

National Parties' Manifestos in Regional Elections: the case of Spain

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1. Introduction

Regional parties in Europe have experienced a considerable degree of electoral success -even if cyclical in nature- since the 1970s (Amoretti and Bermeo 2004, De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch 2006, Tronconi 2006, Alonso 2008). This electoral growth has signalled the receptivity of their programmatic stance among the electorate and the increased relevance of the centre-periphery dimension of political competition in countries with peripheral minorities. The growth of peripheral parties has in most cases taken place at the expense of national mainstream parties on the right and on the left of the ideological spectrum.

If electorally threatened by the growth of a regional party, the national party has strong incentives to respond by emphasizing issues of cultural and territorial autonomy in its electoral manifestos (Meguid 2008), thus stripping the regional party of its monopoly as representative of the autonomist cause. However, national parties need to be credible in their adoption of the autonomist cause (Petrocik 1996, Hinich and Munger 1997, Pogorelis, Maddens et al. 2005). Only if they are credible, will threatened national parties be able to stop voters from flying their ranks to join the autonomist cause of regional parties or to recover the voters that have already been lost to regional parties. The problem is that, being *national* parties, they cannot convincingly defend particularistic regional or cultural interests. As long as national parties remain nationwide, representing the whole nation-state, they will have a difficult time trying to counteract their regional competitors by credibly assuming their autonomist agendas.

This dilemma is ameliorated, though not completely eliminated, by particular institutional frameworks, such as a decentralized state. In the absence of sub-national electoral arenas, it is difficult for a national party to convince autonomist-minded voters that the party's leaders really care about devolving power to some or all regions in the country. The presence of sub-national electoral arenas changes this. In sub-national arenas the national party elites will be rendered accountable regionally, so they have an incentive to be responsive to regional electorates and

autonomist-minded voters. The problem of credibility will therefore be less acute in a decentralized state, but it comes at a price. The negative side of the national party's strategy to adopt an autonomist agenda at the regional level to counteract the growth of its regional competitor is that it risks conveying an image of disunity that is usually punished by voters in national elections.

National parties competing in sub-national elections face therefore conflicting interests: on the one hand, they have a strong incentive to appeal to voters with a platform focused on the interests and needs of the sub-national territory in which the elections are taking place; on the other hand, the dispersion of sub-national programmatic agendas should not be so large as to attract the punishment of voters for not looking after the general –i.e. national– interest. According to our main hypothesis, which of these two strategies, namely the programmatic dispersion strategy or the programmatic concentration strategy, national parties pursue will depend, to a large degree, on the presence of strong regional parties that threaten the electoral results of national parties.

This paper analyzes the autonomist positions of national parties' manifestos in regional elections in Spain. We have chosen the Spanish case for three main reasons. First, because regional elections have a long trajectory (as compared to, for example, the UK or Belgium), and thus national parties have had time to accommodate to the reality of sub-national politics. Second, because there is a large number of autonomous regions in Spain (see table 1). And third, because there is variation across regions concerning the presence or absence of relevant regional parties. Our empirical evidence comes from the content analysis of the regional manifestos of the two main national parties in Spain, the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE), in the last regional elections.

2. Party competition: saliency, position and ownership

There are two main interpretations of electoral competition between parties. According to the spatial theories of party behaviour, parties are vote-maximizers and, as such, they offer the electorate the policy packages that are closest to the voters' own preferences (Downs 1957). This means that, when competing at election time, parties have the choice between moving their

policy positions towards those of their main party competitor (policy convergence) or away from them (policy divergence), depending on where their voters position themselves. Spatial theories of electoral competition give particular relevance to the positions of voters and parties along the policy space, taking issue saliency for granted. Certainly, the presence of an issue in a party's discourse and documents already indicates a particular position of relevance. Otherwise, the issue would be dismissed as unimportant.

The spatial theory of electoral competition has been criticized for its unrealistic image of political conflicts. According to Donald Stokes (1963), the structure of the policy space is not fixed but changes through time and space. Parties convey to voters –and are perceived by voters as representing– particular *positions* within different policy dimensions. However, the policy dimensions that are relevant for voters may, and do, change with time (Stokes 1963: 371). Thus, the capacity of a party to win votes depends on its ability to interpret the dimensions that are relevant for the electorate at a particular time and place or, alternatively, on its ability to make particular dimensions relevant through partisan propaganda and rhetoric (Stokes 1963: 372).

Moreover, not all political conflicts concern positional issues where actors disagree about the aim to be achieved. Many times conflicts involve *valence issues*, which are goals generally desired by all voters in the polity, such as high employment and the absence of corruption in government and administration (Stokes 1963: 373). Where valence issues are at stake, voters will choose those parties that have more credibility or competence in dealing with them. For example, if the party in office has been found guilty of corrupt practices, it will have no credibility as defender of the fight against corruption. The advantage of valence issues over positional issues is that they attract different types of voters “beyond ideological differences [while] support for positional issues, in which public opinion is divided, will come exclusively from one part of the electorate” (Maravall 2008: 39).

Petrocik (1996) has argued that those issues in which one party has more credibility or reputation than any other in the system are ‘owned’ by this party (*issue ownership*). For example, Socialist parties have more credibility than Conservative parties in dealing with wealth redistribution while Conservatives have more credibility than Socialist parties in tackling law and order. Parties will compete with each other by becoming the owners of particular issues and emphasizing them in

their programmes since it is here where they have a competitive advantage in terms of credibility and/or reputation (Petrocik, Benoit et al. 2004; Budge, Robertson et al. 1987).

But party competition is not a matter of *either* confrontation over different issue positions *or* selective emphasis of different issues; one type of competition does not preclude the other (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008; Maravall 2008). In fact, parties can undermine their competitors' issue ownership if they choose to alter both their position on the issue at stake and the saliency of the issue in the electoral context (Meguid 2008). A party's strategy is defined by both policy position and issue saliency. Each party will emphasize those issues (valence or positional) in which it has credibility and reputational advantage over its competitors. The voter will choose the party that is closer to its preferences, as the spatial theory predicts, but in the issue dimension that is more relevant for the voter. The party that is more credible or has a better reputation in this dimension will be the chosen one, as the theory of saliency hypothesizes.

