Career Patterns in Multi-Level Systems: Political parties influence or individual MP’s preferences?

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Panel: Career Pattern in Multi-Level Systems

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1. Introduction

In this paper we aim at shedding some light into the analysis of political careers in Spain, analyzing some aspects of the career paths followed by members of the Spanish Lower Chamber (Congreso de los Diputados) (from now on national MPs or just MPs). In particular, we want to focus in multi-level careers, developed in several political arenas, the regional one and the national ones. In particular in this paper we are interested in national MPs who have previous political experience in the regional level (either as MPs in the regional Parliament or in top-ranking official appointed positions in the regional executive\(^1\)). Our aim is to analyze what variables explain to a larger extent that some national MPs have previous regional political experience while others don´t, and whether, depending on the context, in the decision of moving to other level prevails mainly what could be expected to be the individual politician preference or the party strategy one.

Elsewhere (Oñate and Pérez-Comeche, 2012) we have observed this kind of up-wards movement is the most frequent one in Spanish politics. That is, most of those MPs having multi-level experience have moved from the regional level to the national one. Those hopping back and forth are scarce, as are those moving from the national level to the regional arena. Therefore, we will focus on those national MPs having a previous political experience at the regional level.

To do so, after defining our theoretical framework, we will present some features of the Spanish political system and some figures regarding previous regional experience of Congreso de los Diputados members. We analyze the data for 7 Congresses, those from the 4\(^{th}\) to the 10\(^{th}\) legislative terms (those elected from 1989 to 2011). Then, in the third section, we will define relevant variables to explain the dependent one (having previous regional political experience) and gauge their explanatory power conducting a multifactorial analysis based in a regression model in order to test the three hypothesis we will formulate. Our aim is to find out whether the variables that are relevant to explain this previous regional experience are linked to individual MP´s preferences or to party strategies. We will conclude with some final remarks on the factors that may determine that a national MP has or has not previous political experience at the regional level as well as some possible future research lines.

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\(^1\) The considered top-ranking positions in the regional executive branch are regional ministers, regional vice-ministers, and regional director generals (or equivalent), the three top-ranking positions in regional governments.
2. Theoretical framework

In the last two decades academics have paid extensive attention to the development of territorial politics in a multi-level perspective, and therefore to the relationships between regional and national institutions and politics (Keating, 1998; Jeffery & Wincott, 2010). The emergence of political regional arenas (or gaining salience, if previously existed) impacts the political careers of professional politicians, in the contexts of multi-level layered political systems. These professional politicians may form a political class, conscious of their interests and aims, as well as the ways to achieve them in the institutional framework they develop and –may be— adapt or re-shape to fulfill those interests and common career aims (Beyme, 1966; Borchert, 2003; Stolz, 2001, 2010).

Those political politicians built up, shape, or re-shape the institutions of these multi-level polities, potentially benefiting from the achievement of selective incentives and ambitions. At the same time these institutional designs are the framework that may constrain or foster the development of their professional careers and their consolidation as a political class (Schlesinger, 1966; Stolz, 2010). There are reciprocal relations between regional institutions and the political class, which are yet to be in-depth studied in their traits and consequences.

The multi-level layered out institutional system opens new opportunity structures for politicians to develop their political careers in the new arenas of government or between the “new” and the old ones. The new (regional) arenas may be attractive enough to recommend ambitious politicians not to move away from it, jumping to the national level. The classic model of “springboard” political career (Francis and Kenny, 2012) is no longer the only or –necessarily-- most attractive alternative politicians have. New career paths in several directions add to that model: Following Stolz (2003, 2012), these diverse trends and movements can be centripetal (towards the national level) or centrifugal (towards the regional one). They pave the way for four models of political careers: classical springboard, inverse springboard, alternative careers and integrated careers models (Stolz, 2003 & 2012). Other analyses study the relation between these arenas and classify them according to the politicians’ movements: “clear hierarchy” between the political arenas, “separate alternative arenas largely sealed off against each other”, and “one large integrated playing-field” (Borchert, 2011). Empirical analyses are to show the variety of trends in different countries and in different regions within the same country (Stolz, 2012). Besides the geographical movements, politicians may also jump between institutions, from electing positions in Legislatures (legislative branch) to appointed positions in the executive branch of Government, or all the way around.
Individual ambitions and institutional opportunities will frame the opportunities structure each politician will find when making the decision to move to another level or to remain in the same one. Borchert (2011) operationalized the relevant variables following Schlesinger (1966), summarizing them in the three "a": availability, the attractiveness and the accessibility or a given position or movement. Politicians will find different (individual and common) costs and benefits in his/her political opportunity structure. Needless to say that jumping from one level to the other implies opportunity costs regarding several domains: economic (being away from their home for part of the week/hotel or apartment rental), family costs, loose of network of political and social relationships, adapting to a new institutional framework, lack of media visibility, travelling, and so on. Of course, there are ambition benefits and incentives that could compensate these opportunity costs.

