Party Organisation in Decentralised Countries:
The cases of Spain and the United Kingdom

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Decentralisation, regionalisation, devolution, several words refer to the transfer of power to sub-state levels of government. Whatever the name, this is a typically liberal and pluralist policy. It refers to a distribution of power that is not concentrated at the centre. It also suggests, at a more normative level, that diversity is healthy and desirable because it safeguards individual liberties and promotes debate, argument and understanding (Heywood, 1998: 32). The argument is also made that decentralisation brings decisions closer to the people, according to the principle of subsidiarity, and fosters democratic practices and citizenship skills (Teles and Landy, 2001: 114). Diversity, internal debate and mass participation are concepts that political parties have sometimes struggled with, relying instead on a more controlled and centralised model of organisation and management of internal affairs. Therefore, it become interesting to look at the way political parties have adapted (or not) to state decentralisation.

Regionalisation affects state-wide parties because it allows policy divergence between regions and between the regions and the state. Regional governments make their own policies and create a political context where the issues at stake and the political debate are different from those at the central level. This may then be reflected in the organisation of the state-wide parties, with regional branches allowed to diverge politically and make their own decisions in the regional arena. Another trend in regionalised states can have an impact on state-wide parties: how the regional political agenda affects central politics. The irruption of regional issues and interests in the central political debate can happen in two ways: state-wide parties may consider it in their interest to use regional issues in their state-wide campaigns without any real involvement of their regional branches in the process, or they may integrate regional concerns in their strategy as a result of the influence and participation of the regional branches in the state-wide party.

In this paper, we study the impact of the organisation of the state on the organisation of state-wide political parties on two particular aspects: the autonomy of the regional branches in regional politics and the involvement of these regional branches in the central organs of state-wide parties. Early studies of state organisation and party organisation analysed the impact of federalism on party organisation, often in Canada (Chandler and Chandler, 1987; Smiley, 1987), but also in Germany (Scharpf, 1995). More recently, trends towards decentralisation in Western Europe and the process of European
integration renewed the interest of the discipline in the organisation of political parties in a multi-level environment (Deschouwer, 2000 & 2003; Hopkins, 2003). We propose to see whether the hypotheses regarding the effect of federalism put forward in these studies apply to state-wide parties in two regionalised countries, Spain and the United Kingdom. While both countries share a multi-level nature, the scope and nature of the decentralisation of the system are significantly different, enabling substantial variation in our independent variable. We define state-wide parties as parties that contest general elections and in nearly all the regions of a country, and we focus our attention on the main state-wide parties in each country, the parties with some governing experience (at either level). In Spain, the state-wide parties are the Partido Popular (Popular party, PP) and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist party, PSOE). The PSOE is split in Catalonia, where the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC-PSOE) is a separate party federated to the state-wide party (Méndez Lago, 2003: 38). In the UK, the state-wide parties are the Labour party, the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats.

This paper is structured in four parts. First, we expound the hypothesis regarding the influence of the type of state structure on the organisation of state-wide parties; second, we detail the type of regionalised arrangement that shapes the UK and Spain. In a third part, we describe the organisation of the five state-wide parties and the type of central-regional relationships that characterises them, and finally, we propose an agenda for future research and other hypotheses.

I. Evaluating the impact of state decentralisation on party organisation

Federal systems can be ranked along a scale ranging from 'very dual' to 'very integrative'. Dual federalism implies that the centre and the regions each have clearly identifiable sets of legislative, executive and fiscal responsibilities (Chandler and Chandler, 1987: 95). Consequently, as each level is exclusively responsible for the areas over which it has competence, intergovernmental relations can be kept to a minimum. In contrast, integrative (or joint-decision) federations display a strong fusion of legislative, executive and fiscal tasks among the central and regional levels of government. Integrative federal
systems are characterised by a division of labour – rather than areas of competence – between the federal and regional governments (Chandler and Chandler, 1987: 94). As a result, intergovernmental relations are strongly developed and the regions are heavily involved in the central decision-making process in order to ensure that their interests are properly taken into account.

This distinction between dual and federal can also apply to regionalised but not yet federal multi-national polities such as Spain and the United Kingdom. The difference between regionalised and fully federal systems does not lie in the way powers are distributed (in a dual or an integrative way) but in the scope of devolved or decentralised powers (or the fiscal or administrative capacity that goes with it) that is more limited in such multi-level systems. Hence, analytically, we can distinguish between the nature (dual vs. integrative) and the scope (limited vs. extensive) of the decentralised powers.

The influence of both factors on the organisation of state-wide parties can thus be hypothesised as follows. Following Scharpf (1995: 32), we would expect dual federal systems to favour highly regionalised, if not truncated, state-wide parties. In such states, the relations between the centre and the regions can be difficult insofar as regional political elites may find it convenient and strategically useful to exploit conflicts with the centre (Chandler and Chandler, 1987: 95). As the relations between the state and the regions become more politicised, regional branches may take their distances from the state-wide party. Moreover, each level of government has areas of competence for which it is responsible and accountable; different issues are discussed at each level and there is a clear distinction between state-wide and regional politics. Consequently, regional elections are not seen as second order elections (Hix, 1998). The existence of two political games being played at different levels of government allows for more internal differentiation within political parties (Deschouwer, 2000: 6). Central parties do not have to keep their regional branches under tight control out of fear that the lack of popularity of bad record of a regional branch might adversely affect its electoral prospects at the state level. On the contrary, the situation creates incentives for state-wide parties to allow internal differentiation and also possibly bifurcation, with distinct parties of the same name operating at different levels of government. As a result, we expect state-wide parties that operate in a dual system to be decentralised, but we also expect that the
powers of the regional branches will be more extensive as the *scope* of decentralised powers is large. In keeping with the dual model of organisation, we hypothesise that regional party branches will have limited access to the central decision-making organs of the state-wide party.