2.1 Party competition in two dimensions

Valence issues are a particular case of a more general type of competitive structure, one in which two or more dimensions of competition exist. In the particular case, voters' preferences along one of the two dimensions do not vary but are all the same, occupy the same position; this is why we talk of a valence issue. What changes is the relevance that voters attribute to the valence issue with respect to the other dimension of competition. In the general case, voters' preferences vary along the two (or more) dimensions and the relevance that the two dimensions have for voters varies as well. The relative saliency of each of the two (or more) existing dimensions will determine the choice of the voter since the voter will opt for the party that is closest to her preferences in the dimension that is more important for her.

Voter support for a party depends on three conditions: "1. The party's issue is considered salient or important; 2. The party's position on a given issue is attractive; 3. The party is perceived to be the rightful 'owner' of that policy stance" (Meguid 2008: 24). The existence of two (or more) dimensions of competition gives parties ample maneuvering possibilities to emphasize or deemphasize each of them depending on their interests in every moment. This means that in the presence of two dimensions of competition, a left- or right-wing party is not limited to hunt for

the votes of those competitors that are ideologically close in the left-right dimension but it can also hunt for votes in the other dimensions. The same applies to regional parties.

2.2 The centre-periphery dimension of competition

The centre-periphery cleavage includes two analytically distinct dimensions, the territory and the group. The territorial dimension is that of the identification with and the occupation of a specific piece of territory. The group dimension is that of a population group that possesses, and is probably aware of possessing, some distinctive cultural characteristics that make it different to the population group at the centre. The link between group and territory is both physical and instrumental: physical, because territory and group coincide in the same geographical space; instrumental, because the protection and preservation of the group's culture can only be achieved to the degree that the group has the capacity for autonomous political decision-making within its territory.

Each of the two components of the centre-periphery dimension, the territorial and the cultural, can be represented as a continuum along which the preferences of parties and voters are ordered from those most favourable to the periphery to those most favourable to the central state. The territorial continuum orders the preferences concerning who should have decision-making control over a specific piece of territory and how this decision-making control should be constitutionally defined. The cultural continuum deals with the definition of the group borders and of group membership and with the means for the protection and preservation of the group's cultural distinctiveness, whatever it is based on.

Parties competing along the centre-periphery dimension of competition have diverse territorial and cultural preferences that combine to constitute the party's position on the dimension. Parties with positions in the periphery side of the centre-periphery dimension constitute one party family, which is called differently by different authors (regional, peripheral, non-statewide) while parties with positions in the central state side constitute another party family, also with diverse denominations (national, nationwide, statewide). On the periphery side, regional parties defend an agenda of cultural and territorial autonomy for the peripheral group. The exact preferences of regional parties vary along the periphery side of the continuum, with separatist parties occupying

the periphery extreme. On the central state side of the centre-periphery dimension, national parties defend an agenda of cultural and territorial state control, although, as with regional parties, national parties also vary in their preferences for more or less centralization. To sum up, both the regional and the national party families can be further divided according to their exact positions along the centre-periphery dimension.

2.3 National parties in the regional arena

The existence of regional parliaments and governments accountable to an exclusively regional electorate is the main characteristic of politically decentralized states. It is also one of the factors that explain the salience of the centre-periphery (CP) dimension of competition. The other factor is the presence of relevant regional parties (i.e. parties with seats at the regional parliament).

All regional parties make salient centre-periphery issues in their programmatic agendas. Some parties give so much saliency to these issues that they have been denominated ‘niche parties’ (Meguid 2008). We will not go so far, since we believe that the saliency of centre-periphery issues in relation to other type of issues (for example, left-right issues) varies widely across regional parties. However, we do agree with this interpretation that regional parties are the “owners” of the pro-periphery agenda in its multiple forms (autonomist or separatist, cultural or ethnic, regionalist or nationalist). By contrast, national parties give saliency to left-right issues, with socialist and communist parties owning left issues and conservative and liberal parties owning right issues.

In politically decentralized states, particularly if strong regional parties are present, national parties face a structure of electoral competition that is clearly more complex than the one in centralized states. National parties have to compete for votes with regional parties. Needless to say, not all national parties are equally vulnerable to the electoral growth of regional parties. Either for reasons of ideological proximity or of historical trajectory –or a combination thereof– some national parties are more clearly and directly threatened by the emergence and growth of regional parties than others.

In the presence of a regional party challenger, the national party has to decide whether to ignore the pro-periphery issues defended by regional parties or to incorporate them as part of its own programmatic agenda. The first is what Meguid calls a *dismissive strategy*: “by not taking a position on the niche party’s issue, the mainstream party signals to voters that the issue lacks merit” (Meguid 2005: 349). The second is what Meguid calls an *accommodative strategy*, by which national parties give salience to issues that are typically emphasized by regional parties. This implies that national parties will try to take voters away from regional parties by challenging the exclusivity of the regional parties’ programmatic stance. By contrast, when national parties defend policy issues that oppose those of regional parties (for example, proposals in favour of a unitary centralized state or in favour of a homogeneous national identity), they engage in an *adversarial strategy*. This means that regional parties try to mobilize those voters who oppose the proposals of regional parties. Under both the accommodative and adversarial strategies, the salience of the centre-periphery dimension of competition will increase.

A national party will decide to engage in a dismissive strategy if (1) regional parties do not threaten either its electoral strength or its capacity to form governing majorities and/or if (2) its left-right competitors are also ignoring centre-periphery issues and thus do not benefit in exclusivity from an accommodative or an adversarial strategy. There are times, however, when one or both of these scenarios are present. On the one hand, the electoral growth or blackmail potential of a regional party makes it a credible electoral threat to the national party. In such case, a dismissive strategy may backfire and signal to voters that the national party does not care or does not dare to face the demands put forward by the regional party. This will lead the national party to lose voters to the regional party, particularly those voters for whom the pro-periphery issues take precedence over left-right issues in the choice of party. On the other hand, if a competitor of the national party in the left-right dimension has engaged in an accommodative strategy towards the regional party, ignoring the policy issues of the centre-periphery dimension will also entail electoral losses for the national party, since it will leave the competitor to reap all the benefits of such a strategy in exclusivity. Therefore, the national party will use an accommodative strategy whenever the regional party is a direct threat to its electoral strength or whenever failing to do so will benefit the other national party competitors (Meguid 2008: 96).