The movements between tiers of government politicians may make create two theoretical groups of politicians (Borchert, 2011; Stolz, 2012): Those belonging to an integrated national political class, who move from one level to the other depending on the opportunity structure regarding both levels. And those belonging to a separated or distinct regional political class, who find enough incentives or constrains in the regional arena, and do not move away from it. Empirical cases are, nevertheless, difficult to be located in a clear-cut way in one of these groups (Stolz, 2012) and a big variety of cases might be found in a given arena. From an empirical point of view, we should talk about general or predominant patterns, more than clear-cut general trends.

For the correct functioning of a multi-level system it should be considered important that at least part of the MPs have previous political experience in other tiers of government. That should improve their sensibility and awareness of interests, concerns and functioning dynamics of the diverse political arena. Therefore, political experience both at national, regional and local levels should be considered a political asset.

As it is well known, along the last three decades, the decentralization process in Spain created regional institutions in 17 Comunidades Autonomas, which quickly institutionalized, enjoying great amount of power and increasing attractiveness for their politicians. New political elites arose in those contexts (to a large extent, shaping them), and interacted with the national one in different ways, either in a single integrated political class (with hierarchical and/or horizontal relations) or in two distinct and isolated political classes. The prevailing trend varies from region to region, even if most of the movements still occur in a unidirectional way, from the regional to the national level (Oñate and Pérez-Comeche, 2012).

In the other hand, Spanish political parties are strong, highly cohesive, centralized and almighty organizations, controlled by the central
leadership and with very low levels of internal political contestation (Oñate, 2008). Leaderships –both at the regional and at the national levels– try to keep control over the electoral nomination processes (party lists), which involve complex processes where interests of the regional organization are balanced with those of the national one, prevailing in most of the cases the later. Nevertheless, regional institutions constitute a context in which the national views are not always shared. Legislative institutions and formal and informal provision in the chambers, as well as electoral systems, reinforce the power and control possibilities of parties headquarters, which to a large extent have a final say in the promotion processes of the members of the political elite. The balance between the regional and the national party organizations implies potential conflicts and spaces for regional autonomy that may benefit local politicians with not that-strong relationships with the national party leadership. Anyhow, Spanish parties (and their leaderships) work as real gate-keepers (Norris, 1997; 1999), influencing and shaping political careers to a large extent: MPs willing to advance forward in their political careers will not go against their party’s guidelines and directions.

It is also relevant to outline that in the Spain party system there are many non-state wide parties (NSWP), which are small parties in the national competition, but that may be very important ones (even holding a majority and leading the government) in the regional arenas. This feature implies diverse patterns of competition and coalition in different regions, what was defined as the “electoral Spains” (Oñate y Ocaña, 2008). These NSWP may be just regionalist or separatists, if there is a relevant national identity other than the Spanish one in their region. These NSWP are focused in regional politics, although they also may play a relevant role in the national arena, supporting SWP that don’t get a majority in the national Legislature. There have been between from 7 to 13 NSWP in Congress in every legislative term.

It should also be noted that a high percentage of Congreso de los Diputados MPs (as do their regional colleagues) don’t follow a long-lasting political career in the institution. Approximately 40% of the national MPs in each legislative term are newcomers, even if they may have previously been MPs in one of the 17 Regional Parliaments.

