

The Dynamics of Nationalist Evolution in Contemporary Spain

A research project based at the University of Liverpool, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK)

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PROJECT OUTLINE

1. Context

The last decade has seen significant shifts in orientation within the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements, whose leading political parties in historical terms—Convergence and Union (*Convergència i Unió*, CiU) in Catalonia and the Basque Nationalist Party (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, PNV) in the Basque Country—have won enough seats in the Spanish Parliament to affect the governance of Spain from time to time. On occasion these parties have helped ensure political stability in Spain by lending support to minority governments of conservative (*Partido Popular*, PP) or socialist (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) coloration; at other times they have made difficult or even impossible the task of central government, especially in 1995-96 when an end to PSOE-CiU cooperation effectively brought an end to the last González administration.

Though formal coalitions at central government level have been alien to post-Franco Spanish politics, nationalist parties often find themselves in a position to exert leverage and even act as power-brokers, thanks to an electoral system that tends to over-reward small parties so long as they have concentrated regional support. Outright victories are rare in Spanish general elections (just two since 1989) and the potential for nationalist parties to play an influential role is helped by the lack of a Spanish centre party to serve as a potential partner of the PP or PSOE and the limited support for the post-communist United Left (*Izquierda Unida*, IU), a potential ally of the Socialist Party.¹ Nationalist parties have also controlled the regional governments of two of Spain's most economically developed regions (Catalonia and the Basque Country) for most of the last 30 years of devolved government.

Shifts in the orientation of nationalist movements have attracted public attention owing to indications that the PNV and CiU, for decades identified with the moderate mainstream of micro-nationalism in Spain, may be susceptible to 'radicalization' of a kind that could upset the established Spanish governance pattern involving substantial 'territorial accommodation', defined as 'the capacity of states to contain conflict within the mechanisms and procedures embedded in existing institutional arrangements' (Muro, 2009:

¹ While this state of affairs has prevailed over the last quarter century, strong signs of an end to the PP-PSOE duopoly were evident in public opinion poll findings by 2013 as both the PP and PSOE became discredited and IU together with the Union, Progress and Democracy party (*Unión Progreso y Democracia*, UPyD) made gains.

453). Such 'radicalization' was identified by many observers (although not by the parties themselves) in the unsuccessful efforts of former PNV regional prime minister Juan José Ibarretxe to have the status of the Basque region upgraded to that of a semi-independent associated state of Spain, and in nationalist (amid wider Catalan) responses to 'constitutionalist' efforts to block or dilute the enhanced Catalan autonomy statute of 2006 (parts of which were nullified by a Constitutional Court ruling in June 2010, resulting from a PP appeal).

In addition to the centre-periphery dimension of these developments, and particularly in the setting of the post-2008 financial recession, there has been pressure from publics and political elites in other regions of Spain, complaining variously that decentralization of the state may have gone 'too far' and become an obstacle to Spain's economic recovery and the need to become more competitive, or about Basque and Catalan positions with regard to inter-territorial solidarity. Sectors of the PP in particular, but also other components of the political class, have been seen to reaffirm a Spanish nationalist discourse and/or to show a lack of empathy in relation to the ambitions of other nationalisms within the country. Thus, in contrast to simplistic depictions of a 'rise in regionally-based nationalism' there is wider evidence of tension, if not a clash, between different national sentiments, as well as different regional interests. The interaction between rival nationalisms itself may be having a catalytic effect in radicalization processes, leaving accommodation politics more difficult on all sides.

These developments explain the reason for examining the mainstream nationalist parties (and broader nationalist movements) in this project, focusing on the dynamics of their recent evolution. Their future direction is far from clear. Centre-periphery tensions have sharpened significantly in the case of Catalonia at a time of absolute majority government by the PP statewide, but nationalist movements in the past have shifted between radical and accommodationist positions, so one must be cautious about projecting current trends into the future. In the Basque Country tension across the centre-periphery axis is currently less pronounced owing to a number of factors (a different fiscal status, relatively strong fiscal discipline despite the financial crisis, the historical impact of political violence, ETA's recent abandonment of violence, etc.), yet there were distinct signs of radicalization just a decade ago.