So far we have argued that the accommodative strategy of national parties is a reaction to the threatening presence of regional parties. However, the saliency of the CP dimension in national parties' electoral programs can grow also in the absence of regional parties. In decentralized states national parties develop institutional interests at the regional level (Van Houten 2002). If the regional branch of a national party is doing badly in regional elections, such that either its survival in government or its survival as a regional player is at stake, the regional branch's leadership can turn to a decentralizing rhetoric of "region against central state" or "region against other regions" (comparative grievance) with the aim of increasing its support among the regional electorate. In regional elections national parties are less likely to raise suspicions about their credibility, their consistency or their opportunism if they defend regional interests than at national elections. As a result, a decentralized state structure gives incentives to national parties to compete in regional elections in terms of the CP dimension of competition, irrespective of the presence of regional parties¹.

Accommodative strategies come at a price for the national party that decides to make use of them. A large divergence in the CP positions of the regional branches of a national party could harm the party's reputation as a *national* or *nationwide* party. Only a national party with a historical identity of defence of decentralization as a good in itself would be able to justify before its constituency large discrepancies among its regional branches. Or, to put it differently, a national party with a state nationalist ideology and historically identified with centralizing and homogenizing postulates would risk a larger electoral punishment for allowing discrepancies among its regional branches in relation to CP issues. If, despite the risk, the national party cannot avoid a large territorial divergence, this would indicate lack of party cohesiveness or, alternatively, a weakened central leadership that makes room for powerful regional branches whose leadership is more interested in defending narrow regional interests rather than the party's national interest.

¹ An additional advantage to national parties of assuming decentralizing positions at the regional level is that of preventing the emergence of a regionalist or nationalist party in the region. The national party pre-emptively appropriates the pro-periphery issues in its manifestos, thereby filling in the niche that could have been used by a new regional party. This is what Maddens and Libbrecht have called an *anticipatory accommodative strategy* (2009: 206).

3. National parties' demands for decentralization in regional elections: a proposal for measurement

There are two main sources of data on party policy preferences and positions, the expert surveys (Castles and Mair 1984; Laver and Hunt 1992; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003; Benoit and Laver 2006) and the content analysis of parties' electoral manifestos (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987; Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994; Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). The most appropriate for our purposes is the second one, for several reasons (Volkens 2001). First, election programs are either issued by councils of elected party elites or legally ratified by party conventions. Thus, they are authoritative statements of party preferences and represent the whole party, not just one faction or politician. Second, election programs are issued at regular intervals; in all electoral democracies programmatic changes can be observed over parties' lifetimes. Third, election programs cover a wide range of concerns. Therefore, the parties' positions on these issues can be measured and compared to the positions of their competitors within party systems as well as to their sister parties across political systems.

3.1 The nonexistent centre-periphery empirical scale.

The centre-periphery dimension is strikingly absent from scholarly attempts to produce comparative empirical models of the space of political competition. During the last thirty years, an impressive amount of research efforts have been dedicated to characterize empirically the policy spaces of Western democracies in terms of the left-right dimension. The same is not true of the centre-periphery cleavage. A clear indicator of this neglect is the absence of a centre-periphery scale of measurement for common use among scholars. It is only since 2008 that a few isolated efforts are being dedicated to develop an empirical scale of the centre-periphery dimension (Fabre and Martínez-Herrera 2009; Maddens and Libbrecht 2009). The absence of a centre-periphery scale is, in turn, the result of the scarcity of comparative data to estimate the policy positions of political parties along a centre-periphery dimension, in contrast to the relative abundance of comparative data on the left-right dimension.

In theory, the same sources of data used to estimate the left-right positions of parties could be used to analyze the centre-periphery dimension given that the policy categories for which data are

collected do not limit themselves to left-right issues. In practice, however, this is not quite so, for two main reasons. First, because the existing categorizations of issues in either expert surveys or manifestos' content analysis do not provide all the information necessary for distilling general centre-periphery positions from policy specific information. The centre-periphery dimension is usually captured by just one or two categories, usually "centralization-decentralization" and "nationalism", among a long list of categories (Laver and Hunt 1992; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Laver, Benoit and Garry 2003; Benoit and Laver 2006). In the expert surveys of Laver and Hunt (1992) and Laver and Benoit (2006) the centre-periphery dimension is further captured, somehow arbitrarily, by country-specific categories: the "Quebec question" is used as a category or policy issue in Canada and the "Northern Ireland" question is used as a category in the United Kingdom. Following their logic, Laver and Benoit should justify why the "Basque and Catalan questions" are not considered for Spain, the "Federation versus Confederation" question is not taken into account for Belgium, and the "North versus South" question is ignored for Italy.

Political decentralization is a basic component of the centre-periphery dimension and, in this sense, this category can be used profitably for analyzing the policy positions of parties along this issue space. However, the centre-periphery dimension does not end with the question of political decentralization. There is a cultural dimension that is at least as important and that it is hardly ever measured². The Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) dataset is, in this respect, more generous than the existing expert surveys. At least seven positional issues are related to the territorial and the cultural aspects of the centre-periphery dimension, among a total of fifty six: centralization-decentralization, national way of life (positive and negative), multiculturalism (positive and negative) and non-economic demographic groups³.

The second reason why existing datasets cannot be used satisfactorily to estimate policy positions of parties along a centre-periphery dimension is because all the existing data have a clear nation-state bias. No comparative dataset of the policy positions of parties exists for the sub-state level, i.e. for the party systems of the self-governing units of decentralized states. Therefore, existing

² The only two exceptions known to the authors are the works by Fabre and Martínez-Herrera (2009) and of Maddens and Libbrecht (2009), who measure the two components –institutional and cultural– of the centre-periphery dimension when analyzing the party manifestos of British and Spanish statewide parties, respectively, in regional elections.

