Gender, State Architecture, and Political Representation: Evidence from the United Kingdom and Spain

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Abstract

To date, comparative studies of women’s descriptive representation have neglected the impact of political decentralization. Yet, political decentralization has been one of the most notable trends in Western Europe in recent decades and it affects party systems, party organization, and electoral campaigning at different levels of the political system. This paper aims to contribute to the emerging literature on territorial party politics by evaluating the relationship between decentralizing reforms, political parties, and women’s political representation. In seeking to explore this under-researched area, we evaluate the interaction of institutional effects with gender effects in the context of territorial constitutional reform, focusing on the potential effects of devolution on women’s descriptive representation (DRW) – that is, the numerical presence of women in political institutions. To do so, we undertake a small-n comparison over time of two decentralized European countries: the United Kingdom and Spain. This particular context allows us to investigate how and why institutions can be (re)negotiated to produce positive gender outcomes. We claim that the outcomes of institutional reform are filtered by parties’ internal dynamics and organizational inertias which, at the same time, are gendered, thus limiting the potential of gender equality reforms.

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Introduction

To date, comparative studies of women’s descriptive representation have neglected the impact of political decentralization. Yet, political decentralization has been one of the most notable trends in Western Europe in recent decades. As Hopkins argues, “multi-level electoral politics and the distribution of important policy competences to the regional level have become the norm in established democracies” (2009: 179). As the supply of vertically divided political authority – in both federal and decentralized forms – has become ever more politically relevant, Western European politics needs to be understood from a multi-level perspective (Swenden and Maddens 2009).

This paper aims to contribute to this emerging literature by evaluating the relationship between decentralizing reforms, political parties, and women’s political representation. Political decentralization affects party systems, party organization, and electoral campaigning at different levels of the political system (Hough and Jeffery 2006). When analyzing the ways in which decentralizing reforms can open up opportunities for innovation and change, territorial politics scholars have generally focused on minority nationalist and ethno-regionalist conflicts, largely ignoring issues of women and gender, as well as other marginalized populations (Vickers 2011a). This omission is particularly surprising given wider political developments in Western Europe, including the rise of candidate gender quotas (Caul 2006; Krook 2009) and the key role of women activists as agents in recent and ongoing processes of institutional and constitutional restructuring (Mackay 2009).

In seeking to explore this under-researched area, we evaluate the interaction of institutional effects with gender effects in the context of territorial constitutional reform, focusing on the potential effects of devolution from the central level to the regional units on women’s descriptive representation (DRW), that is, the numerical presence of women in political institutions. To do so, we undertake a small-n comparison over time of two decentralized European countries: the United Kingdom and Spain. We define political decentralization processes as the transference of decision-making power to sub-national political authorities, which creates a new tier of government and divides power vertically. This particular context allows us to investigate how and why institutions can be (re)negotiated to produce positive gender outcomes. In line with work in the field, we will focus on political parties, as they are the key actors both for candidate selection and the implementation of territorial reforms. Thus, we can only understand the outcomes of institutional reform by exploring the “inner lives” of parties. Parties’
internal dynamics and organizational inertias filter, absorb and even overturn the pressures arising from institutional change (Hopkin and Bradbury, 2006: 136). We conceive these as gendered dynamics, inertias and legacies which limit the potential of gender equality reforms (Kenny and Mackay forthcoming).

The paper is divided into four main sections. First, we review emerging debates over the relationship between state architecture and women’s politics. Second, we provide some background to our empirical cases. Third, we evaluate the gendered political opportunity structures opened up by decentralizing reforms. Fourth, we attempt to disentangle how the relationship between state architectures and women’s representation is mediated by party organization, particularly by the multi-level party dynamics which arise from the territorial structure of the state. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on the circumstances and conditions under which positive gender outcomes – in this case, numerical increases in women’s political representation – can be achieved. We argue that we cannot simply “read off” whether a particular form of state architecture is good or bad for women’s politics; rather, we contend that a more conditional approach is needed which pays special attention to institutional legacies, nestedness, and the interaction of formal and informal practices.

**Decentralization and women’s descriptive representation**

The growing literature on the influence of state architectures on women’s politics is a dynamic and emerging field of research (Chappell 2002; Haussman et al. 2010; Vickers 2009, 2010, 2011b). Researchers point out that state architecture is not neutral in its potential for women’s empowerment. Much of this debate has revolved around the relationship between gender and federalism, seeking to assess whether federalism is a barrier to or an opportunity for women’s equality-seeking (Vickers 2010). Some claim that federalism produces various forms of inequalities and disadvantages for women’s interests due to, among others, the asymmetry in public services delivered at the sub-national level, the saliency of the territorial cleavage, which can inhibit the political expression of gender and fragment progressive alignments, and the existence of multiple veto points which conservatives might use to obstruct gender-friendly changes (Grace 2011; Haussman 2005). Conversely, other researchers sustain that federalism allows women political activists to transfer their activism across levels (Bashevkin 1998; Chappell 2002). Others address the issue of institutional and constitutional restructuring more broadly and argue that political decentralization might provide
“windows” or “moments” of opportunity for political and institutional actors to press for and implement institutional reforms (Mackay 2004a: 108). However, to date, this literature has not fully evaluated the relationship between state architecture and women’s political representation. When work in this area has addressed women’s numerical representation, it has often underplayed or ignored party political factors, and often over privileges either systemic variables such as electoral systems or the role of women’s movement organization (Vickers 2009, 2010).

