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Abstract

In this article the authors develop a new approach to the study of policy dynamics in a quasi-federal system of government. The goal is to contribute to previous research on comparative federalism by analyzing the variations of issue attention between levels of government and across four regional governments—Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country. To do so the authors follow the policy dynamics approach, developing a comparative and empirical analysis about issue attention across time, territories, and policy subsystems. The analysis relies on an extensive database, created following the methodology of the Comparative Agendas Project, which includes all laws passed from the early 1980s to present. The results indicate that legislative agendas have become increasingly diverse since the 1990s, and this is partly explained by party preferences and the type of government.

Keywords

policy dynamics, comparative federalism, legislative agenda, party preferences, type of government

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The goal of this article is to develop a new approach to the study of policy dynamics in a quasi-federal system of government. More specifically, it explains law production at the national level and in four *Comunidades Autónomas* (CCAA)—Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, and Andalusia—from the early 1980s to the present to, first, describe the variations in the lists of problems that are the objects of attention by the national and regional political elites and, second, explain why these variations occur. Hence, the goal is to explain not only which issues are monopolizing the legislative agenda but also to what extent institutional factors constrain the possibilities of action of regional policy makers, whether changes in political autonomy, such as the implementation of fiscal capacity of regional governments in 1997, led to changes in the pattern of the prioritization of issues by regional governments, to what extent variations in issue attention are linked to the national legislative agenda, and whether partisan politics and the type of government—minority or majority—are related to changes in issue attention over time.

Research on comparative federalism and decentralization has paid attention to some of these questions (e.g., Erk, 2006). Most of the literature focuses on the impact of different institutional settings on economic performance—fiscal federalism—or political representation—for example, the degree to which some units are overrepresented, the balance between national and regional interest in national institutions—giving a static picture about vertical distribution of authority (Wibbels, 2003). To provide a more dynamic perspective to the analysis of comparative federalism and decentralization, recent research gives more attention to party politics and policy preferences, following in most cases Riker's study of party causality (Aldrich, 1995; Filippov, Ordeshook, & Shvetsova, 2004; Wibbels, 2006). In this view, shifts in authority are a reflection of the bargains made among national and regional actors, who have different incentives to pursue policies consistent with their priorities. It is assumed that policy actors have strong preferences, political elites follow party ideologies, and thus differences in the governing political party or the pattern of interest representation will have an impact on policy dynamics, or even on the stability of the federation.

These analyses have increased our understanding of federalism, but they are mainly focused on the relationship between the national and regional governments as a whole, leaving aside variation in the behavior of subnational governments (Wibbels, 2006, p. 182). This article seeks to contribute to previous research about comparative federalism by analyzing the variations in issue attention not only between the national and regional governments but

also across regional governments, over time, and across policy subsystems. To do so, we use the policy dynamics approach (Baumgartner et al., 2011).

Andalucía, Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country share important features. They became CCAA following a special route or fast track—the Basque Country and Catalonia in 1979 and Andalusia and Galicia in 1981—assuming the maximum level of political jurisdiction and are granted special status by the Spanish Constitution in terms of language (the Basque, Gallego, and Catalan are recognized as official languages), civil code, and fiscal autonomy. All of them (except Andalusia) have a strong nationalist character, and each enjoyed considerable political autonomy during the Second Republic in the 1930s. In addition, these CCAA have experienced long periods of political stability. As summarized in Table 1, for more than three decades the Basque Country and Catalonia have been governed by conservative regional parties: the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV), always the minority for Basque Country, and *Convergència i Unió* (CIU) for Catalonia (absolute majority from 1984 to 1995 and minority from 1995 to 2003). The same occurs for the case of Andalusia, governed by the socialists (PSA) for the whole period, and Galicia, governed by the conservative Partido Popular (PP), the majority for almost the whole period.

Our results indicate that legislative agendas were especially similar in the 1980s, just after the transition to democracy. In this first decade of democracy, regional governments had to accomplish two crucial goals: the construction of their basic political institutions (regulation of public administration, electoral rules, etc.) and the development of the welfare state. Beginning in the 1990s, legislative agendas were increasingly diverse, and this is explained not only by institutional factors but also by party preferences and the type of government. The results of the regression model illustrate that (a) regional legislative agendas are increasingly similar when the same political party (or under the same party federation) is governing in each CCAA, (b) the Spanish and regional agendas are increasingly similar when the Spanish executive is governing under minority and depends on the support of regional political parties for government formation,¹ and (c) other factors like the transfer of political competences from the national to the regional level are important in explaining the evolution of the level of regional political autonomy, but their impact on the increasing differentiation of regional legislative agendas is not significant.