³ For a definition of these categories see Volkens (2001).

categorizations do not distinguish between the levels of government to which the policy issues refer. Some initial steps are being taken in this direction, but they are either one-case studies (Agasoster 2001, Pogorelis, Maddens et al. 2005, Fabre and Martínez-Herrera 2009, Libbrecht, Maddens et al. 2009) or they are still research in progress⁴.

3.2 A new proposal for measuring CP party positions in regional elections

In order to fill the methodological gap identified in the previous section, we propose a methodology to code regional party manifestos based on the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (Volkens, Alonso and Gómez 2009)⁵.

The text unit of analysis of the CMP coding procedure is the quasi-sentence (Volkens 2001). All the quasi-sentences of party manifesto are coded into one of the fifty six issue categories of the CMP standard classification scheme. These categories refer to a wide variety of questions including external relations, democracy and the political system, the economy, welfare and quality of life, the fabric of society and social groups. The CMP registers the number of quasi-sentences that a party manifesto dedicates to each category and calculates this number as a percentage over the total number of quasi-sentences in the manifesto. The *saliency score* of each category is, therefore, the rate of mentions that this category receives in a given party manifesto.

The adaptation of the CMP methodology to the regional level consists of (a) creating sub-categories that capture regional-level specific issues⁶ and that are hierarchically nested into the standard classification scheme so that they can easily be aggregated to one of the fifty six standard categories and (b) introducing an additional coding scheme that will be combined with the existing one (Volkens, Alonso and Gómez 2009). This new coding scheme classifies authority claims. Authority claims deal with the relationships of authority between the regional

⁴ Marc Debus (Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, MZES) is heading a project entitled “Party competition, government formation and policy outcomes in West European multi-level systems”, for which he will be doing content-analysis of party manifestos in sub-national elections.

⁵ A new classification scheme has been developed to adapt the CMP standard classification scheme to multi-level elections (local, regional, national and supra-national/European). This paper will only present the regional-level classification scheme.

⁶ Some of the regional-level subcategories created are the following: regional finance, differential treatment among regions, immigrants inside the region: positive, protection of region’s language. For a complete list with definitions see Volkens, Alonso and Gómez (2009).

and the national level of governance. Code 22 is applied to explicit demands for more authority to the regional level. Code 21 is applied to explicit demands for less authority to the regional level. Code 20 is to be used when no explicit authority claim is being made. Many sentences in a manifesto do not contain any obvious direction of claim. They address the regional level of governance by emphasizing a problem, such as regional welfare, that needs to be tackled without claiming more or less authority for the region over decision taking for it. This new coding scheme may be used independently or in combination with the CMP standard classification scheme.

Let us see it with some examples from real regional programs. The sentence to be coded says: “We are going to establish a regional agency for the evaluation of public policy implementation”. According to the CMP standard classification scheme, this sentence is applied the code 303, corresponding to the category “Government and administrative efficiency”. Because there is no explicit authority claim, since the party is only telling us what it plans to do within its authority range, we add the code 20. Therefore, the final double coding for this sentence would be 20-303. Let us see yet another sentence: “We are going to promote the participation of the Autonomous Community of Madrid in the management of the Barajas airport”. This sentence belongs to the standard category “Infrastructures” (code 411). At the same time, it claims for the region of Madrid more authority over the Barajas airport. Therefore, the final double coding for this sentence should be 22-411.

4. The saliency of demands for decentralization in national parties’ regional manifestos

This double classification scheme of policy preferences and authority claims has been tested for the first time to code the electoral programs of the two main Spanish parties in the last regional elections in Spain (table 1).

Table 1: *Selection of cases: the electoral programs of the two main national parties in the last regional elections of Spanish Autonomous Communities.*

Autonomous Communities	Main national parties	Regional election year
País Vasco	PP and PSOE	2005
Extremadura	PP and PSOE	2007
Galicia	PP and PSOE	2005

La Rioja	PP and PSOE	2007
Comunidad Valenciana	PP and PSOE	2007
Madrid	PP and PSOE	2007
Aragón	PP and PSOE	2007
Baleares	PP and PSOE	2007
Navarra	PP and PSOE	2007
Cantabria	PP and PSOE	2007
Andalucía	PP and PSOE	2004
Castilla y León	PP and PSOE	2007
Murcia	PP and PSOE	2007
Canarias	PP and PSOE	2007
Castilla La Mancha	PP and PSOE	2007
Cataluña	PP and PSOE	2006

Since our interest is the analysis of national parties' position towards decentralization, our dependent variable will be the percentage of quasi-sentences that a party manifesto dedicates to code 22 (more authority for the regional level) or, in other words, the saliency of demands for decentralization. We shall therefore ignore all the information that our data provide concerning policy preferences by national parties at the regional level. We do not care whether the authority claim in favour of the region is aimed at increasing the presence of the region in international organizations or at improving the attention to the needs of the elderly.

In this section we shall present a descriptive analysis of the saliency that the demands for decentralization have in the regional manifestos of the PP and the PSOE. We want to test, first, whether there are differences across the two parties and how large they are and, second, what is the degree of programmatic dispersion within each party and across them.

4.1 The intensity of demands for decentralization

Table 2 shows the mean saliency of the demands for decentralization in the programs of the PP and the PSOE. Clearly, the demands for decentralization are more salient in Socialist regional programs than in the regional programs of the PP. This result coincides with that found by Ruiz Jiménez (2007) for the 2004 national elections.

Table 2: *Mean saliency score of demands for decentralization in PP and PSOE regional manifestos.*

	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
PP	16	2,17	0	5,81
PSOE	16	4,67	0	15,39
Total	32	3,42	0	15,39

This large difference between the PSOE and the PP comes partly as a result of different historical party identities. The Socialist party has historically been closer to pro-periphery positions than the Popular Party. At the time of Franco's death the Socialists defended intense and far-reaching pro-periphery positions that Blas Guerrero has described as "filo-nationalist" (Blas Guerrero 1988: 72). At the 1974 party congress, the PSOE defended in one of its documents the right of the national minorities within Spain to territorial self-determination and stated as the party's preferred solution for Spain a federal republic of all the nationalities within the state (Blas Guerrero 1988: 72). In contrast, the conservative PP is by history and ideology a Spanish nationalist party that believes that the nation in Spain is one and indivisible and that only the Spanish people, as represented by Spanish institutions, are sovereign.