Conversely, we expect party organisations to be less decentralised in integrative federations, but anticipate a stronger involvement of the regional party branches in the governance of the state-wide party. This would be consistent with the typical pattern of intergovernmental relations that we find in highly integrative federations: most legislative competences are attributed to the central government, tax resources are shared, and regional governments are responsible for the bulk of policy implementation (including federal law). If the regions are not to be reduced to simple administrative appendages of the federal government, then regional governments must be able to participate in federal policy-making, for instance when federal laws appropriating regional revenues are debated. In Germany, the prototype of a highly integrative federation, this form of co-operation is provided under the form of a strong federal second chamber composed of representatives from the regional executives (Sturm, 2001). Therefore, policy is not a result of a decision of the federal government, but of a bargain between the federal and regional governments. As federal legislation is passed and implemented in co-operation with regional governments or representatives, it is in the interest of the ruling party or coalition at the federal level to ensure that regional party branches follow central party policy, and opposition parties will also want to present a state-wide united front. Moreover, as regional elections influence the federal legislative process, they are closely followed by state-wide party headquarters and the media. Regional elections, with their state-wide resonance, tend to be seen as second-order; or a test for the federal government (Chandler and Chandler, 1987: 98). This connection between state-wide and regional politics reinforces the need for party cohesion. Therefore, state-wide parties tend to exert more control over their regional branches to ensure loyalty and compliance with party policy (Deschouwer, 2000: 17). Obviously, the higher the *scope* of policy areas in the legislative, administrative and fiscal arenas for which the centre and the regions must co-operate, the stronger the incentive for the state-wide party to control its regional party branches.
Furthermore, we should take an additional element that influences party organisation into account: institutional asymmetry. By asymmetry, we mean the legal differentiation between the regions of a country with respect to their powers and areas of competence (Fossas, 1999). We hypothesise that institutional asymmetry coincides with some regional party branches enjoying more autonomy than others and having different responsibilities in their corresponding state-wide party organs. As a result, state-wide parties may not have the same form of organisation all over the country.

II. State decentralisation in Spain and the United Kingdom

Spain’s Estado de las Autonomías

In Spain, the 1978 Constitution did not define the new democratic state as either federal or unitary. The constitution recognises the 'indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation' while at the same time acknowledging that Spain is made up of 'nationalities and regions' that have a special 'right to autonomy'. (Art. 2, Constitution). The regions, or autonomous communities (Communidades Autónomas), were to achieve autonomy through bilateral negotiations of their statute with the central government. The Constitution provided for two routes to autonomy, a fast route for the 'historic nationalities' (Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia) through Article 151, and another 'slow' route for the other regions (Article 143). The fast route provided that the three historic nationalities would be able to achieve full autonomy relatively simply and rapidly, by approval of their statutes of autonomy by referendum. On the other hand, Article 143 provided that the other regions would first have a more limited autonomy through statutes that needed to be approved both by the Cortes (the Spanish Parliament) and the population of the region through a referendum (Gibbons, 1999: 18). By 1981, four autonomous communities had been established through Article 151 (Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia and Andalusia, although the latter is not considered as a historical nationality). Moreover, three other regions (Navarre, the Canary Islands and the Valencian Community) achieved statutes close to the 151 regions, and the other regions obtained statutes with lesser powers through Article 143 (Magone, 2004: 118-9).
Rapidly, the Spanish government tried to limit the open-ended nature of this process of regionalisation and to reduce the asymmetry between the regions. The Organic Law of Harmonisation of the Autonomous Process\(^1\) was passed in 1982 and was quickly rejected by the autonomous communities. They presented a request against it to the Constitutional Court (*Tribunal Constitucional*), which declared that 14 of its 38 articles were unconstitutional (Magone, 2004: 120), and the law was abandoned. The 1990s represented a new phase in the process of regionalisation, as the 143 communities were allowed to expand their level of autonomy to come closer to that of the 151 communities (Organic Law 9/1992). As a result, the original asymmetry of the system has been considerably reduced (Moreno, 2001: 64-5).

The seventeen autonomous communities are responsible for agriculture, education, health policy, regional economic development, culture and research, among other things. However, the bilateral nature of the negotiation of the statutes of autonomy means that each statute is unique and each region has its own list of powers. It becomes therefore very difficult to make a detailed comparison of the division of competences between the central government and the autonomous communities. There remain a number of asymmetrically devolved areas, such as finance, which is partly devolved in Navarre and the Basque Country on the basis of some old *foral* rights, language (six regions have special dual-language provisions in their statutes of autonomy)\(^2\), or policing (Catalonia, the Basque Country, Andalusia and probably very soon Galicia have their own police force).\(^3\) Leaving aside Navarre and the Basque Country, the autonomous regional taxes are relatively few and insignificant: they contribute only around 15% of the total regional revenues. The bulk of regional expenditures are financed on the basis of a central block grant that leaves the regions with substantial discretion as to how the money should be spent. The Constitution provides a list of powers that are exclusive either to the central or regional government, leaving residual powers (i.e., those that are not listed) to the central government except in five regions (Watts, 1999: 30, 126). In spite of this seemingly

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\(^1\) *Ley Orgánica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico*, LOAPA, 1982.

\(^2\) Basque Country, Navarre, Catalonia, Valencian Community, the Balearic Islands and Galicia (Agranoff, 1999: 101).