The article is organized as follows. First, we explain the distribution of political competences and the level of political autonomy of regional governments in Spain, giving some information about the trends toward increasing

Table I. Type of Government and Governing Political Party, 1982-2009

Year	Galicia	Andalusia	Basque Country	Catalonia	Spain
1982	Partido Popular (PP) (conservative party)	PSOE	Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV)	Convergència i Unió (CIU)	PSOE
1983					
1984					
1985					
1986					
1987					
1988					
1989					
1990					
1991					
1992					
1993					PSOE
1994		PSOE			
1995					
1996				CIU	PP
1997					
1998					
1999					
2000					PP
2001					
2002					
2003					
2004		PSOE			
2005	PSOE			PSC-ERC-IU	PSOE
2006					
2007					

Minority governments are shaded.

regionalization; second, we state some hypotheses that have as a main theoretical reference the policy dynamics approach; third, we define the data and methodological aspects of the article; fourth, we compare the evolution of the law agendas across time; finally, we discuss the importance of partisan politics and the type of government over issue attention and provide some concluding remarks.

Increasing Regionalization

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 defines a quasi-federal system of political decentralization, which altered the fundamental pattern of politics in Spain after 40 years of dictatorship. This is a quite open and flexible system of political decentralization created during the democratic transition to prevent one of the most relevant political conflicts after Franco's death (Linz & Stepan, 2006; Tezanos, Cotarelo, & de Blas, 1993). The question of how to accommodate the interests of the hard-liners who defend the unity of Spain and the political demands of those territories that historically had a strong political autonomy was a central debate that ended with the adoption of a hybrid system of territorial distribution of political power that shares most of the features of a federal state (Aguilera de Prat, 2001; Morata, 1992).

The implementation of this original system of political decentralization reflects the distribution of power in the Spanish society, and it is also an expression of the demands (especially of some communities such as the Basque and Catalan) for self-rule by some territorially based groups (Hooghe, Gary, & Schakel, 2010, p. 76). As a whole, 17 territories became CCAA from 1979 to 1985,² but only 7 of them achieved the maximum degree of political autonomy in the early 1980s.³ In addition, the so-called historical CCAA—the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalusia—followed a special route to become CCAA and have additional political jurisdiction over issues such as language (Gallego, Basque and Catalan) and the civil code (Catalonia and the Basque Country) and have a special fiscal status (the Basque Country and also Navarra). These differences are recognized by the Constitution and each of the Estatutos de Autonomia and are explained mainly by cultural and historical factors (Aja, 2003; Capó, 2003; Requejo & Caminal, 2010).

In terms of self-rule (to what extent a regional government may exercise authority in its territory),⁴ (a) each of the 17 CCAA has a general purpose administration that is not subject to national government veto; (b) each has a directly elected assembly, which directly appoints the president of the CCAA, following a parliamentarian system of government quite similar to that of Spain; and (c) each exercises authority over a wide range of issues. According to the Spanish Constitution, the national government has a monopoly over regulation of defense, foreign policy, justice, criminal and commercial law, foreign trade, currency, citizenship, customs, and immigration, whereas each CCAA can claim jurisdiction over a list of issues defined in Article 149,

including social welfare, police, economic issues such as taxation, and cultural and educational policy (López Nieto, 2001; Porras, 2002).

Important differences exist on fiscal autonomy—this is the regional government's capacity to determine its revenues unilaterally. The Basque Country and Navarre have a special economic system of *Conciertos* according to which they are allowed to collect taxes, out of which they pay a “quota” to the national government for the performance of national-level government functions. They also have a larger capacity to set the base and rate of major taxes, whereas the rest of CCAA had competences to set only the base and rate of minor taxes until the mid-1990s. In 1997 a major tax reform was undertaken by the minority government of the PP, increasing the capacity of these 15 CCAA to set the rate of some of the major taxes (personal income and corporate taxes). This fiscal reform is an example of the permanent political tension about the pattern of allocation of power between the national government and some regional governments (mainly Catalonia and the Basque Country) that leads to an asymmetrical and open-ended system of political decentralization.

In Spain, in contrast to most federal states, the distribution of political authority across issues may be revised and redefined according to bilateral negotiations between the national government and the governments of some CCAA (Linz & Stepan, 2006). One way to look at this process of devolution is to trace the evolution of decrees for the transfer of political competences (*Decretos de Transferencia*) from the national government to CCAA. As Figure 1 illustrates, there have been three main waves of political decentralization. The first wave occurred in the early 1980s, as a formal response to the principles established in the Constitution, the *Estatutos de Autonomía*, and also some bilateral agreements made during this period (Aja, 2003).

The second wave occurred in the mid-1990s, as a result of a contradictory process of negotiation. On one hand, the two main national political parties, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and the PP, reached an agreement to delegate political competences about welfare-related issues to the nonhistorical CCAA and thus to initiate a process to homogenize the level of issue jurisdiction at the regional level. On the other hand, the minority governments of the PSOE (1993-1996) and the PP (1996-2000) reached bilateral agreements with some of the so-called historical CCAA, mainly Catalonia and to some extent the Basque country, oriented to increase their level of political autonomy over a larger range of issues, which contributed to increase the asymmetrical character of the Spanish quasi-federal state. Finally, a third wave has occurred from 2004 to the present, under the minority government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and it is mostly oriented to adapt the *Estatutos de Autonomía* to new political, economic, and social conditions.