Thirty years after the democratic transition, however, it is time to move beyond the weight of the past. As we have hypothesized, national parties at the regional level have institutional incentives to assume pro-periphery positions, irrespective of their historical party identities. Therefore, we must move beyond these aggregate indicators to see whether the difference between the PSOE and the PP still holds if we look at the saliency of their demands for decentralization across regions (table 3).

Table 3: *Ranking of national parties according to the saliency of their demands for decentralization in their regional programs*

Autonomous Community	Saliency score of claims for decentralization
	PP
País Vasco	5,81
Extremadura	5,66
Galicia	4,68
La Rioja	4,28
Valencia	3,7
Madrid	3,08
Aragón	2,89
Baleares	2,36
Navarra	0,74

Autonomous Community	Saliency score of claims for decentralization
	PSOE
País Vasco	15,39
Cataluña	12,55
Aragón	11,44
La Rioja	6,88
Galicia	6,5
Navarra	4,66
Andalucía	2,87
Madrid	2,76
Valencia	2,72

Cantabria	0,55
Andalucía	0,54
C. y León	0,47
Murcia	0,11
Canarias	0
C. La Mancha	0
Cataluña	0

Murcia	2,41
C. y León	1,84
Canarias	1,49
Extremadura	1,23
Baleares	1,11
Cantabria	0,92
C. La Mancha	0

Leaving aside, for the time being, the within-party programmatic dispersion that table 3 unfolds, we can see that the difference between the PSOE and the PP still holds, although it requires a more nuanced interpretation. There is a large difference between the three regions of highest Socialist saliency scores and the three regions of highest PP scores. The PP's highest saliency of demands for decentralization is less than half that of the Socialists. In half of the Spanish regions, the PP's regional manifestos hardly dedicate any space to demands for decentralization whereas the Socialists' scores are over two percent in ten out of seventeen regions. However, table 3 shows an interesting result. In three regions (Baleares, Madrid and Valencia) the PP's regional manifestos give more relevance to demands for decentralization than the PSOE's manifestos⁷. These three regions are precisely those where the PP has the regional government.

4.2 The within-party programmatic dispersion of demands for decentralization

According to some analyses, voters reward the programmatic cohesion of political parties and do not punish the lack of internal party democracy (Maravall 2009). Parties prefer to convey a cohesive ideology, a unified position nationwide rather than publicly air their internal divergences. In a decentralized country this is more difficult to achieve than in a centralized state because the interests of the party at the regional level often clash with those of the national leadership. The multi-level institutional structure of electoral competition in decentralized polities introduces centrifugal pressures within the structure of national parties (Roller and Van Houten 2003, Hough and Jeffery 2006, León 2006, Van Biezen and Hopkin 2006). In Spain, the political debate around the territorial distribution of state power has left national parties with a dilemma: in order to obtain good electoral results at the regional level, national parties have to risk their programmatic cohesiveness nationwide.

⁷ Also in Extremadura the PP's pro-periphery position is stronger than that of the PSOE. The only possible explanation we have for this is that the PP in this region is allied with a regionalist party, *Extremadura Unida*.

Table 4 shows the within-party programmatic dispersion of PSOE and PP concerning the saliency of demands for decentralization. We already know from table 3 that the range of pro-periphery saliency scores of regional manifestos is much wider inside the PSOE, where it moves from zero to fifteen percent, than in the PP, where it goes from zero to nearly six percent. This is reflected in both their respective mean values (table 2) and standard deviations (table 4). The Socialist party clearly presents a larger heterogeneity of pro-periphery positions among its regional branches than the PP. However, it is not possible to claim that the Socialist regional manifestos are more dispersed around the mean than the PP ones. The coefficient of variation is almost identical in both parties. Therefore, the PP, despite being organizationally more centralized than the PSOE (Méndez Lago 2000; García Guereta 2002) and despite its historical identity as the party of Spanish nationalists, shows an unexpectedly high degree of programmatic dispersion.

Table 4: *Programmatic dispersion within the PP and the PSOE concerning the saliency of demands for decentralization*

Party	N	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation	Standard error
PP	16	2,13	0,97	,53
PSOE	16	4,65	0,99	1,16
Total	32	3,78	1,1	,67

Inside the PP, the four regions in which the party gives the largest saliency to demands for decentralization are the Basque Country, Extremadura, Galicia and La Rioja. In one of them, Galicia, the PP was the incumbent party at the time of elections (2005). In Extremadura and La Rioja there are right-wing regionalist parties with the capacity to take votes away from the PP. In the Basque Country there is, besides, a strong regional identity.

5. Explaining the saliency of demands for decentralization in regional manifestos

How can we account for the programmatic dispersion found in the regional manifestos of the PSOE and the PP? Our main hypothesis claims that this is the result of competition for votes with regional parties. However, we know, on the one hand, that the decentralized structure of the Spanish state presses national parties to adapt to the regional electoral arena, an adaptation that is likely to lead to some level of programmatic dispersion irrespective of the presence or absence of

regional parties. In this respect, there may be several mechanisms at play. First, assuming that the national party is a vote maximizer also at the regional level, its CP position at the regional level will be more pro-periphery in those regions in which there are a large number of voters with a strong regional identity. Second, in the event of a clash of interests between the party at the centre and its regional branch, a regional party leadership with a wide popular mandate will be in a good position to defend its regional interest at the expense of the interests of the party's national leadership. Third, there is a government-opposition dynamic that pushes the national party towards either accommodative or adversarial strategies depending on the circumstances of each region. We also know, on the other hand, that past positions matter for the credibility and acceptability of present ones. Therefore, not all national parties are equally free to emphasize demands for more decentralization in regional elections when facing a regional party threat; national parties historically connected with state nationalism and centralizing preferences have more to lose in terms of votes than national parties with a reputation as decentralizers.

In this section we shall use some descriptive statistics to look at these factors, concentrating on the bivariate relationship between each of them and the saliency of demands for decentralization in the regional manifestos of PSOE and PP.