\(^3\) For Galicia, see ‘La Xunta creará un cuerpo de Policía Autonómica propio y prevé una carrera única con los cuerpos locales’, *Correo Gallego* 4 April, 2004.

clear-cut division of competences, the shared areas of competence are quite numerous (Fossas, 1999: 13), as the central parliament can develop central framework legislation in devolved policy areas.

On the other hand, the regions have a very limited input in central decision-making. The upper chamber of the Cortes, the Senate (Senado), is only partly a chamber of territorial representation. The bulk of the Senadores are elected at the provincial level,\(^4\) and the autonomous communities appoint 51 out of the 259 members of the Senate.\(^5\) Intergovernmental relations generally take the shape of 'sectorial conferences', in which the advisers (Consejeros) of the various autonomous communities meet with the corresponding Spanish minister (Law 12/1983 of the Autonomous Process, art.4\(^6\)). However, sectorial conferences do not meet very often, and they seem to be rather disregarded by ministers (Magone, 2004: 121) as well as by the historic communities, which seem to prefer to deal with the central government through bilateral relations (Roller, 2002; Grau i Creus, 2001). Given this limited regional input in central decision-making, the central government has frequently engaged in specifying central laws beyond what the regions deemed acceptable (Börzel, 2002: 94). Conversely, the regions have sometimes implemented central legislation as they saw fit.

Overall, the Spanish regions enjoy considerable legislative and executive powers, but one of the main obstacles against calling Spain a federal state is its 'lack of any effective mechanism for collegiate representation of the autonomous communities' (Heywood, 1995: 162). As mentioned earlier, the Spanish Senate has not yet been reformed so as to operate as a chamber of representation of the autonomous communities (on the model of the German Bundesrat), nor is there a highly developed web of intergovernmental conferences. However, the constitutional debate is far from over: on the one hand, Senate reform is a promise of the new socialist government; on the other, both the Basque Country and Catalonia demand more autonomy and a reform of their statutes.

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\(^4\) The provinces are one level below the Autonomous Communities, except in the case of the uniprovincial regions: Principado de Asturias, Cantabria, Comunidad de Madrid, Región de Murcia, Navarra, La Rioja, Islas Baleares.

\(^5\) The much-demanded reform of the Senate was blocked by the PP government, but the current socialist government seems very much in favour of giving it a more 'federal' aspect.

\(^6\) *Ley 12/1983, de 14 de octubre, del Proceso Autonómico.*
Devolution in the United Kingdom

Devolution in the United Kingdom is a much more recent phenomenon. In spite of Home Rule having been on the British political agenda since the late 1800s (first in relation to Ireland, see Bogdanor, 2003, chapter 3), and after a failed attempt to decentralise power in Scotland and Wales in 1979 (Bogdanor, 2003: 190), devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland finally became reality in 1998. However, if Spanish devolution is fairly asymmetrical, British devolution is very asymmetrical. Devolution was also the result of separate agreements. Unlike in Spain, the separate devolution settlements that created the devolved institutions and organised the division of powers between the centre and the regions were drawn up by the centre. An oddity of British devolution is the absence of any constitutional guarantee. What is more, devolution is a delegation of power from the centre to the regions (Hoods Philips et al. 2001: 89). As a result, the Westminster Parliament remains sovereign and the only limit on its ability to legislate on devolved issues is political rather than legal (Trench, 2004: 167).

Devolution is far-reaching in Scotland, more limited in Wales, and has bypassed England, by far the largest component of the Union. In 1997, Labour promised regional assemblies for the English regions that wished to have one but then failed to deliver its promise. In 2001, Labour reiterated its promise of voluntary devolution in England. Referendums were to be held in the regions that wished to have their own assemblies. The negative results of the referendum in the North-East have cast a shadow on the future of other referendums and potential devolution in other regions.

In Wales, a highly integrative pattern of decentralisation was chosen, whereas in Scotland, devolution more closely resembles the dual model of allocation of powers. Scotland was given powers of both primary and secondary legislation over such areas as

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7 From now on, we will limit our study to Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland poses several problems. First of all, the Stormont Assembly has been suspended three times since 1998, the last time on 14 October 2002 and has remained so ever since. Second, the main state-wide parties that present candidates in England, Scotland and Wales are nearly virtually absent from the Northern Ireland political scene. The Labour party does not field candidates in Ulster, nor do the Liberal Democrats, who have links with the non-sectarian Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, and the Conservative party only fields a small number of candidates and receives a very small number of votes (.2% of the 1st preference votes in 2003).

8 See Hélène Mulholland 'North-East voters reject regional assembly', The Guardian, Friday November 4, 2004 (http://society.guardian.co.uk/regionalgovernment/story/0,8150,1343801,00.html), and also http://www.bbc.co.uk/northyorkshire/iloveny/devolution/postponement/index.shtml on the postponed referendum in Yorkshire and the Humber.
the health service, local government, education, housing, regional transport, legal system, law and order, and economic development. In the Scottish devolution settlement, the powers reserved to the Westminster Parliament are listed, and the rest falls into Scotland’s competence (Scotland Act 1998, Schedule 5; Hoods Phillips et al., 2001: 94). On the other hand, the Government of Wales Act provided the National Assembly with powers of secondary legislation over a list of areas: agriculture, culture, economic development, education, environment, health and health services, sports, tourism, transport, water, Welsh language (Hoods Phillips et al., 2001: 102). The British Parliament remains responsible for primary legislation over all aspects of Welsh government and secondary legislation over all the non-listed matters.