Meanwhile, when we turn to the literature on party politics, we find another paradox: research on gender and party politics neglects the multi-level dynamics of the political setting, while the growing body of work on territorial party politics neglects issues of women and gender. The first set of scholars have shown how the number of female candidates and elected representatives are, on the one hand, related to systemic factors such as socioeconomic characteristics, electoral rules, district magnitude, party systems, or types of party (Mateo Díaz 2005; Norris 1997; Rule and Zimmerman 1994). However, while the political system structures the overall context of recruitment, parties are the main “gatekeepers” to political office in most countries and their decisions are structured within the context of formal party rules and informal norms and practices (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Operating within these broader political and party settings are the factors which most directly influence the political recruitment of individuals – “supply side” factors, such as individual resources and motivation, and “demand side” factors, such as the attitudes of gatekeepers. To a limited extent, these scholars have addressed the relationship between decentralization and DRW. While some argue that decentralized candidate selection process are more likely to bring about equitable representation of women on the basis that localized concerns engage more women (Lovenduski and Norris 1993) or that a selection process taking place closer to ordinary party members might more easily attract previously excluded groups (Norris 1997), most empirical accounts claim that centralization is more conducive to the selection of higher numbers of women candidates (Vickers 2009, 2010).

Alternatively, research on the impact of state architectures on political parties shows that devolution processes shape the most relevant dimensions of party organization, namely distributional conflicts over resources, definition of platforms, and electoral and governing strategies (Deschower 2006; Hopkin 2003). The type of vertical integration between party levels (the extent of organizational linkages and cooperation between central and subcentral party levels) determine the degree of organizational
autonomy allocated to sub-national party branches, including autonomy on candidate selection processes, and of sub-national party influence in central party boards (Detterbeck and Hepburn 2010; Thorlakson 2009). Both sets of literatures have neglected the study of how different vertical integration arrangements might eventually help or hinder the adoption and effective implementation of gender quota reforms.

Why is state architecture relevant for understanding women’s presence? As Vickers argues (2009: 29), “measuring women’s presence in multiple sites is essential for understanding their representation in, and impacts on, governance in compounded states”. Several scholars have argued that political decentralization has the potential of advancing women’s numerical representation for various reasons. On what could be labeled the supply-side arguments of political decentralization, it has been argued that the closer decision making processes are to the community the more comfortable women feel to get involved in politics (Johnson 2003; Goetz 2004). On the demand-side three main arguments have been put forward as to why decentralization is “good” for women: first, more governments mean more candidates and officeholders are needed; second, the lesser importance of sub-national arenas/relative lack of power of regional deputies compared to members of national legislative assemblies; and third, the lack of incumbency due to newness (in the first elections) (Vickers 2009: 29; Murray 2008). Others argue that the regional level may serve as the training ground for women’s ascendant careers to national offices (Vengroff et al., 2003).

Notwithstanding, the advantages of decentralization for gender equality, including descriptive representation, are contingent on the very same motivations for decentralization by institutional architects and by the existence of a favorable political opportunity structure for the advancement of gender equality. Furthermore, institutional reforms interact with historical legacies, which can block the efforts of gender equity entrepreneurs. As Mackay (2004a: 113) notes: “developments within existing institutions – and the design of new institutions – may be more path-determined by past commitments, institutional legacies and practices than by institutional architects or self-conscious programmes of change”. In assessing the success of campaigns to increase the political representation of women, then, we need to conceive of political parties as organizations with their own “histories, ideological traditions, formal rules, standard operating procedures, and interpersonal relationships” (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006: 136), which may limit or block the outcomes of gender equality reforms.
Decentralization in the UK and Spain

The dynamics through which institutional effects (constitutional reform) interact with gender effects (DRW) are analyzed through a comparison of the processes of adoption of candidate gender quotas in the United Kingdom and Spain.

Both countries have experienced a significant transference of power from the central to the regional level in the past decades and share various characteristics: (i) they are parliamentary monarchies with strong party organizations – the electoral and legislative arenas are party-determined; (ii) the multinational character of the polity is well reflected in the party system(s); (iii) the devolution process has been asymmetrical in the two cases reflecting the dissimilar territorial salience across regions – though the gap has almost closed in Spain; (iv) instruments of direct democracy are not relevant for decision making and federal dynamics. The British and the Spanish cases can actually be considered to be “federations in the making” or “quasi-federations” (Solozábal Echavarria 1996; Bogdanor 2003), which makes them valuable case studies for understanding how historical legacies interact with institutional factors when it comes to evaluating the effect of state architectures on women’s descriptive representation.