The trends within nationalist movements are complex and at times contradictory, well beyond the more enduring of the contrasts to be found within and between the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements. While any provisional depiction of shifts and trends is likely to involve simplification, one can identify changes in the balance of forces within such movements over time, often linked to changes in alignment patterns or potential realignments. As with some other party families, the varied composition of nationalist movements is analysed often in terms of a continuum between exponents of pragmatism (here involving a willingness among nationalist parties to cooperate with central government and non-nationalist parties and commit to the politics of territorial accommodation) and of radicalism (involving nationalist claims to 'sovereignty', implying a right to formalized consultation, self-determination and potentially a fundamental change to existing centre-periphery constitutional relationships). While nationalist *movements* may be too broad and heterogeneous to classify *in toto* in relation to this continuum, some

nationalist *parties* (albeit often with internal factional differentiation) can be analysed in such terms.

2. *Specifying and Justifying the Research Focus*

Period of analysis

This project focuses primarily on the behaviour of nationalist movements since the early 1990s.² It thus embraces a quarter of a century that has seen much fluidity within nationalist movements after a more settled pattern had pointed to stability, seen by many as a success story for the system of autonomous communities but also strongly conditioned in the Basque case by the effects of political violence. In the recent period, the Basque Country has appeared in many accounts to have been through a period of radicalization and polarization during the PNV's adherence to the Ibarretxe Plan and since then through several years of relative pragmatism under new leaders, following electoral defeat, or a rather loss of power in 2009 (Mees, 2009). At the same time, more radical political parties advocating independence have been attempting to establish themselves within the political system since the ban on Batasuna (the second most popular party in electoral terms) in 2002. Groups that broadly shared ETA's political perspectives became increasingly forthright in calling for an unambiguous end to political violence and for genuine commitment to the rule of law and competition within the political system. Unaffected by bans on parties, Catalonia meanwhile has experienced more acute electoral competition between the nationalist parties, particularly CiU (itself an alliance, but a stable one) on the centre-right and the ERC on the left, yet initially there were radical reactions from a majority opinion shared by most *catalanistes*³ upon hearing the ruling of the Constitutional Court in 2010.

Basque-Catalan Comparison in the Context of Spain and Developments in Spanish Nationalism

Since the 1990s, Spain has seen plentiful evidence of political movement among the nationalist forces based in two regions of economic and political importance, accounting for 20+ seats in the lower house of the Spanish parliament. In these regions, after four decades of democracy, the framework of the Spanish state is still widely questioned (to differing degrees) by nationalists. While many Spanish nationalists depict separatist tendencies as resulting from Spain having one of the most decentralized polities in Europe, other interpretations view the radicalization of mainstream Catalan nationalism as a response to a

² It is open to more historical studies that offer analysis of the dynamics of nationalist movements in earlier times, so long as they relate past to present in ways that help us to interpret the more recent evolution of nationalism.

³ While many people use the terms 'Catalan nationalism' and 'Catalanism' interchangeably, some Catalans describe themselves as *catalanistes* (implying a primary Catalan identity and prioritization of Catalan interests) but not nationalists. Often this comes with advocacy of enhanced Catalan autonomy and support for a federal Spain, along with a rejection of the idea of Catalan independence. In political party terms, such views are probably most prevalent in the Party of the Socialists of Catalonia (*Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya, PSC*), affiliated to the PSOE, and in the Initiative for Catalonia Greens-United and Alternative Left (*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, ICV-EUiA*), an alliance often compared to the Greek Syriza.

resurgence in Spanish nationalism/‘radicalization of centralist nationalism’ (Guibernau, 2003: 130), involving deliberate state strategies, and/or as a response to more impersonal global influences.