Both devolved institutions are financed by a block grant based on the Barnett formula. This formula translates the fluctuations in spending in England into equal changes in the budgets of Scotland and Wales. However, the central government is not obliged to follow this formula, as shown by the UK government’s decision to increase the Welsh budget in 2000, whereas the Barnett formula would led to a reduction of this budget. While they lack financial autonomy, Scotland and Wales are free to spend this money as they see fit. Scotland also possesses a limited tax varying power. It can change the basic rate of income tax by plus or minus 3%.

As far as inter-governmental (or inter-institutional) relations are concerned, the formal processes of co-operation between the central government and the regions are very limited. First of all, the British government includes Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, but neither is selected from or by the corresponding regional government. The role of the Secretaries of State is quite odd and also confusing: his or her role is to speak ‘for the UK government on matters relating to that territory’ and to speak ‘for the territory on matters on which it had dealings with the UK Government’ (Trench 2004: 182). Representing alternatively the UK government and the region depending on the issue at stake, it is hard to see how this can be achieved without problems of legitimacy from a regional point of view. Moreover, both positions have been somewhat undermined by their downgrading to ‘part-time jobs’ in 2003. Inter-governmental relations also take the

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9 Peter Hain MP is both Secretary of State for Wales and Leader of the House of Commons, and Alistair Darling is both Secretary of State for Scotland and Secretary of state for Transport.
shape of meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC), but these meetings have been less than frequent, and they have never been used as primarily intended, that is, as a forum to discuss problems and consider disputes (Trench, 2004: 179). Informal meetings outside this framework have been more frequent, in particular between officials. Inter-governmental relations have taken such an informal turn for several reasons. First, the JMC appears to be too formal and this formality might have given rise to disputes that could be avoided in a more informal setting. Second, the high level of political consensus between the central and devolved administrations facilitates the development of informal mechanisms. With Labour in government in Westminster, Wales and Scotland, inter-governmental relations can easily become informal. Overall, the participation of the constituent regions of the UK in central decision-making is rather restricted. In addition to such informal co-operation mechanisms and the supremacy of Westminster, regional governments are not represented in Parliament, like the German Länder are represented in the Bundesrat or the Spanish regions in the Senate. Regional representation in Parliament is made virtually impossible by the asymmetrical character of the devolution process and the absence of any regional government in England.

Should party structures reflect the structure of state, we should find that overall the Spanish parties are more regionalised than the British ones. In as much as Spanish decentralisation is not completely dual and requires a certain level of co-operation between the central and regional levels, we expect regional branches to be involved and have some influence in the central party organs of the PP and the PSOE. On the other hand, as the Spanish autonomous communities enjoy a rather large degree of autonomy, we expect the regional branches of the state-wide parties to enjoy a rather substantial degree of independence in the running of regional party affairs. Because of the certain asymmetry in the system, we can expect that the regional branches in the Art. 151 and foral communities will be more autonomous than the others, while being at the same time less involved in central party organs.

10 In Scotland, the Labour party is in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but remains the major coalition partner.
The issue if the territorial organisation of British parties is more complicated because of the greater asymmetry between the regions. Leaving fiscal powers aside, devolution has granted Scotland with more or less the same amount of autonomy as the Spanish regions. We therefore expect the Scottish branches of the UK-wide parties to be relatively autonomous in the management of their own affairs. Meanwhile, the Welsh branches are likely to be more controlled by the centre, as the nature of devolution in Wales is more integrative and the scope of devolved powers less large. Because of this integrative nature of Welsh devolution, we may as well expect the Welsh branches to be more involved in the central party than their Scottish counterparts.

III. Party organisation: central-regional relationships

Involvement of the regional branches in the state-wide parties

A party’s sensitivity to regional issues is likely to be a function of the involvement of its regional branches in its central organs and processes. Overall, we find that most parties involve their regional branches only to a limited extent.

Selecting the party leadership

The way the party leader is selected is also a good indicator of the sort of selectorate favoured by the party and the level of influence it wants to give to its regional branches. None of the parties gives a clear voice to its regional representatives or regional leaderships, as the case may be. The British parties have chosen the one-member-one vote method, but with different consequences. The Liberal Democrats are the only ones to elect their leader exclusively by membership ballot. The Conservative party also ballots its membership, but after the parliamentary party has made a shortlist of two candidates. This is what happened in 2001, after William Hague resigned following the general elections. However, in 2003, after the Conservative parliamentary party passed a no-confidence vote against Hague’s successor, Iain Duncan Smith, the same MPs chose to back one single leadership candidate, Michael Howard. As a result, there was no need to ballot the rank-and-file. The Labour party ballots its members for the leadership selection process, but their vote only represents one third of the electoral college. The other two thirds are for the affiliated organisations (trade unions and socialist societies,
which also have to ballot their members) and the parliamentary party. Moreover, the three parties require that their leader be a member of the House of Commons. In Spain, the party leaders are elected at a party congress, where the delegates are elected by the provincial congresses. However, the rule can be diverted, as it happened in 2003 in the Partido Popular. Having promised he would only stand for two elections, José María Aznar chose himself his successor. After a long period of rumours and predictions, he decided on Mariano Rajoy, whose candidacy to the Moncloa was accepted by the party’s national executive; he later became general secretary of the PP and finally President at the 15th Congress of the party in October 2004.