In each country, political decentralization started at very different periods. Whereas Spain’s democratization and political decentralization were concurrent processes in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the UK, the devolution campaign gained momentum in the 1990s in a context of a long established democracy\(^1\). In Spain, the constitutional model established two different procedures for devolution justified on historical and political grounds, which differed both in speed of competence transference and institutional development, though it permitted any region as well, the so-called autonomous communities (*comunidades autónomas*), after a period of five years, a broad leeway to choose, through its regional statute of autonomy, the degree of devolution desired within the limits established by the Constitution. This incremental adaptation gradually transformed Spain from an asymmetric decentralized system into a largely symmetric quasi-federation (Aja 2003; Colino 2010).

At the national level, the bicameral Cortes, are composed of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate. Spain is a clear example of asymmetrical bicameralism as the Senate does not participate in the investiture vote of the prime minister and acts as a second-reading chamber with no veto power even when bills affect territorial interests.

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\(^1\) This followed several unsuccessful attempts to introduce devolution in Scotland and Wales in the 1970s, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.
At the sub-national level, the seventeen regions have their own elected legislative and executive institutions. Legislative concurrent powers are predominant and revenue-sharing is the main funding model (Colino 2010). Unconstitutionality appeals can be presented by the prime minister, the Ombudsman, 50 deputies, 50 senators, and the regional governments and parliaments. Nonetheless, only the appeals presented by the central government suppose the immediate suspension of regional laws.

The UK system of devolution is asymmetric, in that the devolved regions have different sets of competences, institutional forms, and ways of working. For example, while the Scottish Parliament can pass primary as well as secondary legislation, the National Assembly for Wales has, until the recent March 2011 referendum, only been able to pass secondary legislation in devolved areas. Other matters remain reserved to the Westminster Parliament, which does not normally legislate in devolved areas without consent. In fact, the UK has always been a territorially asymmetrical state, with the devolution reforms of the 1990s serving as the latest iteration of this “tradition of asymmetry”. As such, the devolution reforms were not approached as a comprehensive, integrated reform package, but rather as a series of “disconnected responses” to separate demands and causes articulated within territorially-specific settings (Jeffery 2009: 292). Despite the delegation of central government powers, the UK’s constitutional system continues to rest upon the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. In theory, these devolved powers could be rescinded at any time, while in Europe, most systems of federal or regional government are constitutionally enshrined. In practice, however, the devolution settlement – which was introduced by referendums – is politically, if not constitutionally, entrenched.

The UK Government communicates with the devolved administrations through a number of formal mechanisms – primarily through the Memorandums of Understanding and Concordats between Westminster and the devolved administrations and the Joint Ministerial Committee. Yet, in practice, intergovernmental coordination remains underdeveloped and continues to work mainly through informal linkages among officials in devolved and UK administrations. As such, in contrast to Spain, devolution in the UK lacks “generally understood, generally accepted rules of the game” (Jeffery 2009: 308).

Having provided the background to our cases, we will mainly focus on politywide political parties in our analysis. Indeed, as politywide parties dominate the political institutions of even highly decentralized systems, they design decentralization
and advocate institutional change in a particular direction (Hopkin and Houten 2009: 131). In the two countries under study debates over women’s descriptive representation have largely centered on candidate quotas for women in political parties – since they are the gatekeepers of political representation. Additionally, in both cases, the adoption of quotas has been driven by the main left-wing parties, in this case the British Labour Party and the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE). While we do address the wider party system and political context, we focus largely on these two parties in the remainder of our paper.

Opportunity structure of devolution
In order to evaluate the extent to which devolution affects women’s citizenship, that is, how it has increased the opportunities for women’s participation in political institutions at one or more levels, we need to evaluate institutional architects’ motivation to undertake a constitutional reform that significantly alters the state architecture.

A common concern in both devolution processes was to address the national diversity of the polity and the will of self-government expressed by national minorities: the Scotts and the Welsh in the British case, and the Catalan and Basque in the Spanish case (Moreno 2001, Greer 2007).

During the Spanish transition to democracy, one of the principal conflicts dealt with the centre-periphery cleavage regarding the self-government demands of various regions which claimed a distinct national identity, particularly Catalonia and the Basque Country. All political parties acknowledged that this conflict hanged as a sword of Damocles on the very success of the transition and agreed on the need to redesign the centralized territorial organization of the state. Indeed, decentralization was not only a way of managing national conflict but it was also considered as an integral part of the democratization process.

Spanish democratization also had to face the unfavorable and retrograde political, legal, and patriarchal cultural norms developed by the authoritarian regime. Most of the grievances about women’s issues were framed within autonomous feminist organizations which brought them onto the political agenda. However, the constant menace of a reactionary coup led women’s organizations to work closer with other

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2 We do not address Northern Ireland in this paper, as it is marked by a unique political setting and has a territory-specific party system in which no “mainland” parties seek election (see Hough and Jeffery 2006 for further discussion).
antiauthoritarian groups, such as left-wing political parties that were democratic, but not explicitly feminist, which were simultaneously forced to moderate their positions on social change to assure a successful transition (Pereira 2003; Scanlon 1990).