This context, together with the controversies it has inspired, makes Spain a crucial point of reference for developing a clearer understanding of the dynamics acting upon nationalist movements within plurinational states and their consequences for central government. While the issue has political importance in a number of European countries (notably the UK and Belgium, but also Italy), the Spanish focus is particularly interesting, for three reasons:

- It provides scope for comparative analysis of two politically significant nationalist movements and thus the possibility of avoiding conclusions that may apply only to a single movement and its interactions with central government.
- It raises issues about territorial politics more widely, given the way that Catalonia and the Basque Country face strong competition from other regions of Spain in political, fiscal and other economic matters.
- Spain is one of several EU member states in which centre-periphery relations are politically important and may be reaching a historical turning point. On the one hand, the leading Spanish parties have needed to obtain support from nationalist parties in order form effective governments, in 1996, 2004 and 2008; the dynamics of nationalist forces are thus immediately relevant to the issue of governance and political stability in Spain, whatever perspectives one entertains regarding the long-term prospects of maintaining the territorial integrity of the Spanish state. On the other hand, the current emphasis on *soberanismo* in Catalonia and the (re-) entry of the *abertzale*⁴ left into Basque political life both signal the possibility of important changes in the relationship between these territories and the Spanish state and in their own governance regimes.

While contrasts between the Basque Country and Catalonia must be respected, the two cases are comparable in terms of a number of commonalities: structure of the nationalist movement (in broad terms), degree of economic success compared to other Spanish regions, predominance of nationalist parties in regional government, existence of party competition within the nationalist camp as well as more widely, and degree of potential political influence of nationalist parties *vis-à-vis* Madrid. Galicia also has a significant nationalist movement but differs in all these respects from the Basque Country and Catalonia. It could be used as a counter-example to our comparable cases, but will not be a focus owing to resource limits and a conviction that comparison is more likely to be effective if based (at least initially) on a modest number of cases.

Besides those nationalisms that are based in territories without sovereignty, there has also been longstanding research interest in ‘Spanish nationalism’ (Álvarez Junco, 2001; Núñez

⁴ Meaning ‘patriot’ in Euskara, *abertzale* is generally used to denote ‘Basque nationalist’.

Seixas, 1999; Balfour and Quiroga, 2007; Humlebæk, 2013 forthcoming),⁵ in addition to current political interest at a time of PP governmental dominance and confrontation over the future of Catalonia. While not principally concerned with Spanish nationalism *per se*, this project certainly will address transversal influences across nationalisms and seek evidence of how one form of nationalism may be fuelled by assertion of the other (Lecours, 2007).

3. *Conceptualization and Terminology*

For the independent observer, terminology is a minefield. It would seem virtually impossible to apply concepts from the social sciences without some risk of being identified by others with a political posture or sympathy. This makes it particularly important to define one's terms clearly and use them consistently in the course of analysis. Many scholars who specialize in the study of nationalism in Spain *do* happen to be partisan in one way or another and thus this has become the expectation. In fact, interesting research is to be found across the divide of perspectives. Since one aim of this project is to promote collaborative and where possible comparative research activity, the need to define terms is additionally imperative: a prerequisite for any concerted exploration of the research topic, avoiding 'parallel discussions' or a 'dialogue of the deaf'.

'Radicalization' is a term used both by independent observers and often also by opponents of nationalist movements. It does not tend to feature in the discourse of nationalist parties in their accounts of recent trends in their own evolution. Rather, the rise of *soberanismo* in Catalonia is presented by nationalists and more generally by Catalanists as being an essentially democratic development involving the assertion of a popular 'right to decide' on the future of the community in which the nation is rooted. However, the very concept of the homeland that is claimed to have such a right can differ from one nationalist party to another. Many in the PNV, for example, accept the autonomous community of the Basque Country (Basque name Euskadi) as the unit in which they will operate politically whereas *Sortu* ('Create') continues in the Batasuna tradition of attributing this right to the broader Basque population resident in several parts of Spain and France.