When analyzing how many of the Congreso de los Diputados MPs had previous regional political experience, it appears that one third of them –as an average- did so². This is a remarkable amount that shows that regional

² The total number of cases for the analyzed period (1989-2011) is 1,480, out of which 473 reported to have had that previous experience in the regional level. Along the 7 legislative terms analyzed, there were many MPs who were re-elected, so we have excluded them from our data base (the second, third... time they were elected): our cases are MPs that enter the Congreso de los Diputados for the first time. Approximately 60% of the MPs in each new term are re-elected MPs (were MPs in the previous Congress). The total number of MPs that occupied a seat of these 7 legislative terms is 2,783; many of them are the same person, who was re-elected (and has, therefore, been excluded from our calculations).
and national arenas are not isolated, and that the national institutions are open to politicians coming from the regional arenas that see the national one as an attractive alternative to develop further their political careers (either because they do or because their parties do...).

As shown in table 1, the percentage of newcomer MPs in each Congress with previous experience in the regional tier of government has been quite steady over time. Only the 10th Congress shows a relevant increase (of 10 points) in the percentage of newcomer MPs with this previous experience: Probably the enormous defeat of PSOE in the regional elections held 5 months before the national one, pushed many of those regional MPs that were not re-elected at the regional level to run in the national one, increasing the percentage of those who had previous regional experience in the 10th Congress.

Table 1. MPs with previous regional political experience (1989-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative Term</th>
<th>Electoral year</th>
<th>MPs with previous regional experience</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>27,5</td>
<td>107*</td>
<td>389*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>33,0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>30,4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>29,2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>34,5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>32,4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>42,9</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>473</td>
<td>1.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32,0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration from data from Congreso de los Diputados website (www.congreso.es).
* Since the 4th Congress is our starting point, there are no "re-elected" MPs in that Congress and, hence, its figures are higher than those of other legislative terms.

In any case, in the 10th Congress almost 43% of the MPs had previous experience in the regional level of government. This means that they were “multi-level” parliamentarians, with experience in both levels of government, what probably allow them to make the multi-level political system work more efficiently, since they are familiar with both arenas and their respective institutional, political and social contexts.
3. Determinants of multi-level careers (national MPs having previous political experience in the regional arena)

In order to try to answer to our research question (what explains multi-level political careers of national MPs?), the above-mentioned features of Spanish political parties should be taken into account, as well as the relationships they set with individual politicians (and MPs). We think our dependent variable (for national MPs, having previous experience in the regional level) can be explained to a large extent by political factors linked to their political parties guidelines, such as “expectations”, “accessibility”, and the “type of party MP belongs to”. We do so from the premise that these variables are not necessarily linked to a decision made by a professional politician according to his preferences, but to one made (or highly influenced) by their political parties (taking into account professional politicians want to advance in a professional career which is highly dependant in the party –leadership- interests and decisions. We define the dependent variable as -for each national MP- “having previous regional experience as MP in a Regional Parliament or as top-ranking public appointed official in a Regional Government when they first entered Congreso de los Diputados”.

Therefore, we will test the following hypothesis:

H1. It is more likely to find a higher percentage of national MPs with previous political regional experience when his/her expectations when making the jump was “to loose”.

We assume that in the context of getting ready to be in the opposition in the national level, Parties will be more interested to add to the national electoral lists candidates who are well trained experts, therefore, those who have experience as regional MPs or top-ranking regional public officials, better than people without that experience. Therefore, a “to loose” jump should increase the probability of finding more percentage of MPs with regional experience, when compared to that resulting from “to win” jumps. It is quite unlikely that someone holding a public regional office (elected or appointed) whose party holds the majority and the government at that level will prefer to jump to the national arena if he knows that his party will be in the opposition in the resulting national Legislature.

H2. It is more likely to find a higher percentage of national MPs with previous political regional experience among MPs who belong to non-state wide parties (NSWP) than among those belonging to state wide ones (SWP).
Being the regional arena the main focus for NSWP, their leaders will be more interested in "sending" to the national arena trained experts who are familiar with the interests and concerns of the regional context, better than sending to non-trained candidates. Therefore, belonging to a NSWP should increase the probability of finding national MPs having previous regional experience, when compared to the one for MPs belonging to SWP. Again, it is quite unlikely that someone from a NSWP holding an elected or appointed office in the regional level will prefer to leave it in order to jump to the national level.

H3. It is more likely to find national MPs with previous regional experience when the “accessibility” for that given MP was low (when he/she decided to run for the national Legislature) than when the “accessibility” was high (when he/she decided to run for the national Legislature).