Another indicator of the involvement of the regional branches in the state-wide party is the presence of regional representatives in state-wide party organs, and in particular in the party executive, which runs the party on a day-to-day basis. The British Labour party is the only party that does not provide for representatives of its Scottish and Welsh parties in its National Executive Committee (NEC). The Conservative party’s Board includes the chairman or his/her deputy of its Scottish and Welsh branches among its 17 members. Likewise, the Federal Executive Committee of the Liberal Democrats provides for the presence on one representative from the Scottish, Welsh and even English parties. Of course, it could be argued that Scotland and Wales also have representatives in the persons of the senior party leaders: Tony Blair was born in Scotland, Gordon Brown is also a Scotsman, Michael Howard is a Welshman, and Charles Kennedy is a Scotsman, as is the party’s deputy leader, Menzies Campbell. However, involved in British politics, they do not necessarily want to advance the interests of a particular region to the detriment of the rest of the country, while not always being aware of the intricacies of devolution. In Spain, the Partido Popular’s National Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) includes the presidents of all the regional parties and the party’s Presidents of autonomous communities. However, the PP is a very centralised and presidentialist party, and the influence of the party leader is paramount throughout the whole party (Balfour, 2004: 149-50, van Biezen, 2003: 97). Whereas the PSOE’s Federal Committee (Comisión Federal) integrates the general secretaries of the regional branches, the PSOE presidents of autonomous communities and delegates elected by the regional congresses, its Federal Executive Commission, the most important decision-
making body of the party (Magone 2004: 98), at present only includes 3 ‘regional barons’. While regional party leaders have benefited from state decentralisation to increase their power at the regional level and used it to push their way into the FEC (Méndez Lago, 2005: 181, van Biezen, 2003: 99), and while they have played an important role in the resolution of the crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Méndez Lago, 2005: 185; Gunther et al., 2004: 245), their presence in the party’s executive has been reduced at the 2000 and 2004 Congresses. The party’s general secretary – and Spain’s new premier – José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero proposed a reform of the Federal Committee to make it a smaller unit and reduce the number of regional representatives, who would then be part of a strengthened Consejo Territorial (Territorial Council), which was until then a consultative body. This reform was opposed by the Catalan Socialists, who claimed special rights as a federated party to the PSOE. As a result, José Montilla, the PSC’s general secretary and member of the Spanish government, retained his seat in the Federal Committee.\footnote{See ‘Zapatero incluye a Ibarra y Montilla en la Ejecutiva del PSOE’, El Mundo, 4/07/2004 http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2004/07/03/espana/1088891372.html}

**Participation in the state-wide electoral process**

Two crucial processes of state-wide parties are the formulation of the party’s policy for the general elections and the selection of candidates for these elections. The former, by proposing policies and a general political line to the party, is likely to have an impact on the political debates in the regions and the political line followed by the regional parties in regional elections. The latter is crucial in the way various intra-party and territorial interests are represented in the parliamentary party.

State-wide party programmes are often elaborated in several steps. Generally, the party conference or congress is in charge of providing the party with political lines and the draft of a policy programme. In Spain, the political influence of such meetings is limited by their low frequency, once every legislature. The congresses of the PP and the PSOE do not include regional delegates. In the PSOE, congress delegates are elected at the provincial level (or lower), and the provincial congresses decide whether their delegates can vote with the delegates of the other provinces of their autonomous community.
Méndez Lago (2000: 112) argues that the election of congress delegates at the provincial level has a centralising effect and facilitates the influence of central party leaders on the delegations. The delegates at the PP national congress are also elected at the provincial level. Their number partly depends on the results of the party in the constituency at the last general elections and on the number of party members of the provincial branch of the party. The parties’ executive committees and leadership then have a relatively free hand over the making of the party programme and election manifesto. It should be noted that the PSC-PSOE makes its own general election manifesto due to its status as an independent party federated to the PSOE. The party’s will to use this independence has sometimes varied, with a more docile attitude during Felipe González’s leadership, and a greater will to defend its special rights and status since then.

In the UK, party conferences are more frequent, once or twice a year. It does not necessarily mean that they are more powerful, as illustrated by the Conservative party, where their policy-debating aspect has been transferred from the open forum of the Conference to the closed doors of the Conservative Policy Forum. The Conservative conference is a consultative body, as is the Conservative Policy Forum, and the policy-making and manifesto-drafting processes are very much in the hands of the leadership, the party leader in particular (Butler and Kavanagh 1997: 41; Kelly, 2004: 400). Even though party members were consulted in a membership ballot over the draft election manifesto in 2000, this ballot is generally considered as a way to reinforce the leader's power and standing within the party rather than as an exercise in party democracy and membership empowerment in policy-making (Kelly, 2003: 95). The Labour party conference is now a forum where policy is voted upon but much less debated than in the past. The Partnership in Power process and the establishment of the National Policy Forum (NPF) provides party members, affiliated bodies and regional branches with a forum to voice their positions on policy issues prior to the conference, where policy papers are put forward to vote by the NEC. This process has been put in place for several reasons: officially, this allows a better process of policy debate and development. It also places party disputes and heated debates away from the cameras present at the party conference, while giving the leadership more control over the agenda (Seyd, 1999; Seyd and Whiteley 2001: 79-82). In the final stages of the policy-making processes, senior
party officials (Prime minister, Cabinet members and members of the NEC and of the NPF) decide which items discussed in the NPF and voted upon at party conference will be included in the manifesto. The Liberal Democrats’ party conference is a more policy-debating forum than the Conservative and Labour conferences. Moreover, the Federal Executive, in charge of developing the election manifesto together with the Federal Policy Committee (both include representatives of Scotland and Wales), presents a draft manifesto to the conference for a vote. In the UK, devolution has brought forward some changes, though. While some parties had Scottish and Welsh general election manifestos before devolution, the practice is now generalised across the board. In order to take into account the changes in policy competence and the policy divergences between Scotland, Wales and England, the regional parties are involved in the process. The Labour party consults its Scottish and Welsh branches on the content of the regional manifestos, but the NEC remains in charge of drafting it. The situation is more contrasted for the Conservative party, in part due to the asymmetrical nature of devolution. The Scottish party is responsible for everything that relates to the devolved areas in the general election manifesto, but because the Welsh Assembly only has powers of secondary legislation, the Welsh party is only responsible for the details of devolved legislation while the British party is in charge of the principle of devolved matters. Finally, the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats are in charge of developing their own manifesto for the general elections, in consultation with the Federal party. They develop policy on devolved matters and propose use in the regions of the budget prepared by the federal party, which would have implications in the regions through the Barnett consequentials.