Even where 'radicalization' is discerned, it relates to a tendency and does not necessarily imply a determined push for full independence. While radicalization in the sense that it is used here was evident in the Ibarretxe Plan, the fact that it spoke vaguely about some form of legally-based association with Spain implied some desire for negotiation and the avoidance of complete separation.⁶ Thus, as recent CiU policy illustrates as well, it can be compatible with attempts to reconstruct centre-periphery cooperation on a different basis within the Spanish context. Eventual confederalism, rather than separation, is sometimes

⁵ See also details of the research project on 'Nacionalismo Español: discursos y praxis desde la izquierda 1982-2008) based at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla at http://www.upo.es/proyectos/nacionalismo_esp

⁶ It should be noted that the plan was not simply about the relationship of the Basque Country to the Spanish state, but also involved an attempt to leave ETA with no arguments to justify the continued use of political violence.

posited as an alternative to the less than successful moves so far towards ‘cooperative semi-federalism’ (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007: 199).

For the purposes of this project, the term ‘radicalization’ is used strictly in relation to the continuum extending from ‘radical’ to ‘accommodationist’ positions at the polar ends of the potential field of positions occupied by micro-nationalist political forces to be found in a country characterized by multi-level government. ‘Radical’ here implies a fundamental questioning of, and desire to change, existing state structures in Spain. ‘Accommodation’ implies accepting (at least temporarily) those structures in order to concentrate on other desired outcomes through cooperation with Spanish parties. ‘Radicalization’ is meant to denote direction, shifts in orientation and tendencies: not to suggest that mainstream nationalist parties in Spain are essentially or ultimately ‘radical’, have already begun to act in some unequivocal ‘radical’ way or exhibit a growing proclivity for violent action. It is not intended to convey a value judgement, either positive or negative.

In any case, with regard to labelling, it should be noted that some nationalist parties are broad churches in which any evidence of radicalization or its opposite⁷ is likely to be found more distinctly at the level of internal currents than at that of the whole party or wider alliance (albeit with probable consequences for them). Alongside them one does find radical nationalist parties as such - notably the Basque *Sortu* and the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC) - which at times have played a significant part in influencing the behaviour of the mainstream party or groups within it.

Preliminary research designed to identify and map phases of radicalization and accommodation in the Catalan case suggests that these encompass episodes of varying duration and significance. Shifts in either direction may be more or less profound, more or less tactical or strategic and, as a result, more or less durable. Accommodationism, if adopted just for immediate electoral purposes, may end quickly if the instrumental purposes it was intended to serve are thwarted by the outcome of the election or other developments. For example, in the campaign for the Spanish general election of 2011 the PP in Catalonia, unlike the rest of the party, accepted the principle of linguistic immersion underlying the Catalan education system and generally adopted a moderate discourse on the national question. The apparent aim was to keep alive the prospect on continued political collaboration with CiU, initiated after the regional election of 2010, but also to win votes from any former CiU voters alarmed by the new *soberanista* discourse of that party.

Equally, there would appear to have been substantial electoral motivation behind CiU’s articulation of a relatively radical discourse in the approach to the regional election of 2006, designed to exploit the embarrassment of its ERC rival resulting from certain compromises made in the course of collaborating in the regional coalition headed by Pasqual Maragall in 2003-06. This did not prevent CiU from offering itself as a potential solid ally of Zapatero’s minority socialist government in Madrid, thereby illustrating how in the context of multi-level government, on occasion one can find rather different nationalist postures or alignments at the centre and in the autonomous community.

⁷ For the opposite trend, the term ‘de-radicalization’ may be more problematic and it may be clearer to use a phrase such as ‘growing support for accommodation’ instead.

For evidence of more profound degrees of radicalization, one would be looking for shifts that outlast a single electoral period or legislative term. It would imply major changes in personnel and leadership, different alliances with other parties and possible changes in international alignment and affiliations.

