms of social background. Also, the composition of parliaments tends to follow what Sartori et al. (1963:317, as quoted in DiPalma and Cotta 1986:51) call the “rule of distance”, which means that people from more underprivileged backgrounds usually have to “travel” a longer distance if they are going to be selected.
a political elite that reproduces the social structure of society, the result of the agglutination model is a parliament whose members usually come from privileged backgrounds. Study after study has shown that the independence model does not exist and that the reality of parliaments is closer to the agglutination model—citizens that share few social features have more chances to get into the elite than others. Thus, as Blondel (1973:77) indicated, “the only question that arises is how vast is the distortion between the composition of the country and the composition of the legislature.” This means to ask to what extent the parliamentary elite is socially biased. In order to find out the level of distortion between the society and the elite, I will compare the elite and the Spanish population on five accounts: gender, age, place of origin, studies, and profession. For a better understanding and a systematic comparison, I introduce a measure of the disproportion, the “social bias index” or “social disproportion index”, which is an adaptation of what Pippa Norris (1995:96) calls the “index of electoral bias” after Ross’s (1944) works.\(^\text{14}\) I believe this index is more informative and straightforward than the simple difference in proportions between the population and the elite, as used by Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996:22), a measure that notwithstanding also helps to point out the gap between the two groups.

**Table 2. Evolution of social background of MPs and population.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First legislature</th>
<th>Last legislature</th>
<th>MPs 1980-05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MPs</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Bias index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Women</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Immigrants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>42.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average education</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% university trained</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>17.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Lawyers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Workers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Owners&amp;managers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Educators</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** For computation purposes, the last legislature refers to the sixth legislature in all regions.

*Gender.* The usual politician of the period is a man (79%), although women have been incorporated to regional parliaments increasingly over the years paralleling what has happened also in the Congress of Deputies of Spain and other European parliaments.\(^\text{18}\) For instance, at the beginning of the 80’s, the proportion of women in regional parliaments barely reached

\(^{14}\) This index is the ratio between the proportion of a particular group in the elite (say, women, immigrants, university trained people) and the same group in the electorate. Rather than choosing the electorate, I have relied on the data for the population as counted in the Spanish census. If there is a similar proportion in the elite and the population, the index will be close to 1. If the index is over 1, the group in question is overrepresented while if the index is below 1, the group is underrepresented. The further the index departs from 1, the more under or overrepresented the group analyzed.

\(^{15}\) See INE (1985) for data from the 1981 census. For the professions, the base is the active population having a job (over 10.7 million people).

\(^{16}\) Data from the 2001 census available at [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es). For the professions, the base is the active population having a job (over 16 million people).

\(^{17}\) Includes 17.2% of nationals born in another region and 5.3 of foreigners residing in Spain.

\(^{18}\) See Uriarte and Ruiz (1999) and Valiente et al. (2003).
10% (except in Madrid, 13%, and la Rioja, 11%) while by the beginning of the 21st century in most parliaments the proportion was over 30% and in some cases (like Castile-La Mancha) almost reached 50%. There were cases (like Murcia in 1987) where no woman was elected as regional MP. Over these 25 years of federal democratic politics, parliaments more open to women have been those of Castile-La Mancha, Andalusia, and Madrid, while those more closed to women’s participation have been Aragon, Murcia and Catalonia. Data presented in Table 2 show the evolution of the proportion of women from the first legislature (around 1980-3) to the last one (at the turn of the century). Women have multiplied their presence in the regional political elite by a factor of almost 6, being proportionally more than in the Congress of Deputies, where the presence of women does not reach the third of the total members. Although the index of bias has gone from 0.11 to 0.66, there is still a long way to reach equal representation, which seems to be the trademark of what Best and Cotta (2000) call “minority representation”.