5.1 The effect of voters' regional identity on national parties' regional manifestos

If it is true that a vote-maximising national party will adapt the saliency of its demands for decentralization to the degree of regional identity among regional voters, we should see that the regional manifestos of both PSOE and PP have higher scores in those regions where a majority of voters feel more identified with the region than with the nation as a whole. In order to test this, we shall use the responses to a survey question that asks which entity the respondent feels more identified with, the nation or the region (the so-called Moreno question).

Table 5: *Ranking of the strength of regional identities, by Autonomous Community*

% respondents with regional identity ⁸		Degree of regional identity ⁹	Decentralization saliency score > 3.4*	
			PP	PSOE
45,8	País Vasco	HIGH	Yes	Yes
37,7	Cataluña		No	Yes
36,8	Navarra		No	Yes
36,5	Canarias		No	No
23,8	Baleares	MEDIUM	No	No
23,7	Galicia		Yes	Yes
16	Andalucía		No	No
11,2	La Rioja	LOW	Yes	Yes
10,3	Extremadura		Yes	No
9,6	Cantabria		No	No
8,3	Valencia		Yes	No
4,9	Murcia		No	No
4	Madrid		No	No
3,3	C. La Mancha		No	No
2,5	C. y León		No	No
2,2	Aragón		No	Yes

*3.4 is the mean saliency score of the demands for decentralization in the regional manifestos of both parties.

This hypothesis does not find confirmation in table 5. Although the Socialist party seems more sensitive to the degree of regional identity among regional voters than the PP, neither decides the saliency of demands for decentralization in their regional manifestos according to this variable. This is further confirmed if we look at the Pearson correlations in table 6.

Table 6: *Correlation between the level of regional identity and the saliency of demands for decentralization, by party*

	Pearson R	Sig	N
PP	,061	,822	16
PSOE	,496	,051*	16

The fact that in Catalonia, a region in which there is the second strongest regional identity, the PP does not dedicate any sentence in its manifesto to demand more authority to the regional level (see table 3) is a puzzle. According to the median voter hypothesis, we should expect much more emphasis on decentralization in the regional manifesto of the Catalan PP than the one it really

⁸ The data come from the CIS Regional Barometer of December 2005 (study n° 2610). The categories “I feel more [region] than Spanish” and “I feel only [region]” have been merged together in one category that describes those respondents with a strong regional identity.

⁹ This ranking (high, medium, low) is derived from dividing the range (0-46) into three equal intervals. The resulting divisions are as follows: from 0 to 15 (low), from 16 to 30 (medium), from 31 to 46 (high).

has. This lack of decentralizing sensibility of the PP in Catalonia can only be understood in light of the PP's strategy at the national level. Opposing the autonomist nationalism of the Socialists in Catalonia is highly rewarding for the PP in national elections. Of course, the PP pays a price in terms of regional votes in Catalan elections, but the conservative party is willing to pay that price because its electoral presence in Catalonia is nevertheless quite weak. Losing votes in Catalonia, where it could never manage to become a government party –at least not in the short-run, is not a high price in exchange for the possibility of governing Spain. This is an instance of the influence that government-opposition dynamics may have on national parties' emphasis on decentralization in their regional manifestos.

5.2 The popularity of regional leaders and its effect on the saliency of demands for decentralization

National parties in regional elections need to maintain a balance between keeping a cohesive political image nationwide and being responsive to the specifically regional demands of their constituencies (Keating 1998). Regional elections give the regional branches of national parties an independent source of representative legitimacy and a power stronghold. The prestige of a regional political career increases and making a national career relies more strongly on making a regional one. Regional *barons* have to be taken into account by the national party elite, particularly if the region contributes a large portion of the party's total national vote share.

According to some analyses, regional leaders with high popularity have more room of manoeuvre to ignore the party's national line and pursue their own regional interests than regional leaders with low or decreasing popularity (Van Houten 2002). There is empirical evidence of it in several European countries, among them Austria, Germany (Abedi and Siaroff 1999) and France (Sferza 2002). This means that in the event of a clash of interests between the party at the centre and its regional branch, the regional leadership will defend a more pro-periphery agenda than it is wished for by the national one.

If this hypothesis is true, we should see that the popularity of the regional leader is closely connected with high saliency scores of demands for decentralization in regional manifestos (table 7). In order to test it, we shall use the index of popularity of the CIS Regional Barometer of

December 2005 (n° 2610). This index ranges from 0 (lowest popularity) to 10 (highest popularity).

Table 7: *The popularity of regional barons and its effect on the saliency of demands for decentralization in regional manifestos*

Autonomous Community	Party	Popularity index of regional leader¹⁰	Decentralization saliency score > 3.4
Castilla LM	PSOE	6,4	No
Extremadura	PSOE	6,2	No
Valencia	PP	5,9	Yes
Murcia	PP	5,9	No
Andalucía	PSOE	5,9	No
Aragón	PSOE	5,8	Yes
Baleares	PP	5,7	No
Cantabria	PSOE	5,5	No
La Rioja	PP	5,4	Yes
Madrid	PP	5,4	No
C. y León	PP	5,3	No
Castilla LM	PP	5,2	No
Galicia	PP	5,2	Yes
La Rioja	PSOE	5,1	Yes
Galicia	PSOE	5	Yes
Canarias	PSOE	4,9	No
Extremadura	PP	4,7	Yes
Cantabria	PP	4,7	No
Cataluña	PSOE	4,7	Yes
Baleares	PSOE	4,6	No
Valencia	PSOE	4,6	No
Canarias	PP	4,6	No
C. y León	PSOE	4,5	No
Navarra	PP	4,5	No
Aragón	PP	4,4	No
Murcia	PSOE	4,4	No
Navarra	PSOE	4,3	Yes
País Vasco	PSOE	4,3	Yes
Madrid	PSOE	4,2	No
Andalucía	PP	4,0	No
Cataluña	PP	2,8	No
País Vasco	PP	2,1	Yes

Table 8: *Correlation between the popularity of the party's regional leader and the saliency of the party's demands for decentralization, by party*

¹⁰ El índice de popularidad es la valoración en una escala que va de 0 a 10 del Presidente Autonómico. El 0 significaría que es muy mal valorado y el 10 que muy bien (CIS, Barómetro Autonómico n° 2610).