As for candidate selection for general elections, the picture is rather varied. In Spain, the selection process is identical for the PP and the PSOE: provincial party branches draft the lists of candidates, which have to be approved by a state-wide selection committee and the executive of the party. This therefore leaves regional branches in charge of candidate selection in two cases: uniprovincial autonomous communities, and the PSC-PSOE. In the UK, the situation is more contrasted. The Labour party’s selection process is a state-wide process overlooked by the NEC. The NEC establishes a state-wide shortlist of candidates from which the constituency Labour parties can choose, but it is argued that the grip of the NEC on this process is very strong (Seyd and Whiteley, 2001: 82). In
Scotland and Wales, the regional executives implement the process on its behalf following the rules established by the NEC, which keeps a final say over the selection. In the Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, the selection process is the responsibility of the regional parties (‘State parties’). The Scottish and Welsh parties establish their own procedures (although they are identical) and candidates panels, from which the local parties (at the constituency level) choose their candidate. Finally, the Conservative party has an asymmetrical process. While candidate selection in Wales is supervised by the state-wide selection committee, a Scottish Candidates’ Board appointed by the Scottish party overtakes the functions of the national committee in the region. Again, the constituency associations elect their candidates from a shortlist established by these selection committees.

**Constitutional guarantee**

By constitutional guarantee, we mean the security of the status, powers and autonomy of the regional branches within the state-wide parties. We consider whether the powers of the regional branches are entrenched in the party constitution and how easily it can be amended; e.g. whether its amendment requires the mutual consent of the state-wide and regional parties or only a decision of the former. The Liberal Democrats have the most detailed constitution. It mentions the powers of the regional branches (State parties) and gives them a right to veto constitutional changes that would alter the balance of power between the state-wide party and the regional parties. The constitutions of the other parties sketch a few responsibilities of the regional branches but fail to clearly stipulate their powers. Moreover, the constitution of these parties is amended by a vote of state-wide organs, generally the party conference (Labour party) or congress (Partido Popular and PSOE) or, in the case of the Conservative party, a special Constitutional College.

*Self-rule at the regional level*

The other issue at stake in central-regional intra-party relationships is the degree to which regional parties have control over the management of regional politics and the degree to which the state-wide party is involved in such processes as the selection of regional party leaders, candidate selection for regional elections and regional policy formulation.
Self-organisation and leadership selection

The regional branches are generally free to arrange their organisation and powers within the region, but most state-wide constitutions include organisational requirements for their regional branches: the existence of a congress and its periodicity, and the form of the executive for the Spanish parties; the electoral system used in intra-party elections for the Liberal Democrats (single-transferable vote). Moreover, the statutes of regional branches of the PSOE have to be approved by the state-wide party executive.

The autonomy and sense of independence of regional parties can be derived from the existence of a regional leader and the way s/he is selected. Both Spanish parties provide for the election of their regional leaders (called President in the Partido Popular and General Secretary in the PSOE) at a regional conference. Recently, the PSOE has arranged to have its candidates for the presidency of autonomous communities selected by membership ballot (some regions have also chosen to involve their associated members) in the region, but the result of the vote has to be approved by the Federal Executive. If the membership does not choose the general secretary as their candidate, and if the candidate wins the regional election, the president of the autonomous community becomes, if not a *de facto* leader of the party, at least a serious contender and a political force that has to be reckoned with. As an independent party, the PSC chooses its own leader and candidate to the Generalitat. The direct election is a way to increase the legitimacy of the leader. The Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats leaders are elected by membership ballot in the State parties. Conservative regional leaders, that is, leaders of their group in their respective devolved assemblies, are also elected by membership ballot. However, in Scotland, the current leader, David McLetchie was selected following a different procedure, in which an electoral college composed of constituency delegates and parliamentary candidates elected him (Lynch, 2003: 170). Finally, the British Labour party constitution does not provide for regional leaders in Scotland and Wales. Traditionally, the (Shadow) Secretary of State was the leader of the party in the region. With devolution, the leaders of the regional parliamentary parties

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12 See the case of the PSC, where Pascual Maragall, the President of the Catalan Generalitat, is President of the party, and José Montilla, member of the Spanish Parliament and minister in the Spanish government, is its General Secretary.
have become *de facto* leaders of the regional parties, even more so as they both have become First ministers in their region, but the authority of the state-wide leader remains intact. Both leaders have not been elected following the usual Labour electoral college (one third for the rank and file, one third for the affiliated organisations, and one third for the local parliamentary party). The leader of the Labour group in the National Assembly for Wales, Rhodri Morgan, was selected by his parliamentary colleagues after they forced his predecessor’s resignation. This challenge of the sitting First Minister, Alun Michael, was a real show of independence and defiance of the Welsh party *vis-à-vis* the central leadership, which was responsible for the election of Michael as a leader in the region (Rawnsley, 2000: 247-50, 359-60). Having to choose a new leader while in power and in less than 28 days (maximum time allowed for the Scottish Parliament to find itself a leader, otherwise the Parliament is dissolved) twice, the Scottish Labour party also departed from the rule. On the last occasion, unopposed, Jack McConnell, was elected by an electoral college comprising Labour MSPs and the members of Labour’s Scottish Executive Committee.\(^{13}\) Contrary to Wales (and London), Scottish leaders have been selected without much attempts to influence the process from Westminster and the central party (Lynch and Birrell 2004: 186).