There are reasons to explain the incorporation of women to politics (Uriarte and Ruiz 1999:212, Valiente et al. 2003:197-203), usually associated to the growing presence of women in the public arena, the politics of leftist parties opening the electoral lists to more women, sometimes using quotas, the role played by highly educated centralized selectorates, and the proportionality of the electoral system (not the size of the electoral district). There are not so obvious reasons to explain why some regions are more open to women in parliaments than others. Perhaps we should pay attention to the party ruling the region and its majority in parliament, the proportion of women in the active population, the presence of women among affiliates of different parties, and the average ideological outlook of citizens. In any case, the growing presence of women during the period 1980-2005 has reduced the gap between the elite and the population very much in line with what has happened in other parliaments at the national and European level. As I will show later, there are strong differences between parties.

Internal migrants. The Spanish regional politician has been born in the region s/he serves in 84% of the cases, which, overall, has left a short room for internal migrants to participate in the political elite of their host regions. This is not surprising in some regions

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19 According to data presented by Valiente and her associates (2003:185), in 1977 there were 6% of women elected at the Congress of Deputies, 5% in 1982, and 28% in the eighth legislature (2000-04). Similar data for the Spanish representatives in the European Parliament presented by Martinez (2000:271) indicate that in 1986 there were 8% of women, in 1989 there were 15%, 28% in 1994, and in 1999 there were already 34% of women. This shows that women were incorporated to regional parliaments earlier than to Congress and the Spanish delegation at the European Parliament.

20 Norris and Lovenduski (1995:93-5), analyzing the concept of political representation, refer to the “demographic” or “microcosmic” notion of representation according to which a truly representative parliament mirrors the social structure of the population becoming then a microcosmos of the society to which it represents. They (1995:289) give examples of 9 countries that reserve seats for groups in society (Singapore, Croatia, Ireland, Bhutan, Indonesia, Morocco, Slovenia, Belarus, and Tanzania). Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996:21) indicate that advocates of this conception of representation “have used arguments of pure fairness or equality as a complement to the more functional reasoning that good social representativeness leads to more democratic and effective decision-making”. Although there are trends towards making parliaments a “microcosmos” following a “minority representation” model, the truth is that parliaments tend to be unrepresentative and thus are socially biased.

21 Leftist parties (PSOE and IU) began applying quotas for women in 1988. The PSOE held in 1988 a congress in which the party passed a resolution mandating that 25% of ruling positions in the party should be reserved to women.

22 Immigrants refer here to those MPs that have been born in Spain but not in the region where they hold a seat in parliament.
that traditionally have exported labor force to other areas. For instance, Andalusia, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia have traditionally been regions whose inhabitants have been nurturing the industries and services of Catalonia, Madrid, Basque Country and Valencia. Consequently, Madrid appears as one the regions whose parliament has been more open to immigrants (43%) also reflecting the proportion of non natives living in the region. Castile-La Mancha and La Rioja are the other two regions whose parliaments are more open, although they have exported population rather than being a traditional pole of attraction for people. Contrary, Andalusia, Galicia, and the Canary Islands appear as the regions whose parliaments are less open for immigrants. However, Catalonia being in the group of parliaments with low levels of immigrants is highly counterintuitive. Catalonia has been a pole of attraction for many Spaniards who during the 50s and 60s moved there to work. Overall, almost a third of the Catalan population has been born elsewhere in Spain. However, their share in the political elite for the period considered is roughly 10%. Further research should find explanations for this peculiar situation.

Comparing the population with the elite, as can be done with data presented in Table 2, one realizes that while the proportion of internal migrants has doubled in Spain, its presence in the political elite has been reduced from 17% to 13% in 25 years. This means that the number of Spaniards living in a region that were born in another has grown because of a higher mobility and the incorporation of foreigners. However, the political elite of the regions has closed the door to immigrants. The changes in the bias index support this claim. By the eighties of the 20th century, immigrants were overrepresented (1.54) while by the turn of the century the index was 0.59. Certainly, this bias index is lower than the one of women, which leads to think that, if a “minority representation” approach is to be adopted, the number of non natives should be increased in regional parliaments.