	Saliency score of decentralization		
	Pearson R	Sig	N
PP	-,085	,743	16
PSOE	-,264	,323	16

The hypothesis finds no confirmation. The popularity of the regional party leader does not seem to have much to do with the decentralizing emphasis of the party's regional manifestos. Out of seven cases where Socialist regional leaders have a popularity score above five, in three of them the Socialist regional manifesto gives an emphasis on decentralization above the mean and in the other four the emphasis is below the mean. Similarly, three out of eight PP regional leaders with a popularity score above five have presented a regional manifesto whose saliency score of demands for decentralization is above the mean and the other five have a saliency score below the mean. If anything, the Person correlations (table 8) show that the relationship is the opposite of what we have hypothesized; in other words, the greater popularity of regional leaders is related with less saliency of demands for decentralization in the regional manifestos of both PSOE and PP. We can think of two different reasons why this may be so. According to the first, regional leaders from national parties do not need to emphasize demands for decentralization because their popularity is not at stake so the temptation to use the regional card does not exist. Second, regional leaders of national parties that do not emphasize demands for decentralization are more popular among the regional electorates.

5.3 The effect of regional office on the saliency of demands for decentralization

Does the party in office at the regional government have more incentives to emphasize decentralization in its manifestos than the party in opposition? The unqualified answer is no. National parties in difficulties at the regional level, either because their survival in office is at stake (incumbent party), or because they are unable to outgrow the electoral support of the government (opposition party), cannot rely exclusively on electoral externalities to get out of their difficulties in the region. The reason is that the existence of regional governments and legislatures eventually leads to the development of differentiated constituencies that vote differently depending on the level of government, the more so the higher the level of self-government in the region (León 2006: 75). Therefore, the regional branches of national parties will have incentives to play the regional card as a way to attract voters. What is the least costly

way to play the regional card? The least costly way is to transform pro-periphery issues in valence issues. Let us see how.

The unequal distribution of financial resources and political power among the Spanish regions, as well as their unequal levels of development, are a fundamental source of conflict of multi-level governance in Spain. The idea that other regions in the country –or the state itself– have more political and economic power and that this is what keeps the region behind the rest in terms of development and well-being is a powerful one among voters. The reverse idea according to which other regions in the country –or the state itself– are lagging behind and, as a result, the more advanced region is paying for the underdevelopment of the others is also an appealing idea among voters. All parties at the regional level have an incentive to use this rhetoric of comparative grievance to attract votes. The rhetoric of comparative grievance is a valence issue, not a positional one. It will attract not just regionalist and nationalist minded voters but also voters who do not care about the CP dimension of competition. Therefore, the incumbent party has incentives to convey an image of defender of the regional interest vis à vis the central government and the rest of regions in order to survive in office whereas the opposition party has also incentives to do it in order to gain office.

The consequence is that without controlling for other factors, we should not expect to find a clear difference in the saliency of demands for decentralization among national parties in government and in opposition at the regional level. And this is exactly what table 9 shows.

Table 9: *Means difference between the regional incumbent and the opposition with regard to the demands for decentralization*

	Saliency scores means difference*	
	Incumbent	Opposition
PP	2,15	2,20
PSOE	4,87	4,57

* The means differences are not statistically significant

Whether it is the party in government or the party in opposition the one which has more incentives to use the rhetoric of comparative grievance will depend on their respective electoral trajectories, on what type of competitor the party is facing (another national party or a regional

party) and on how much this competitor is itself emphasizing decentralization in its regional manifestos. Again the electoral threat to the regional branch of the national party becomes a fundamental explanatory factor.

5.4 The presence of regional parties and its effect on the saliency of demands for decentralization

Ultimately, the decentralizing emphasis that national parties convey in their regional manifestos will be a function of the presence or absence of strong regional parties that represent an electoral threat to the national party. Table 10 shows the saliency of demands for decentralization in the regional manifestos of PSOE and PP across regions and the vote share of regional parties in each of these regions. If our hypothesis were to be confirmed, we should see that in regions where regional parties are a strong electoral force, PSOE and PP emphasize decentralization to a greater extent than in regions where the presence of regional parties is either weak or inexistent.

Table 10: *Saliency of demands for decentralization in national party manifestos according to the presence or absence of regional parties*

Autonomous Community	Regional parties in regional parliament	Regional parties' vote share	Decentralization saliency score > 3.4	
			PSOE	PP
País Vasco	Yes	55,9	Yes	Yes
Cataluña	Yes	46,8	Yes	No
Canarias	Yes	42,4	No	No
Navarra	Yes	28,6	Yes	No
Galicia	Yes	25,1	Yes	Yes
Aragón	Yes	24,8	Yes	No
Baleares	Yes	19,4	No	No
Cantabria	Yes	17	No	No
Valencia	Yes	9,4	No	Yes
Andalucía	Yes	7,5	No	No
La Rioja	Yes	5,9	Yes	Yes
C. y León	No	4,2	No	No
Extremadura	No	2,8	No	Yes
C. La Mancha	No	0	No	No
Madrid	No	0	No	No
Murcia	No	0	No	No

The hypothesis seems to be correct for the Socialist party, but not for PP. In five out of the six regions with the highest vote shares of regional parties (above 25%), the saliency scores of

demands for decentralization in the PSOE's regional manifestos are above the mean. In nine out of the ten regions with the vote shares of regional parties below 20%, the relevance of demands for decentralization in the PSOE's regional manifestos is low. The regions in which the regional branches of the PP present manifestos with a saliency score of decentralization above the mean are few and are equally distributed among regions with high and low vote shares of regional parties (Basque Country, Galicia, Valencia, La Rioja and Extremadura). Moreover, as we already mentioned before, in the region with the second strongest regional parties the regional branch of the PP leaves no space to demands for decentralization in its manifesto. The Pearson correlations in table 11 provide further confirmation of these relationships.