Moreover, the ability of the regional parties to discipline their members in case of failure to abide by the party constitution is a way to increase their authority within the party and *vis-à-vis* their members.\(^{14}\) The PSOE entrusts its regional party branches with some disciplinary authority, but serious infringements are resolved by the state-wide party, while the PSC is responsible for party discipline in Catalonia. The PP allows for a more limited involvement of the regional branches, as disciplinary sanctions are taken by a central Rights and Guarantees Committee in last resort. The regional branches of the Liberal Democrats are responsible for most aspects of party discipline, but the final appeal is the responsibility of a federal organ, albeit half the members of this appeal commission are appointed by the regional branches. The Conservative party has again an asymmetrical organisation: whereas the Scottish Disciplinary Committee is in charge of

\(^{13}\) His predecessor, Henry McLeish, was also elected while Labour was in power (after Donald Dewar’s death) and also by a small electoral college (MSPs and members of the SEC). He was however later elected by a full electoral college, where he stood unopposed.

\(^{14}\) Here, we exclude parliamentary discipline, as in Britain this is dealt with within the parliamentary party.
the administration of party discipline in Scotland, central party organs are responsible for party discipline in the rest of the UK, Wales included. Finally, the Labour party has a central system of party discipline in the hands of the NEC.

**Participation in regional party competition**

The selection of candidates and the ability to make the party programme and election manifesto for the regional elections are strategic powers in the regional arena. Whoever controls these processes controls the regional parties. Both Spanish parties have their lists of candidates established by the provincial and regional parties, but these lists have to be approved by the state-wide executives. The Regional Electoral Committees of the PP are responsible for establishing the lists of candidates for the regional elections, and these lists have to be approved by the National Electoral Committee, which is appointed by the National Executive Committee. The process of candidate selection for regional elections is similar in the PSOE, with regional parties establishing the regional lists and a Federal List Commission advising the Federal Committee, which approves the lists in the last resort. The List commission can actually modify the lists presented before it (van Biezen, 2003: 100). Because it is bifurcated in Catalonia, the PSOE does not control the candidate selection process in the region. The Labour party also requires that the NEC approves the lists established by the regional party, but the central party has no authority over the selection of constituency candidates. The Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats select their own candidates: the State parties establish a panel of candidates, which the constituency associations can choose from, and the lists are established by membership ballot in the top-up areas. The Welsh and Scottish Conservative parties also select their candidates in the same way, with regional panels established at the regional level and the regional lists set up by membership ballot. The central approval of candidate lists tends to have a centralising effect and inhibit the regional branches from dissenting or diverging from the central party. On the other hand, if they can choose their own candidates, regional party branches may feel freer to adapt to the regional context and defend their link with the region.

The Spanish parties tend to insist on programmatic unity and require that their regional parties provide them with their campaign manifestos for approval. They also provide
their regional parties with a ‘framework programme’. In the Partido Popular, the regional branches are responsible for the elaboration of a programme for the regional elections, but this programme has to get the central party’s approval. Moreover, the PP is a highly centralised party with a presidentialist ethos which leaves little room for the regions to express their differences. Only in Catalonia and the Basque Country have the regional branches been allowed more autonomy, in particular when it was in the state-wide party's interest (Balfour, 2005: 163). Within the PSOE, the National Committee of each regional branch is responsible for the elaboration of the party programme for regional elections, but this programme have to obtain the approval of the Federal Committee. Again, the PSC-PSOE is free to make its own programme for regional elections. Roller and van Houten (2003: 18-9) argue that over time, and in particular under the dual effect of the PSOE's loss of power and Maragall's leadership, the PSC has affirmed its Catalan interests more and adapted its strategy to the regional circumstances. This provision that regional programmes have to be approved by the central parties represent a strong constraint on the regional branches and provides little incentive for them to dissent or make divergent proposals.

On the other hand, the British parties leave their regional branches free to develop their own programmes. The rules of elaboration of the regional programmes are generally the same as those existing at the state-wide level, but they are not always followed. For instance, the 1999 manifesto of the Scottish Labour party was not elaborated following the rules set out in Partnership in Power, which replicated the National Policy Forum structure in the regions. On the contrary, the manifesto was produced by a small elite group within the party (Lynch and Birrell 2004: 183). In practice, parties have never dramatically diverged from their state-wide parties. This is particularly true of Labour, which is in power in Westminster, Scotland and Wales, but the Conservatives have also followed the general line the British party (Lynch, 2003: 173).

Comparison of the results and assessment of the hypotheses

Overall, we see that the state-wide parties have all adapted their structures to the decentralisation of the state, but that the degree of decentralisation of the parties rarely matches that of the state. In Spain, the Partido Popular is the most centralised of the two
parties. Regional representatives are included in central party organs, but their influence is undermined by the very hierarchical structure of the party and the large number of powers effectively in the hands of the party leader. As for regional politics, whereas the regional branches select their own leader, their freedom to select their regional candidates and formulate regional policy is limited by the control that the central party exercises over the outcome of both processes. The situation is rather similar in the PSOE. Whereas the regional leaders had gained substantial power within the central party during the party’s opposition period, it seems that its return into power in Madrid has been accompanied by a reduction of the role of the regional ‘barons’ in the federal party. Only time will tell whether the strengthening of the Territorial Council of the party gave the regions a voice in state-wide party affairs. On the other hand, the central party also controls the lists of candidates for regional elections and has a final say over the regional programmes. However, the culture of the PSOE is more tolerant towards dissent and the expression of different opinions. In the presence of strong regional leaders (like Chávez in Andalusia or Bono in Castilla-La Mancha), regional differences are more likely to be accepted and more leeway to be given to regional party branches. It remains that overall, the Spanish parties centralised parties, with the most important decision powers concentrated at the top (van Biezen, 2003: 99).