Age. Although Blondel (1973:77), in what is considered a classic of research in Parliaments, indicated that “it is natural that legislators should be older than the “average” citizen of a country”, the fact is that the average politician is almost as young as the average citizen. The average politician is almost 44 years old at the time of entrance in the regional parliament, which is quite close to the average age of Spaniards in 2001 (39.5) a reference year in which society had already undergone an intense aging process. Younger politicians can be found in the first legislatures and, also, when the majority in parliament changes. That means that the party obtaining the largest plurality of seats has placed in the electoral list a number of politicians younger on average than their predecessors. The youngest politicians can be found in La Rioja, Andalusia and Asturias (around 42 years old) while the oldest politicians, on average, can be found in Galicia, Castile-Leon, and Catalonia (over 45 years old). Compared to other parliaments, even the Congress of Deputies, this is largely a young elite at the point of entry.24 Young politicians are quite common in the also young Spanish democracy. Think of Adolfo Suárez (43), Felipe González (40), José María Aznar (43), and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (43), presidents of government that were closer to the forties than to the fifties when they took office. Also, regional parliamentarians tend to be young and some get old in the chamber.

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23 See Miley (2004)
24 For instance, Linz et al. (2003:87) found out that Spanish ministers were 44.7 old on average for the democratic period, quite younger than the average age of ministers during the transition to democracy (51) and the Franco regime (51).
Young politicians in a parliament might mean a good number of inexperienced politicians as well. Also, following Inglehart (1990), young MPs can incorporate to the legislative process and the political debate a good deal of new values and priorities that veteran politicians from older generations may seem alien to. Further research with these data should show gender and age differences among MPs.25

**Education.** Spanish regional politicians are quite educated since 85% hold a university degree. Only a tenth (11%) finished their studies at high school and 3.4% finished primary school or have no education. Data refer only to the 71% of politicians for which we could obtain data. Few hold a PhD degree (8%), while the vast majority (60%) has a “licenciatura”. The remaining 17% obtained a degree after three years of education.26 Certainly, it seems that Keller (1963:121) was right indicating that “education is the single most important entrance requirement into the higher circles”.27 In comparative terms, there are regions whose elite is more educated than others. Assigning numeric codes to the educational level attained by politicians, we can obtain an indication of the education of the regional elite.28 The average is 3.58, which places the elite at the university level, a bit over the diplomatura or three-year degree. Regions with the more educated elites are Canary Islands, Madrid, and Catalonia, while the less educated elite in comparative terms are those of Extremadura, Aragon, and Navarre.

This is the reverse of the situation in the population at any autonomous community and in Spain in general, making the bias index quite high. Data in Table 2 indicate that the proportion of university trained politicians in the regional elite has grown a bit over the years, and the gap between the elite and the population has been shortened (bias index goes from 0.05 to 0.17), although the disproportion is much higher than in the case of women and immigrants.

There is the idea that the higher the level of power, the higher the educational credentials of the politician. Thus, ministers are more educated than national MPs, who are more educated than regional parliamentarians and local councilors. However, this “rule” needs to be qualified with available data. Certainly, ministers of Spanish governments during the democratic period are highly educated since, according to Linz et al. (2003:92), 97% hold a university degree. However, it is not so clear that regional parliamentarians have lower credentials than other representatives. The proportion of university graduates in the Spanish political elite at the regional level is larger than in the European Parliament, where according to Norris (1999:97) the proportion was 75%. Furthermore, they make a similar proportion than that of the Spanish representatives in the European Parliament, where university graduates are in every legislature over 85% (Martínez 2000). The political elite in the regions show similar levels of university graduates as the Congress of Deputies in the eighth legislature (84%, according to data presented by Valiente et al. 2003:191), and a bit higher than MPs in the Congress of Deputies in the 7th legislature (75%, according to data presented by Uriarte and Ruiz 1999:215). This group of regional politicians is more educated than local councilors in Spain, since only 10% of these have finished higher education (Capo 1992:140). Consequently, the idea that

25 Age groups (-44, 44-54, 55+) as in Norris (1999:98).
26 Spanish university system is divided among diplomaturas or technical schools and licenciaturas. The former require three years of education and the later require five years. Later reforms have changed the years of schooling needed to obtain a university degree.
28 Codes were assigned as follows. 1= up to primary school, 2 = secondary school, 3= diplomatura, 4 = licenciatura, 5 = PhD.
education is negatively correlated with the level of representation seems to fail here—regional politicians are highly educated and certainly, university training is as common for them as it is for national representatives and even proportionally more common than for European parliamentarians.