In the late 1970s, women’s representation was an issue of very low priority in the political agenda. In the three first federal legislative elections (1977, 1979, 1982) women’s representation oscillated between 5% and 6% (this means around 20 out of 350 seats). On average, the first regional elections held in 1983 yielded the same results (average 5.6%) (Verge 2009: 82). In fact, democratization and decentralization were not accompanied by any favorable measure to women’s representation nor was there a public debate on the issue as these proportions were in tune with European standards (excluding Scandinavian countries). In a mimetic reproduction of central institutions, regions adopted the same electoral system in place for the national lower house, namely PR D’Hondt method with closed party lists. Thus, women-friendly measures would be dependent on political parties’ will, encouraging feminists to establish alliances with political parties, particularly those of the Left.

In the late 1970s the Social Democratic PSOE established a women’s section within the party, in which party feminists could (try to) advance a women-friendly political agenda. The impulse for its creation came from party feminists with double membership (in the party and the feminist movement) and it initially focused on advising the party on the elaboration of bill proposals related to gender issues, among many others the legalization of divorce and abortion. Two events led the caucus to take over the issue of women’s under-representation: first, the aforementioned disappointing levels of elected women deputies in the first elections and, second, the launching by the 1979 French Parti Socialiste of a quota campaign for the European elections inspiring Spanish party feminists to fight for having this measure replicated in their own parties. By that time, the feminist caucus was quite reduced in size, it did not count with the enthusiastic support of party leaders, and it was even seen with contempt by many female party members who believed a women’s caucus had the potential to impinge on women a self-discrimination, so the role of individual women in leading the lobby activities towards this goal cannot be neglected (Threlfall 2007: 1080; Fernández Felgueroso 1990: 196; Astelarra 2005: 134). In the mid 1980s the women’s caucus was

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3 For example, in 1980, levels of DRW were 5.3% in France, 7.9% in Italy, 7.5% in Belgium, and 3.1% in the UK (see Mossuz-Lavau, 1988).
transformed into an executive secretariat, acquiring the highest status in the party board and counting with more resources to lobby for the introduction of a gender quota.

The compounded structure of the polity has allowed party feminists to play the two-level game in their efforts to have gender quotas approved, transferring activism across party levels. Gender quotas were pioneered by a regional party federated with the PSOE, the Party of the Catalan Socialists (PSC). In 1982 the PSC guaranteed women 12% of the places on party committees and on candidate lists and in 1987 proportions were raised to 15%, a number equivalent to the party’s female membership at the time (Verge 2009). Once the sub-national sister party had established and tested the gender quota the vertical (upward) contagion took place.

After having published several statistics on the acute imbalance between female party membership and female officeholders and diverse documents which analyzed the experiences of other European Social Democratic parties, in 1986 the Women’s Secretariat conducted a survey asking party members for their agreement with positive actions aimed at increasing women’s representation and with the inclusion of a gender quota in the party constitution. The questions were positively answered by 87% and 67% of members, respectively (Verge 2007: 171). In January 1988 the party conference passed a 25% quota in party positions and electoral candidatures. The endorsement of the PSOE of the 25% quota eased its introduction in the PSC in 1990, observing then a new vertical (downward) contagion. It should be noted that in the two cases the support of party leaders was key to have the quotas approval and to surmount the opposition of medium-level party cadres. The quota provisions were gradually enlarged until reaching a gender neutral formulation of parity between sexes in 1997 (PSOE) and in 2000 (PSC). In both the adoption and the enlargement of the gender quota electoral considerations were present. Party feminists argued quotas would help close the gender gap that disadvantaged the PSOE vis-à-vis its main right-wing competitor, the Popular Party (Verge 2006: 128-9)

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4 The PSOE has sub-national units in each region, with the exception of the PSC in Catalonia, which operates as a sister party rather than as a territorial unit, borned out of the merging back in 1979 of PSOE’s Catalan branch merged with two Catalan Social democratic parties. While the PSOE’s vertical integration with its sub-national units is very tight and the party works as a rather centralized structure, the relationship between PSOE and PSC is more of a federal type. The PSC is completely autonomous to recruit and select its candidates and the reform of its statutes does not need PSOE’s approval (Verge and Barberà, 2009).