In the UK, the situation is much contrasted. On the one hand, the Liberal Democrats have adopted a truly federal structure, with the Scottish and Welsh parties involved in central decision-making processes such as policy formulation and candidate selection for general elections. These same regional parties enjoy a large degree of autonomy over regional matters, as they have sole responsibility over candidate selection and policy formulation for regional elections. On the other hand, the Labour and Conservative parties have more centralised structures. The involvement of the regional branches in central party organs is either limited (Conservative party) or non-existent (Labour), while their autonomy in the regional arena varies. Regional branches are bale to select their leaders and candidates, and to formulate their policy for regional elections. However, between the attempts to influence regional politics obvious in Labour's case and a more traditional loyalty and closeness to the central party (Conservative), the regional branches of both parties have not diverged much from their central party.
As far as the involvement of regional party branches in state-wide party organs is concerned, it is quite limited across the board. There does not seem to be any difference whether the institutional arrangement is dual or integrative, as illustrated by the British parties. Wales does not enjoy a privileged position within the state-wide party as compared to Scotland. In fact, it is the opposite in the case of the Conservative Party, as its Scottish branch can select its candidate for general elections while the Welsh Conservatives cannot. Similarly, with the exception of the Liberal Democrats, all the state-wide parties allow only a limited involvement of their regional branches in their central organs, irrespective of the scope of powers enjoyed by each region.

We see greater variation in the degree of autonomy of the regional branches of these state-wide parties. The Liberal Democrats is the party that gives the most autonomy to its regional branches, irrespective of the nature and scope of decentralisation. The Conservatives and Labour give maximum autonomy to their Scottish and Welsh branches, which can select their candidates and formulate their own programme for regional elections. However, the Welsh branch of the Conservative party is traditionally closer to the central party, and also more dependent, in particular financially, on the London party. In spite of this official autonomy, attempts by the central party to influence their regional branches are not uncommon, in particular in Labour’s case. Whether this is to be attributed to the fact that the party is in power in Westminster remains to be seen. However, since they successfully removed Alun Michael from the leadership of the party and the position of first minister, the Welsh Labour party has shown greater independence (Hopkins, 2003: 233). As for the Spanish parties, they keep a tighter grip on their regional branches, as they require that the central party approves the lists of candidates and the electoral programmes for the regional elections. Still, the regional branches of the PSOE enjoy more real autonomy than those of the PP, even though their level of autonomy has been quite dependent on the position of the central party in power or in opposition. Moreover, the branches that have enjoyed the largest degree of autonomy have generally been the Catalan and Basque parties, that is, the branches in the regions with most autonomy, but also where the political debate most diverges from the national one. Within the PP, the presence of strong regional ‘barons’ is a more important
factor than the institutional independence of the region, even though they may coincide, as in Galicia (Hopkins, 2003: 233).

**IV. Conclusion**

Our analysis partially confirms the general hypothesis that state-wide parties in highly decentralised polities are also more decentralised. However, our findings suggest that the decentralised character of a polity alone cannot account for the differences in the degree of party decentralisation. The results suggest that further research should pay attention to a number of factors that fell beyond the scope of this article.

Other independent variables have been suggested: the electoral formula used in regional elections and the type of party system that it fosters; the timing of elections, which is likely to influence way the campaign is conducted (Deschouwer, 2003: 223). In a way, it can be said that these institutional variables are more like facilitating factors. The presence of a particular institutional context makes the adoption of a particular party structure more likely. Other, non-institutional factors can affect party (de)centralisation: the social and territorial heterogeneity of the country (Deschouwer, 2003: 223; Detterbeck and Renzsch, 2003: 264); the ideology of the party and its position on decentralisation; and the history of the party, as organisational reforms such as the decentralisation of party structures may be path-dependent (Hopkins, 2003: 233).

The will and strategic reasoning of central party elites should not be underestimated. Party decentralisation and the transfer of powers to the regional party branches remain the results of a deliberate decision from the parties and their leaderships. Strategic considerations are involved in the decision to decentralise power within the party structure (Roller and van Houten, 2003), and parties do not simply react mechanically to their environment. The decentralisation of party structures is the result of a conscious choice by the parties based on 1) their position on state decentralisation and party ideology, 2) strategic consideration of a party’s ability to win elections in a multi-level context and on their evaluated necessity to adapt to the heterogeneity of the country, be it social, geographical or otherwise, and 3) on the balance of power and influence within the party between the centre and the regional elites.
Finally, the results of our study of party organisation shows that state-wide parties have not automatically replicated the organisation of the state. While one party has gone further (the Liberal Democrats), the other parties have shown a more limited will to decentralise power within the party structure. Even the most fervent advocates of decentralisation, such as Labour and the PSOE, still have a rather centralised vision of intra-party relations, even though they are not always able to maintain this hierarchical link. Central party elites are tempted to limit the amount of power handed over to the regional branches, and they also have other constituencies they must satisfy, such as affiliated organisations and party members, both of which also demand a voice within the party organisations, therefore reducing the opportunities for regional branches to secure areas of intra-party power.
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