In the former case, the candidate had more “competitors” in the regional arena – considering the ratio of number of national seats elected in his or her region/number of seats of the regional parliament. In the context of low accessibility the regional (section of the) party would prioritize sending the best trained experts to the national Legislature go a larger extent than if the context was that of high “accessibility” (since in the later there would be more room for regional sections of the party to sent not experienced candidates to the national level). On the other hand, we can expect it is most probably that some holding a public elected or appointed office in the regional arena with high level of accessibility (less competitors) will be willing to engage in the “battle” to be nominated for the national Legislature than when the accessibility level is low (more competitors for the nomination).

Therefore, these three hypotheses are testing whether the party interest prevails even in spite of the most likely opposite preferences of the candidates (when they hold a position in the regional arena).

Our independent variables can be described as follows:

a) "Expectations": This variable has to do with what political expectations an MP has if he/she jumps from the regional to the national levels of government, regarding if his/her party is ruling or not in the regional tier and if his/her party will be the majoritarian one or will be in the opposition in the national Legislature (according to electoral surveys prior to the election – conducted by Centro de
We will compare “to loose” and “no change” expectations with “to win” alternatives (the later as the category of reference).

b) "Type of party" relates to weather the party of the MP is a non-state wide party (NSWP) or a statewide one (SWP). It should be remembered that there are many NSWP in Spanish party system, whose main focus is in regional politics, that may be relevant parties both in the regional arena (sometimes, leading or participating in the Regional Government) and in the national one (supporting the simple majoritarian party Government when neither of the two main national parties gets a majority in National Parliament).

c) "Accessibility” relates to the number of potential competitors the regional MP has in his regional Parliament if he is to fight for the nomination) for the national Legislature. We measure this variable with the ratio calculated by dividing the number of seats of the national Legislature elected in MP´s region, by the number of seats of the regional Parliament. We will compare “low” and “medium” levels of “accessibility” with “high” level ones.

The results of our regression model confirm the three hypothesis (Table 2). All our variables, except for “medium level” of accessibility, are statistically significant. The relation of expectation (“to loose” and “no change”) with the dependent variable is positive and very strong (when compared to “to win” value of the variable), clearly confirming hypothesis 1. The relation of type of party with the dependent variable is also positive and strong: more probabilities of previous regional experience among NSWP MPs, when compared to those of SWP MPs. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is also confirmed. And the relation of level of accessibility is also positive and quite high, at least for the “low” value of the variable when compared to the “high” one. Hypothesis 3 is, therefore, also confirmed.

Table 2. Logistic regression model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>O.R.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectation (&quot;to loose&quot;)</td>
<td>0.649</td>
<td>(0.191)</td>
<td>1.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation (&quot;no change&quot;)</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>(0.157)</td>
<td>1.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party type (&quot;NSWP&quot;)</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
<td>1.513</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) This Social Research Centre (CIS) regularly conducts a survey one month before each electoral process, with a remarkably large sample. Its forecasts are the most accurate ones, when compared to others conducted by several media groups. See [www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es).
Accessibility ("low")  0.536** (0.185)  1.709
Accessibility ("medium")  -0.040 (0.167)  0.961
Intercept  -1.440 (0.191)  0.237

(*** p<.001; **p<.05; *p<.1). Nagelkerke R Square: .161.

This allows us to confirm that political careers (in particular, multi-level ones) are highly influenced (to a large extent, determined) by political variables linked to political parties, and the interests, points of view, and strategies they may have in each political context, even if they go against the most likely MPs’ preferences in such a context. In a multi-layered political system, where institutionalized and powerful regional arenas interact with the more traditional national one, cooperative and competitive relations arise. In this political system, state-wide parties compete and cooperate with non-state wide ones, and are relevant both at the regional as well as at the national levels.

Even if there are regional differences, multi-level political careers point to an integrated political class. Party strategies dependent of the political context point to that same direction, strongly influencing and shaping the political careers of their professional politicians. Of course, there are still the preferences and the will of the MP, either to stay in the regional arena if he/she holds an office in that level, or to jump to the national level to follow his political career. Parties, as political careers and institutions gatekeepers, exert a strong influence in these decisions, facilitating newcomer politicians to get into the party list or to foster political experience in other tiers of government as an individual political asset for political careers, opening the way for these preferences to succeed or challenging politicians’ preferences (successfully).

4. References


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