**Profession.** The profession of politicians for the period considered is quite in line with what is expected. Liberal professions are the largest group and among them, law related professions are the most common (19%). 29 Physicians (6.3%), architects (1.2%), engineers (3.9%) or economists (3.7%) are not as frequent among politicians as those professions related to the legal system. The largest professional group is that of educators, though, and workers, and managers and owners get also a good share of power, as can be seen in Table 2. This elite is distinctively different than the one composed of municipal politicians, in which, according to data presented by Botella (1992:155), the largest professional groups are farmers (34%) and industrial workers (18%).

The professional composition of the Spanish regional elite is in line with what Norris and Lovenduski (1995) found for the British parliament—a growing number of professors, although, contrary to the Spanish case I study, a declining proportion of lawyers. In the case of the Spanish political regional elite, the proportion of law related professionals has grown in the period considered (from 19% to 22%), as can be seen in Table 2. It is also in line with what Norris (1999:93) found for the European Parliament concerning the profession of politicians. There, educators (14%) outnumbered lawyers (10%), journalists (9%) and businesspersons (7.3%). It also reflects the professional composition of Spanish representatives in the European Parliament, where there is a growing presence of lawyers and an important although changing proportion of educators (Martínez 2000:274). Still, my data differ from Uriarte’s (2000:118) findings in the Congress of Deputies, where the proportion of lawyers is 15%. Uriarte, following Jerez (1997), indicates that the relative presence of lawyers diminishes over the years. Contrary, in the regional political elite, the proportion of lawyers grows, although its overrepresentation diminishes in 20 years. The bias index goes from 63.3 at the beginning of the eighties to 26.5 at the beginning of the 21st century. This change is accounted for by the growth of lawyers in the Spanish society, which multiplies by a factor of three in the period considered. Still, lawyers are the group that is proportionally more overrepresented in the regional political elite.

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29 Lawyers seem to be the cradle for many representative and executive jobs. Cuenca and Miranda (1987:139) found that 33.6% of Franco ministers were law related professionals, the largest group followed by army officers (32%) and professors (13%). Also, Del Campo and his associates (1982:143) show that in the first constitutional legislature of the Spanish Congress of Deputies, lawyers were the dominant professional group (23%) only outnumbered by public servants (30%) and followed by entrepreneurs (12%). Linz et al. (2003:97) also found out that ministers in the democratic period were largely lawyers (41%), although there was also a similar proportion (40%) of university professors and a lower number of civil servants (25%).

30 Atención a las profesiones de servicios p’ublicos (social workers, nursdes, civil servants, teachers)

31 According to Martinez (2000:274), the proportion of law related professions among the Spanish representatives in the European parliament is 17% in 1986-87, 18 in 1987-89, 17% in 1989-94, 22% in 1994-99, and 20% in 199-04. The proportion of educators for the same periods is 17%, 32%, 37%, 28%, and 15%.

32 This is an aspect of the political elite that has been emphasized by the impressive study of Best and Cotta (2000) about Parliamentarians in Europe. Over the period of more than 150 years, they find out that the political elite is increasingly composed of middle class citizens with some political experience (in local or party offices). However, they detect a reduction in the proportion of lawyers, a steady proportion of businessmen and managers over the years, a growing presence of civil servants (mainly teachers), and an increment in the proportion of people holding social sciences and humanities degrees.
No matter how important is the group of law related professionals in the political elite, it is outnumbered by that of educators: 21% of the Spanish regional elite are university professors or teachers at either a high school or primary school. This is a phenomenon that has been already emphasized in other studies concerning other countries and the European parliament, as it has been already noted. Furthermore, the relative weight of this group has increased like that of lawyers, since it went from 19% at the beginning of the eighties to 23% at the turn of the century. Educators are overrepresented in the elite, although in a lower proportion than lawyers. The bias index goes from 5.42 to 4.89, indicating that the overrepresentation of educators is stable over the years, contrary to what happened to the lawyers.