5 In which any sex is entitled to neither less than 40% nor more than 60% of representation in party committees and candidatures.
In the case of the British Labour Party, there are “a number of stories to tell, all closely interconnected” (Mackay 2004b: 110). One of the most significant changes has been the transformation in levels of women’s representation within the party over time. As a result of sustained strategic campaigning within the Labour Party, organized women’s activists aligned with the party’s left were able to put women’s representation on the agenda starting in the early 1980s, linking arguments for gender-balanced representation to the party’s wider programme of modernization. A key turning point in the path to reform came in the mid to late 1980s, when gender equity entrepreneurs within the party published a series of Fabian pamphlets linking Labour’s electoral failures to the gender gap in Labour’s electoral support. As a result, senior male party officials became increasingly “willing to concede greater women’s representation as part of a strategy to win the next election” (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998: 4).

The first major programme of reform for women was a package of internal party quotas, crafted by a broader coalition of women in the trade unions and in senior office in the party. The campaign for gender quotas in parliamentary selections met with considerably more resistance: while the party supported women’s political representation in principle, members generally opposed “any action from the centre” to enforce gender balance mechanisms in parliamentary selection (Short 1996: 20). Given the obstacle of the British electoral system and the significant resistance of local parties to “central interference”, all-women shortlists (AWS) was seen to be one of the only measures that could ensure that Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) selected women candidates, requiring at least some of them to chose from ‘women-only shortlists’ (Russell 2005: 109). The National Executive Committee (NEC) did adopt the policy of “one woman on a shortlist” in 1988 and actively encouraged CLPS to select women candidates, but progress on women’s representation continued to move slowly. In this setting, a compromise was reached, drawn up the same group of trade union women who had campaigned for internal party quotas and who now sat on the newly reformed NEC women’s committee. The committee proposed that AWS be applied in half of all winnable seats, and half of all seats where MPs were retiring. The measure received the full backing of new party leader John Smith and was proposed to the party conference in 1993 as part of a larger package of modernization forms, including the introduction of OMOV (One Member One Vote). However, legal challenges to the policy stalled the AWS agenda at UK level (Eagle and Lovenduski 1998; Lovenduski 2005).
Parallel to this, processes of decentralization and campaigns for home rule for the historic nations of Scotland and Wales and the contested territory of Northern Ireland opened up new possibilities for regional feminist actors to push for gains in DRW (Kenny and Mackay forthcoming). Whereas the devolution debate in Wales was largely top down, in Scotland, women activists working inside and outside political parties – in particular, the Scottish Labour Party, as well as civic reform groups such as the Scottish Constitutional Convention and its Women’s Issues Group – successfully gendered these reform debates (Russell et al 2002). In response, all Scottish parties declared concern with the under-representation of women in politics. In Wales, in contrast, opportunities for gender equity entrepreneurs to campaign for women’s political representation were constrained by the ‘general ambivalence about the devolution project’ (Mackay 2003: 84). The “story” in Wales, then, is not one of grassroots mobilization, but rather one of a strategic coalition – a group of powerful women in influential positions, including academics, trade union, party officials, and party activities - who pushed for positive action to promote women candidates (Chaney 2008: 273). Both the Scottish and the Welsh Labour Party adopted the “twinning” mechanism – devised by Scottish Labour women activists and academics – which required all constituencies to be paired on the basis of geographical proximity and winnability, with each pair having to select one male and one female candidate. In the results of the first elections to the devolved institutions, women comprised 37.2% of the new Scottish Parliament and 40% of the new National Assembly for Wales (rising shortly afterwards to 42%).

As can be seen in both cases, positive action in candidate selection came only after women had obtained institutionalized spaces in the party organization. Party feminists then used these as a springboard to achieve wider influence in party-decision making, pushing for further and farther-reaching institutional reforms in candidate selection (Lovenduski 2005). We also see the importance of timing and sequence – in both cases, women were able to take advantage of the intersection of particular reform trajectories and strategically frame their demands within wider domestic and international debates. Whereas by 1990 quotas had been adopted in about 20 countries, during the subsequent decade the number had increased to over 50 (Krook, 2009).

6 For example, internal debates around quotas in both the British Labour Party and the PSOE were shaped by the participation of party feminists in the Socialist International Women organization (see Threlfall 2007; Eagle and Lovenduski 1998).
However, while in the UK DRW and constitutional change were tightly coupled, in Spain constitutional issues and DRW were not linked until the late 1990s (Valiente 2005: 175). As a result, the high percentages of women parliamentarians in Scotland and Wales were not matched by Spanish regional parliaments until 2003, two decades after the first sub-state elections. Finally, in both the UK and Spain, the “story” of candidate selection reform is not one of straightforward linear progress. Historically, the success of gender equality reforms in candidate selection in both the British Labour Party and the PSOE has been dependent on the relevance of women’s political representation to the party’s electoral fortunes and to the (male) party leadership’s wider priorities (Mackay 2004b: 110-1; Verge, 2007: 170-2).

Interaction of institutional factors with historical legacies: Party politics and DRW

One of the most important factors affecting women’s political representation is party organization. The type of vertical integration between party levels (the extent of organizational linkages and cooperation between central and subcentral party levels) determine the degree of organizational autonomy allocated to sub-national party branches (“self-rule”), including autonomy on candidate selection processes, and of sub-national party influence in central party boards (“shared-rule”) (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010; Thorlakson 2009; Fabre and Méndez, 2009).