4. *Building upon the Existing Research Literature*

Spain has inspired some very interesting contributions to the academic literature on devolved forms of government, nationalism and nationalist movements, including historically-informed comparison of the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements (Díez Medrano, 1995; Conversi, 1997); individual case studies of their historical dynamics, often in the context of the historical emergence of regional autonomy (Lo Cascio, 2008; Castells and Cajal, 2009; De la Granja, 2009; Molina, 2010); and case studies of nationalist parties (De Pablo and Mees, 2005; Barberà Aresté, 2011; Culla, 2013). This project aims to be innovative in two respects.

First, while studies of the dynamics associated with centre-periphery relations have featured prominently in existing literatures (e.g. Muro and Quiroga, 2004), we are considering a wider range of dynamics potentially shaping the behaviour of nationalist movements in the recent period. Various additional dynamics have been present certainly in some media coverage and in scholarly though often one-dimensional studies (e.g. looking at nationalist responses to immigration into regions). A more ambitious comprehensive approach concerned with the relative roles of different processes found in the evolution of nationalist movements will be involved here.

Second, the project aims to compare and contrast the Catalan and Basque cases in a more recent context than normally found in the comparative works. The period is that of the 'Spain of the Autonomies', whose structure was intended to favour moderation on the part of the Catalan and Basque nation movements, although without actively promoting accommodation. Spanish electoral law, in use since 1977, indeed aimed to ensure a degree of predominance of the two leading state-wide parties

This investigation seeks to integrate with the more familiar analysis of the centre-periphery 'dialectic' other dynamics, regional, transversal and global, while also inquiring whether other less apparent dynamics may be involved.

- *Regional* dynamics are concerned with pressures on nationalist parties from within their own nationalist community and with electoral competition between parties, particularly in competition for control over regional governments. They are thus affected by the degree of political fragmentation as a variable at regional level (Conversi, 1997: 262). There is a substantial and growing literature on the dynamics of regional party competition involving nationalist parties and the regional affiliates of statewide parties, seen as an important cause of territorial mobilization (Fernández Albertos, 2002; Pallares and Keating, 2003; Hough and Jeffery, 2006; De Winter, Gómez-Reino and Lynch, 2006; Balcells and Roig, 2008; Hepburn, 2010; Elias,

2011). One line of analysis here has been concerned with the effects of the decentralization of Spanish parties (especially those on the Left) as they bid to compete more effectively with nationalist rivals. Attention has also been paid to the potentially 'moderating' effects that may derive from the participation of nationalist parties in coalition governments, such as the tripartite governments in Catalonia between 2003 and 2010 (Matas Dalmases and Reniu Vilamala, 2003; Stefuriac, 2009; Elias and Tronconi, 2011). Very little research seems to have been done, however, on informal factional rivalries, especially in 'catch-all' parties such as the PNV and CiU, or comparing nationalist dynamics in the Basque Country and Catalonia in general.

- *Transversal* dynamics are seen in so-called 'catch-up politics', in which Spain's asymmetrical form of devolution—through a state composed of autonomous communities whose powers are defined by statutes negotiated individually with central government—would seem to encourage 'competition' between nationalist movements (as well as regional interests) regarding the enhancement of regional autonomy (Balfour and Quiroga, 2007: 198-99). Transversal dynamics involve demonstration effects as well as competition—e.g. the initially successful negotiation of the enhanced Catalan autonomy statute of 2006 is said to have become a model for elements within the PNV (Muro, 2009: 461; Magone, 2009: 199). They affect the political behaviour of autonomous communities and their parties in general (Keating and Wilson, 2009, Orte and Wilson, 2009), but are of particular interest in relation to patterns of influence between the Catalan and Basque nationalist movements which, notwithstanding different outlooks, both contain accommodationist and pro-independence elements.
- *Global* dynamics are potentially quite diverse, but the literature points particularly to two major variants of such influence in Spain so far:
 - (a) the impact on nationalist movements of processes and models of decentralization to be found beyond Spain, especially in other parts of Europe (salient examples being the effects of the Northern Ireland peace process on pro-independence forces in the Basque Country and the moves towards a referendum on independence in Scotland) but also extending beyond Europe to Quebec. One issue here is whether this is a result of European integration (Keating, 2010; Elias, 2009) or of globalization more generally. Another is whether decentralization channels ethnic and/or national conflict or encourages it.
 - (b) nationalist responses to immigration as a potential threat to identity, Catalonia having received the largest number of immigrants of any autonomous community, with significant consequences for the evolution of its party system (Dowling, 2009: 189; Zapata-Barrero, 2009; Hepburn, 2009).