Table 11: *Correlation between the saliency of demands for decentralization and the presence of regional parties, by party.*

	Pearson R	Sig	N
PP	,003	,942	16
PSOE	,489	,05*	16
PP+PSOE	,297	0,09*	32

Table 10 shows other interesting results. In the Canary Islands, a region with a strong regionalist party and with a strong regional identity, neither PSOE nor PP gives emphasis to demands for decentralization in their regional manifestos. In La Rioja, a region with a weak regionalist party and a very weak regional identity, both PSOE and PP give saliency in their regional manifestos to demands for decentralization.

6. Multivariate analysis

Until now we have presented a simple analysis of the bivariate relationships between the saliency of demands for decentralization in national parties' regional manifestos and several explanatory factors, looking separately at the regional branches of PSOE and PP. Next we are going to present a multivariate analysis, in order to confirm that the bivariate relationships still hold when their effects are considered together in a lineal regression analysis. The dependent variable is, again, the saliency score of code 22 (an explicit demand for more authority to be devolved to the

regional level). The independent variables are measured as in the descriptive analysis of the previous section. The strength of regional identity is measured as the percentage of respondents that claim to feel more identified with the region than with the state. The popularity of the national parties' regional leaders is measured through an index of popularity that ranges from 0 (minimum popularity) to 10 (maximum popularity). The regional office is a dichotomous variable with value 1 if the party is in office at the regional level and 0 if it is in the opposition. Finally, the regional party threat is measured as the merged vote shares of all the regional parties with representation at the regional parliament.

We are aware of the limits implicit in a regression analysis with a small N. For this reason, our aim is not to get conclusive results that can be generalized to other countries and other parties but to see how the relationships between variables that we have found in our data change with respect to the previous bivariate analysis. We shall ignore the statistical significance of the regression coefficients, given its scarce value with a small N. Instead, we shall focus on the size and sign of the coefficients. The results are presented in table 12.

Table 12: *Multivariate analysis: explaining the decentralization saliency scores of national parties' regional manifestos across regions.*

Dependent variable: saliency score of demands for decentralization			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	PP+PSOE	PSOE	PP
Independent Variables			
Strength of regional identity	-0.07 (0.091)	-0.16 (0.139)	-0.013 (0.106)
Popularity of party's regional leader	1.73 (1.183)	-1.92 (2.345)	-0.54 (1.715)
Regional office (yes/no)	-1.71 (1.734)	2.13 (3.279)	0.65 (2.435)
Merged vote share of regional parties	0.19* (0.078)	0.117* (1.073)	-0.004 (0.089)
Constant	-6.47 (5.92)	11.25 (11.361)	4.68 (8.470)
R2	0.28	0.58	0.014
N	32	16	16

* significant at .05 level.
(standard errors in parentheses)

This multivariate analysis confirms that the electoral strategies of PSOE and PP respond to different factors and that only the electoral strategies of the PSOE are a response to the peripheral party threat. The regional manifestos of the PP are not explained by the variables at hand, just as the bivariate analysis had insinuated. Some of the regression coefficients in table 12 contradict the results of the previous bivariate analysis, an indication that we need to pay more attention to possible interactions between variables.

7. Conclusions

The evidence discussed in this paper shows two clear things. First, the regional branches of the Spanish national parties PSOE and PP do not present the same programmatic agenda in all regions of Spain. The CP positions of PSOE and PP vary considerably across regions, particularly in the case of PSOE. Therefore, Spanish national parties adapt their electoral strategies to the regional level of electoral competition. Second, the factors that explain the cross-regional variation in the emphasis that regional manifestos give to the issue of decentralization are different for PSOE and PP. Obviously, each party faces a different strategic situation.

The electoral behaviour of PSOE seems to fit quite well Meguid's *accommodative strategy* in response to the threat from regional parties, and Madden's and Libbrecht's *anticipatory accommodative strategy*. The regional branches of the PSOE emphasize claims for more decentralization in their manifestos in regions where they are being threatened by strong regional parties and in regions where no other party can credibly make such claims. The accommodative strategy fits relatively well with the PSOE's historical identity as a party in favour of decentralization and, for this reason, the Socialist defense of increased devolution to the regions is credible among voters with regionalist or nationalist preferences. This is particularly important in a region like Catalonia, which is not just a highly relevant regional power stronghold for the Socialist party but also the party's key to get the government of Spain. The Socialist party has a high concentration of its total national vote in Catalonia and, moreover, this region contributes with the second largest number of seats to the national parliament, after Andalusia. The presence

of large nationalist parties in Catalonia that take votes away from the PSOE is, therefore, a strong incentive for the Catalan Socialists to push for further decentralization.

The behaviour of the PP, by contrast, has very little to do with the presence of a regional party threat and more, instead, with the competition for votes with the Socialist party at the national level. It is clear that the variables we have analyzed do not explain the saliency that the PP's regional manifestos give to claims for more decentralization. In regions like Catalonia, the electoral strategy of the PP can only be understood in national –as opposed to regional– terms. Anti-catalanism brings the PP electoral rewards outside Catalonia and, given that the PP is the opposition party at the national level, these electoral rewards are highly valued, even if they cause the party electoral losses inside the region. However, in order to test the relevance that being in office or in opposition at the national level has for the regional strategies of the PP, we need cross-time data of regional manifestos that are not yet available.

The electoral strategies of the regional branches of the PP in Madrid, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, however, do not seem the result of competition for votes with the PSOE. These are the only three regions in which the PP gives more emphasis to decentralization than the Socialists. They are also the three regions in which the PP has established regional power strongholds, where the PP has been in office for several legislatures, where the PP finds a large portion of its total national vote, where the PP has its most popular leaders. The decentralizing emphasis to be found in the manifestos of the PP in these regions, therefore, is not part of an electoral strategy to compete against the PSOE but the result of the increased power that these regional organizations have acquired vis à vis the PP national leadership.

Thus, the PP' strategic priority to get the government of Spain leads the party into opposing regional strategies: in regions that give the PP a large pool of both national and regional votes, the national leadership must tolerate the decentralizing agendas of the powerful regional barons; in other regions, by contrast, the best the PP can do is to engage in adversarial strategies, denouncing the decentralizing agendas of the Socialists and other regional parties, and conveying to the Spanish electorate an image of defender of the unity of the state.

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