Federalism tends to be related to decentralized candidate selection7 (Epstein 1980: 31; Harmel 1981: 86; Gallagher and Marsh 1988). However, although one can expect political decentralization to foster redistribution of power from the central party organs to the party regional branches (Kollman and Chibber, 2004), the relationship between state architecture and party organization is not necessarily straightforward. Therefore, party system characteristics cannot simply be “read off” from the configuration of the state’s territorial institutions, nor are decentralizing reforms necessarily accompanied by party organizational change (Hopkin 2009: 183).

We argue that the relative success of quota reforms is determined by two key factors, which substantially relate to the two aforementioned types of intra-party “rules” in the institutions of candidate selection and recruitment. On the one hand, for quotas to be effectively implemented at the various elections the party competes in, all party

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7 We acknowledge that different electoral systems lead to different candidate selection arrangements and that women’s representation is strongly mediated by electoral systems. But in line with recent research in women and politics field, we argue that it is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for higher levels of DRW (Norris, 2004).
levels should be committed to the measure adopted. This relates to the extent to which regional branches have participated in the particular decision-making process conducive to the adoption of the quota (“shared-rule”). If the national leadership includes several regional representatives or party conferences include a significant number of regional representatives then, as Threlfall puts it (2007: 1085), “policy from above is also policy from below”. Conversely, if regional representatives are absent or excluded, quota reforms might raise suspicions of illegitimate party centralism.

On the other hand, the implementation of gender quotas is also more effective the more centralized candidate selection processes are. First, the party central leadership is more likely to be well educated and liberal in their attitudes towards women (Randall 1987). Second, centralized selection processes neutralize local power monopolies and avoid self-nomination (Hinojosa 2005; Baldez 2004: 238), which may be disadvantageous to women’s representation because women are less likely to promote their own candidacies (Fox and Lawless 2004: 275) and have less resources to finance their campaign (Rodríguez 2003: 227). And, third, centralized gender-friendly guidelines regarding candidate selection can effectively trickle down to the local nominating committees (Vickers 2010: 418). Conversely, decentralization may sometimes enhance the power of local selectorates to the point that it might impair the ability of the party to work cohesively in promoting national party programmes and policies (Rahat 2009: 84).

Whereas political decentralization has clearly shaped Spanish politywide parties’ electoral and governing strategies and they all organize according to the structure of the state, their internal decentralization has remained to a great extent isolated from the broad process of institutional change. Indeed, the degree of political decentralization of the state is greater than intra-party decentralization (Montero 2005: 68). In the UK, all three main politywide parties have responded to the new challenges posed by the devolution reforms of the 1990s, adapting their organizations to the decentralized context of government and party competition. Given the asymmetrical nature of the reform, devolution had a stronger impact on party politics in Scotland and Wales, where the territorial salience is more relevant, particularly on those parties with electoral strongholds in these territories, namely the Liberal Democrats and especially the Labour Party. Yet, again, we see that there is no “perfect correlation” (Riker 1975: 137)

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8 Even if the party leadership is committed to gender equality in representation, male medium-level cadres might strongly oppose the adoption of quotas as they threat their current dominant position.
between changes in state architecture and party organizational change: all of the British politywide parties have avoided large-scale internal organizational reform and any adjustments that have been made have often been “insubstantial and always evolutionary”, leaving many long-standing structures and practices in tact (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006: 150).

When we compare current degrees of vertical integration of British and Spanish politywide parties significant differences emerge. For example, the PSOE presents significantly higher levels of ‘shared-rule’ than the British Labour Party, incorporating regional branches and leaders in central decision-making to a much greater extent (Fabre and Méndez-Lago 2009). While the British Labour Party increasingly recognizes the territorial autonomy of the Scottish and Welsh parties, no seats in the National Executive Committee (NEC) are reserved for regional representatives, and the NEC retains its central role in the British Labour Party’s organizational structure. While Scottish and Welsh members can attend the national Labour Party conference, they are not formally recognized and constitute a small proportion of total delegates (Hopkin 2009: 188; Laffin and Shaw 2007). In the PSOE, the territorial inclusiveness is a criterion always applied in the composition of party organs in the quasi-consensual negotiations which take place during party conferences, including the main decision-making body, the Federal Executive Commission (Comisión Ejecutiva Federal). PSOE’s regional party branches have their own bureaucracy and organs of self-rule. However, they replicate the central party structure since central party statutes lay out how party branches must be organized and reforms of regional statutes must be approved by the central organs. Furthermore, regional conferences are celebrated in cascade after the national one has been held so the principles adopted at the federal level are subsequently translated at the lower echelons of the party organization.