Why are there so many educators in the political elite? Already Weber (1946:95) had pointed out that there is an elective affinity between lawyers and politicians and Bell (1994) has found out that politicians that participated in the legislative process of the regime created by the French Revolution were dominantly lawyers. There should not be much of a surprise. Usually lawyers are familiar with the legislative process (making laws, debating, arguing, negotiating) so they bring some sort of know-how to parliaments. Contrary to what happen to doctors or engineers, or other liberal professions, for many lawyers, going back to their professions is not costly and may find some professional benefits after serving in parliament in terms of contacts and knowledge.

However, the case of educators might be different. Uriarte (1997:269), following Norris and Lovenduski (1995), suggest that educators, like lawyers and journalists, are part of the “talking professions” who master the use of words both in speeches and in writing. These skills are relevant for the parliamentary duties: debate, argue, convince, negotiate, and write laws. However, there is a relevant absence of journalists and communicators in the regional elite. Although the “mastering of words” is an important explanation of the presence of educators, it can be complemented with another factor. In my opinion, the important proportion of educators in the political elite can be accounted for what Weber named “dispensability”. For Weber (1946:85), “the professional politician must also be economically ‘dispensable’, that is, his income must not depend upon the fact that he constantly and personally places his ability and thinking entirely, or at least by far predominantly, in the service of economic acquisition […] Neither the worker nor—and this has to be noted well—the entrepreneur, specially the modern, large-scale entrepreneur, is economically dispensable in this sense.” A large majority of educators in Spain are civil servants and as such, they have some privileges in terms of tenureship. Unlike other professionals, their jobs are secure. So, they can easily begin a career in politics and come back to the university or the school if the political career fails or is interrupted. The costs they may face when they come back to the school or the university are low in comparison with that of, say, workers or architects.

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33 The relative absence of journalists should not surprise. Already Weber found out that journalists did not find easy to enter politics except in the socialist party. “The reason”, explained Weber (1946:97), “lies in the strongly increased ‘indispensability’ of the journalist, above all, and the property less and hence professionally bound journalist, an indispensability which is determined by the tremendously increased intensity and tempo of journalistic operations. The necessity of gaining one’s livelihood by the writing of daily or at least weekly articles is like lead on the feet of the politicians”.

34 For Weber, lawyers are more dispensable than other groups like doctors, workers or entrepreneurs. Journalists, whom Weber (1946:96) considered a “pariah caste, which is always estimated by ‘society’ in terms of its ethically lowest representative”, are indispensable.
It is also interesting to note that 11% of regional MPs are workers, 7.4% are owners or entrepreneurs and 5.7% are managers. According to Weber, workers are less dispensable than owners and entrepreneurs, although in the Spanish regional elite it seems that workers get a better share of power than other professional groups. Contrary to what happens to owners and managers, workers presence in the elite remains more or less the same over the years, as can be seen in Table 2. The index of disproportionality indicates that workers are underrepresented (0.15 at the beginning of the eighties and 0.16 at the turn of the century) in the elite and this situation has remained stable over the years despite the proportional reduction of workers in society. The contrary seems to happen to owners and managers. Their presence in the elite diminishes (16% to 10%) during the period considered, although their relative weight in the structure of occupations in the Spanish society remains stable. Notwithstanding, this group is overrepresented in the political elite. The bias index goes from 2.85 at the beginning of the period to 1.75.

Blondel (1973:81) indicated that there were three models of parliaments according to the predominance of the professions. The “lawyers’ paradise” was characteristic of the industrialized world. Parliaments in the communist countries were dominated by workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia, while parliaments in developing countries saw the emergence of civil servants, teachers, and managers as the dominant professional groups. Spanish regional parliaments are a combination of the first and third model with clear tendencies aligned with the normal development of modern parliaments: a stabilization or reduction of lawyers and the opening of seats to other professional groups. Presumably, lawyers will keep playing an important role although it is also foreseeable that other groups (like educators) will consolidate and others, like civil servants, will grow.