Of course, dynamics will tend to interact, adding to analytical challenges. For example, centre-periphery relations have been adversely affected in the Catalan case by the impact of the global financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing recession in Spain. In this regard the project's focus on the perceptions of political actors may be particularly useful in indicating

which dynamics tended to predominate at key moments or how dynamics interacted with one another.

5. *Research Questions*

Three research questions have been selected for the collaborative element in this project. They are intended to focus debate around unifying themes that invite comparative perspectives.

The first question is: **how have the complex dynamics affecting the nature of nationalist movements in Spain (including their own interactions and interactions between peripheral and central nationalisms) changed over time?** To what extent has there been continuity or change in the dynamics affecting nationalist movements in a country that has experienced regime change, modernization and Europeanization in recent decades?

A second research question is **whether, in the context of complex dynamics, the behaviour of mainstream nationalist parties is changing with respect to the alternative logics that historically have positioned them in support of territorial accommodation, in a more radical position or in a tradition of 'pendular' shifts between the two options** (De Pablo and Mees, 2005).

A third question relates to the comparability of the Catalan and Basque cases and asks: **how should one account for (apparent) increased political differentiation between the PNV and CiU over the last decade?** Is this amenable to historical explanations or a matter of relatively recent developments? To what extent does it reflect structural differences (constitutional status, fiscal regime, party system differences) or changes in circumstance (differential impact of the financial crisis, the cessation of political violence by ETA or central government alternation in Madrid)?

6. *First Workshop: 'Nationalisms in Spain'*

This workshop is being organized in order to:

- (a) Obtain feedback from fellow researchers and research users on the initial findings of the research team, consisting of the principal investigator and the doctoral researcher.
- (b) Discuss a variety of research papers produced within the framework of the project and explore their coherence with a view to an eventual edited publication.
- (c) Promote collaborative research between specialists across various disciplines, particularly with regard to the evolution of the Basque, Catalan and Spanish nationalist movements and their interaction.

The workshop will be held over a period of two days in late September 2014 (subject to confirmation) and contributors will work together throughout the event so that a common discussion develops on all aspects. Collaboration will be enhanced by participants all chairing sessions or discussing papers (not necessarily close to their own research

specializations). A short planning meeting towards the end of the programme will exchange views about the format of the publication and potential publication outlets.

Since one aim of the event is to explore the basis for a collective volume (a special issue of a research journal or an edited book) and this may have more potential for impact if it is in English, research papers will be required in English from the start. Either English or Spanish may be used in workshop presentations and discussion.

Call for proposals

Researchers interested in contributing to the project are asked to send a proposal to Richard Gillespie (richard.gillespie@liverpool.ac.uk) by 4 October 2013. This should consist of

- a paragraph on your research profile
- a 200-word provisional abstract of your proposed paper
- an indication of how you see the paper contributing to aims of the workshop and fitting within the framework outlined. We are particularly keen to encourage papers that involve comparison between the Basque and Catalan cases, but individual case studies will also be considered for the workshop.

Final decisions on the proposals will be made by late October 2013, based not only on consideration of individual contents but also issues of balance between papers and overall coverage of the research questions.

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