Turning to candidate selection, PSOE’s regional branches have a consultative role in national elections as it is provincial-constituency parties which draft candidate tickets and submit them to a national electoral commission which holds veto power and may rearrange the order of the candidates listed. The composition of this electoral commission takes territorial balance into account. This national organ subsequently presents the lists to the central organs for final approval. The regional branches of the party select candidates to regional parliaments, though the central party organs must give its approval too. Within the regional party branches, the party board also remains in control of the candidate selection process: although local branches put forward
candidate names, the regional party executive committee establishes the order of candidates in the list and is in charge of granting the application of the party’s principles at this level. Since 1999 a representative of the Women’s Sections sits in the national electoral commission and holds veto power. So lists which do not comply with the parity principle are amended or candidates are reordered throughout the list (Verge, 2007: 172). In the 1999 regional elections the PSOE elected 37% of women (approximately a 52% net increase) as opposed to PP which elected 28%. Further measures were adopted to ensure that parity reaches the winning positions.

Candidate selection in the British Labour Party presents a more complicated picture. Despite its highly centralized structure, the British Labour Party has a long tradition of decentralized constituency-based selection (Denver 1988), due in part to the single-member, first-past-the-post electoral system. In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, the process became increasingly centralized as part of a wider reform trajectory of party modernization (see Russell 2005). In the run-up to the 1999 elections for the devolved institutions, questions were raised as to the devolution of decision-making within the party. However, for the party leadership, the priority was not on devolving selection procedures to the Scottish and Welsh parties, but rather on attracting a wider pool of applications to ensure that seats in the new devolved institutions would not simply go the ‘usual suspects’ (Russell 2005). The party introduced a pre-selection approval procedure, which established a central panel of approved constituency and list candidates. The selection boards that drew up these approved lists included both politywide party members, Scottish and Welsh party members, and non-party members (Bradbury et al. 2000). While constituency selection was left to an OMOV vote, the electoral boards overseeing list selection were made up of members from both the regional party branch and the politywide party branch.

This highly centralized approach proved to be controversial, with some concerns that these changes were an attempt to consolidate New Labour support within the Scottish party. Party officials were accused of implementing an ‘ideological test’ of the New Labour credentials of prospective candidates, rejecting several prominent party figures on the nationalist-left wing of the party (Bradbury et al 2000). The twinning scheme also generated controversy, with accusations that some candidates were ‘twinned out’ of the selection process through central party intervention. The

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9 The authors are grateful to Xavier Coller and Helder Ferreira do Vale for sharing their database on Spanish regional elites in order to calculate the parties’ average means of elected women.
controversy over the 1999 selections created significant pressure for internal party decision making to be devolved downward, leading to a distinct ‘change of tone’ as well as several “organizational concessions” on the part of the British Labour Party (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006: 142). In 2000, control over leadership selection was devolved to the Scottish and Welsh parties, while a year later, control over candidate selection was also devolved (Laffin and Shaw 2007).

These differences have important consequences for the outcomes of gender equality reforms. In Spain, the strong shared-rule combined with a limited self-rule has allowed PSOE’s gender equality reforms to be successfully implemented and effectively enforced at both central and regional party levels (Threlfall 2007). Integrated party policy processes and centralized candidate selection have helped to overcome the potential fragmenting effect of multiple levels.

Tight vertical integration has also allowed the PSOE to instill a contagion effect on gender quotas reform from the party to the institutional level. Efforts for the introduction of a statutory quota were initiated in the national lower house in 1996. All bills presented by left-wing parties, among them the PSOE and the PSC, to make parity mandatory were rejected due to the opposition of the conservative Popular Party (PP), which held the majority of seats (Verge 2007). Nonetheless, the blockade to gender quotas at the national assembly was partially circumvented at the regional level. In June 2002, two regions led by the PSOE Castile-La Mancha (single-party government) and the Balearic Islands (senior coalition member) incorporated zipping (men and women alternate from top to bottom of the candidates’ tickets) into their regional electoral laws. Although autonomous communities can pass legislation affecting regional elections, these laws have to comply with the general principles established by the national electoral regime. The central PP-led government lodged an appeal to the Constitutional Court, effectively suspending the implementation of these reforms. In response, the PSOE voluntarily adopted zipping on its party lists for elections in both regions in 2003, which resulted in high rates of DRW (Castile-La Mancha 51.2% and Balearic I. 47.4%). The PP countered by making a rhetorical commitment to full gender equality in party positions and institutional representation and experienced a net rise in women’s representation in the majority of regional assemblies as well as in the national lower house (Verge 2011).

In the 2004 general elections the PSOE obtained the majority of seats and announced the preparation of a bill to promote gender equality in different policy areas,
including political office. The so-called Equality Law, passed in March 2007, forces parties to incorporate a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% of any sex into candidates’ lists for all elections (legislative, regional, local and European Parliament)\(^\text{10}\). The Equality Law allows for more favorable measures for women in regional electoral laws, supporting the legality of zipping, which shall produce lists with 50% of positions for both men and women. In the most recent regional elections (May 2007) women’s presence at the regional level mounted to 42.8%. Despite the quota provisions, cross-party differences still exist: whereas the PSOE averages 46.7%, the PP averages 39.8%, having failed to reach 40% of women’s representation in seven regions.