Does it make any difference the party to which the politician belongs to? According to Putnam (1976:37), “the degree to which an elite diverges from the independence model of statistically perfect representation is closely related to its ideological orientation. The more conservative a party or regime, the greater the overrepresentation of upper-status social groups within its leadership”. In the case of the regional political elite, there are relevant differences among parties that may account for a differentiated social profile of politicians. I turn now to this topic.

Table 3. Party differences in the regional political elite in Spain (in %).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PSOE</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>Total elite (1980-2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average education</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University graduates</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The social outlook of politicians varies slightly according to territory and party. I will not provide here an analysis of the political elite of different regions, although I would like to focus on differences due to parties. There have been around 30 parties present in the 17 regional parliaments. The majority of them are regional parties which are active in just one region. This number complicates the analysis and might make it useless given the smallness and little relevance of some parties. Thus, I will focus my analysis on the two national parties with representatives in all regional parliaments during the period 1980-2005: the socialist party (PSOE, center-left) and the popular party (PP, center-right or right). Both are the major contenders in national and in most regional elections. The exception is the Basque country, Catalonia, and Navarre, where the major parties are the Basque Nationalist Party, Convergencia i Unió, and Unión del Pueblo Navarro, which might be considered the electoral brand of the PP in alliance with a local party in Navarre. The socialist and popular parties are either in the opposition or part of the minority government in these regions. All in all, both national parties gather 70% of the 4354 regional MPs that served between 1980 and 2006.

Considering the period under study and the two major parties, we can find some differences and similarities, as can be seen in Table 3. The socialist party has been traditionally more open to women than the conservative party. The PP incorporated women to the electoral lists much later than the PSOE, whose leaders followed a policy of positive discrimination for women reserving quotas in the electoral list and, later, some regional leaders introduced the “zip electoral list” consisting on alternating men and women in the electoral list. These measures promoted a larger presence of socialist women in regional parliaments. Soon, the conservative party followed and began placing women in the electoral list, but without a formal policy of affirmative action.

The average conservative MP is slightly older than the socialist one and this is so in all legislatures. The difference is stronger in the earliest legislatures when a generation of young politicians in the PSOE controlled a large part of regional parliaments. For instance, in the early eighties, the average socialist MP was 38.4 years old while the average conservative politician was 45.4 years old. However, twenty years later, by the beginning of the 21st century, the difference is not significant since both socialist and conservative MPs are 45 years old on average. In the case of the PP, a group of young politicians took power in the party by the 90s initiating a generational renovation, accounting for the reduction in the age gap. Conversely, early socialists PMs tend to stay longer in parliaments, contributing thus to the aging process of MPs.

Both parties are equally open to immigrants, although the major differences are related to education and professions. On average, conservative regional MPs are slightly more educated than the socialist ones, according to data presented in Table 3. Certainly, there are more conservative than socialist MPs holding a university degree. This might have a consequence in the quality of the legislative work of the regional parliaments.

Some might argue that political elites in modern countries are socially homogeneous, contrary to what happens in the population. Recruitment of politicians seems to privilege some social features and discriminate against others. Thus, females, immigrants, non educated, very young and very old people seem to be more absent from the elite than other social groups. The thesis of the social similarities between MPs irrespective of their political group assumes that

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35 See Valiente et al. (2003).
36 In some countries, conservative MPs are more educated than socialist or leftist ones (see Norris and Lovenduski 1995:101).
in order to attract a larger number of votes, parties need to offer electoral lists that appeal to a wider portion of electors and thus will reflect the social composition of the society. This is the basic element of the catch-all party model. Consequently, leftist and conservative parties will nurture their electoral list from similar social groups. In terms of professions, this is true only for liberal professionals among Spanish regional MPs. This is the only professional group (architects, engineers, doctors, economists, etc.) that is present in all parties. The exception seems to be the law related professions: The conservative party doubles the proportion of lawyers of the socialist party.