In the case of the British Labour Party, because of its highly centralized structure, once the centre was persuaded, the party was able to enforce quota reforms in both Scotland and a recalcitrant Wales to ensure gender balance in candidate selection (Russell et al 2002). However, the trend post-1999 has been one of internal devolution. Central party control over candidate selection procedures has now been devolved to Scottish Labour, although these decisions take place within a framework of centrally prescribed principles (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006). Yet, despite the authority that has been devolved from the centre, the Scottish party has increasingly withdrawn from the selection process after 1999, signaling a return to the party’s past tradition of decentralized constituency-based selection (Kenny 2011). After the controversies of the 1999 selections, the party has also been extremely reluctant to implement or enforce strong equality guarantees, with a detrimental impact on trends in the recruitment and election of female candidates over time (Mackay and Kenny 2007).

While Labour remains the only party to implement strong equality guarantees in both regions, there is some (limited) evidence of a “contagion effect” in 1999. In response to Scottish Labour’s use of equality measures, the Scottish National Party implemented *unofficial* measures to encourage women to stand for election; similarly, in Wales, Plaid Cymru implemented a “gender template” on the regional lists (Russell et al 2002). Post-1999, however, DRW has been pursued far more vigorously in Wales than Scotland, with momentum being maintained by key ‘champions’ within the main parties (Mackay 2003). In contrast, the issue of DRW has not retained high salience for Scottish political parties since 1999, nor has it remained a matter of party competition

\(^{10}\) In the meanwhile, two other regions reformed their electoral laws. In 2005 the Basque Country (led by nationalist parties) granted women 50% of candidatures in party lists and Andalusia (led by the PSOE) introduced zip lists.
In contrast, DRW was highly politically salient in the UK general election in 2010, although ultimately none of the British politywide parties met their own targets for women’s representation, nor have they come close to matching the levels attained in Scotland and Wales (Kenny and Mackay forthcoming).

We can explain these differences, in part, by considering the institutional and historical legacies within which these parties are “nested” (Chappell 2011; Mackay 2009). The process of decentralization began in Spain in the context of forty years of dictatorship. Therefore, Spanish parties were primarily concerned with establishing strong, united, and cohesive organisations, and the centralization of power within the party was seen as the best way to achieve these objectives (see Fabre and Méndez-Lago 2009). In contrast, devolution in the UK occurred in a long-established democratic system with political parties that were already institutionalised and which had already developed a territorial dimension prior to devolution (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006: 137). Evidence from the UK suggests that elements of the “old” and the “new” continue to uneasily coexist with each other, and that tensions between central intervention and local control are ongoing. Furthermore, as the central Scottish party has increasingly withdrawn from selection decisions – in part due to the perceived controversy of central intervention post-1999 – participants in the selection process have been left with considerable leeway to circumvent or subvert reforms and to return to past practices of local patronage and privileging of “favourite sons” (Kenny 2011).

Concluding remarks

The analysis of Spain and the UK provides some useful insights into the circumstances under which positive gender outcomes can be achieved. In both cases, timing and sequence were extremely important. The intersection of feminist campaigns with wider reform debates, both domestic and international, opened up new possibilities for gendered institutional innovation. Evidence from both cases points to the need to consider a longer time-frame when evaluating the ‘success’ of institutional reforms, as in both countries, seemingly moderate packages of institutional reform (such as internal party quotas) had significantly radical effects over time.

As Sawer and Vickers argue (2011: 9), “the timing of the creation of political institutions is of major importance in determining the kind of gender norms that are incorporated in the new political architecture”. In line with recent work on institutional (re)design, we see some evidence that gender concerns are better integrated “at the
start” of processes of institutional and constitutional restructuring (Chappell 2011; Mackay 2009; Vickers 2009). Yet, at the same time, we have shown that Spain and the UK present a more complicated picture. In the UK, the devolved institutions are ‘new’ institutions but simultaneously they are nested within a wider institutional system, as well as within past historical legacies, which continue to limit the potential of gender equality reforms. In contrast, in Spain, although gender concerns were not integrated at the ‘start’ of devolution, substantial progress on DRW has been made over time. Although more work needs to be done to unpack the complex relationship between ‘newness’ and gender, we can see in both cases that “the securing of gender equality, like devolution itself, is a process not an event” (McMillan and Fox 2010: 12).

This means, in line with a more “conditional approach”, that we can’t just read off state architecture to see if it’s good or bad for women’s politics. State structures’ positive or negative impacts depend on the characteristics of individual countries’ institutions, policy sectors, and even vary with time (Chappell 2002; Smith 2008; Vickers 2010). We argue that political parties are key components of the institutional setting, and need to be considered as independent actors in any analysis of the relationship between gender and state architecture. Crucially, they are also gendered actors whose internal dynamics and organizational inertias filter the pressures arising from institutional change.

References


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