The main difference concerning professional groups is related to the traditional sources of recruitment of politicians for leftist and conservative parties. Data in Table 3 shows that the socialist party tends to recruit regional politicians from workers more often than the conservative party. Conversely, the conservative party tends to recruit from owners and managers a good deal of their politicians and certainly more often than the socialists. It is over ten times more likely that a worker becomes an MP in a leftist party than in a conservative one. There is also an important difference in terms of professions. Leftist regional MPs tend to be educators more often than conservative ones. The difference is significant and might be explained by the fact that educators are usually civil servants and consequently it is not costly in terms of professional careers. Another explanation is that there might be an elective affinity between education and politics. For some MPs, the function of the politician could be perceived to be that of educating the masses.

**Tentative conclusions**

It seems that being a man born in the region, educated and working as educator or in the legal system is one of the most frequent avenues to become part of the regional political elite in Spain. To be true, over the years, women have seen rising their chances of entering the regional political elite, while it is getting harder for non natives in the region to become part of the elite. While workers seem to have the same barriers over the years to play politics in regional parliaments, for managers and owners it is relatively easier to enter institutional politics. Overall, and contrary to what happens in other parliaments (Wessels 1997:85), regional parliaments in Spain have reduced the gap between the elite and society in the period 1980-2005. As Table 2 shows, the disproportion index diminishes in most groups considered, although the bias still exists as it is normal in every parliament. What has happened is that the Spanish society has been transformed in the last 25 years. More people are educated at the university level, more women access the public arena, there are more liberal professionals associated to university degrees. As a consequence, there seems that the gap between elite and society gets narrower. However, this is contingent upon the party we are dealing with, and it is also contingent upon the territory we consider. For instance, Castile-La Mancha seems more open to women and internal migrants than Catalonia. If we take into account that in Castile-La Mancha the socialist party has had always the absolute majority and in Catalonia a regional conservative coalition has enjoyed also a number of absolute majorities, then we may suggest that the different contribution of parties to the social profile of the elite makes an important difference.

Is there a relationship between the social background of politicians and political outputs? Few years ago, Blondel (1973:76) indicated that “we know that, in some way, the backgrounds, career aspirations, and ideologies, as well as the personality characteristics of
legislators will affect the nature of the process by which legislatures come to influence decision making.” 37 However, Putnam (1976:42), after reviewing a number of studies qualified the statement indicating that “the link between background and behavior is neither simple nor direct”. 38 According to Matthews (1985:25), the evidence presented in a number of studies is ambiguous and inconclusive. 39 Therefore, we can not make the claim that the social background of politicians will have an effect on legislation or the effectiveness of a political institution. However, Norris and Lovenduski (1995) found some evidence supporting the relationship between gender and legislative behavior suggesting that women may promote a number of distinctive issues being discussed in parliament. 40 Furthermore, I believe that Best and Cotta (2000:18) are quite close to reality when they indicate that the social background of politicians may make a difference in political outputs “if members of different parliamentary parties are recruited from mutually exclusive social settings and devoted to divergent political norms if it comes to parliamentary compromising and the formation of coalitions”.

The research agenda should follow this suggestion. It would be worth to find out whether there are differences between regional parliaments in law making and, furthermore, whether some regional parliaments pass bills with more or less consensus or conflict. Adopting consensus as the dependent variable, then we could try to find out whether the social profile of the elite, or even that of the hyper elite that makes decisions in parliaments, has any effect in legislative output.

37 Emphasis in the original.
38 See as well Patzelt (2002:85ff).
39 See, for instance, Edinger and Searing (1967) as a case of ambiguous results. The authors conclude that some social background variables perform better than others, and under certain circumstances, to predict elite attitudes and behavior.
40 See Norris (1999) for a list of references. It might well be the case that in modern politics, with closed electoral lists controlled by the party, party officials might think that laws related to social issues could be better defended by women MPs, rendering the relationship between gender and legislative behavior spurious.
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