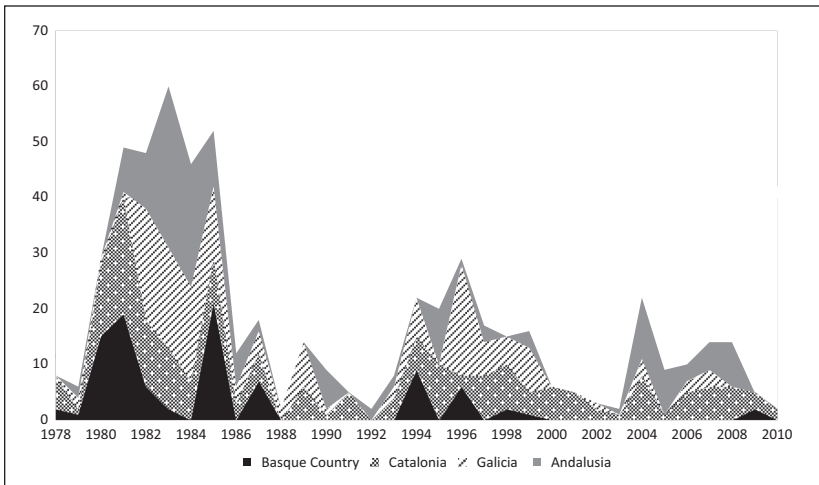


Figure 1. Transfer of political competences (decretos de transferencia) from the national government to four regional governments

This process of devolution illustrates the ability of regional governments to influence Spanish policy through an intense and politicized bargaining in which party preferences and the type of government play major roles. In formal terms the capacity of CCAA to codetermine decision making at the national level is quite limited (shared rule). They are represented in the upper chamber, but Comunidad-appointed senators are a too small minority—less than 20% of the Senado—without enough capacity to veto a national law.⁵ Besides, there are no meetings between the national and regional governments through which binding decisions are made (Aja, 2003; Börzel, 2002). But, as we argue below, these limitations can be overcome when the Spanish government is under minority and depends on the support of regional political parties. Under these circumstances, some regional governments (mainly Catalonia and the Basque Country) increase their capacity to generate shifts in political authority and to modify the Spanish polity according to their priorities.

Explaining Issue Attention

The literature on comparative federalism has long been analyzing the role of institutions on decision-making processes (e.g., Erk, 2006; Hooghe et al., 2010; Wibbels, 2003, 2006). Some of these analyses focus on how different institutional structures shape the incentives of decision makers operating in a multi-level system of governance and/or how the national policy-making process

depends on the nature of representation in decentralized units. To a large extent, these analyses are focused on the formal rules of the game that regulate power relations across territories and ask to what extent these formal institutional arrangements of federalism constrain the pursuit of policy preferences by the different actors involved in the policy-making process. These formal rules constitute a major source of stability and partly explain the obstacles that impede dramatic shifts in the distribution of authority among levels of government.

Formal rules regulating the structure of government in Spain—the Spanish Constitution and the *Estatutos de Autonomía*—impose important constraints on what regional policy makers can legislate. The asymmetric and open character of the Spanish quasi-federal state partly explains why the Basque Country and Navarra have more political autonomy than the rest of CCAA by controlling fiscal policy in their territory, why Catalonia and the Basque country have more jurisdiction over the civil code in contrast to other CCAA, and why attention to economic issues has increased since the late 1990s in some CCAA such as Catalonia, after the fiscal reform of 1997. But the formal distribution of authority does not give information about how much political attention a regional government is able or willing to exert on a particular issue. By analyzing formal institutional structures we cannot explain why some CCAA such as Catalonia and Andalusia have a leading role on the regulation of moral issues such as embryo research whereas others never deal with these issues, why Catalonia and Andalucía created an audiovisual council in the mid-2000s in contrast to the rest of the regional governments, or why the law agenda in Catalonia became increasingly fragmented after the fiscal reform of 1997 in contrast to Andalusia.

Recent analyses of comparative federalism have sought to go beyond formal rules and constitutions following Riker's study on party causality. Authors such as Aldrich (1995), Gordin (2006), Filippov et al. (2004), and Wibbels (2006) have introduced party preferences as a key explanatory variable to give a more dynamic explanation of the ability of regional and national governments to generate shifts in political authority and/or to transform federal structures. But these studies on comparative federalism have not paid much attention to the impact of partisan shifts and elections on issue prioritization and policy outputs across territories, despite a large amount of research in comparative studies devoted to analyzing the connection between political parties and issue priorities (e.g., Schmidt, 1996). Authors such as Boix (2000) and Blais, Blake, and Dion (1993), for example, examine whether there is a greater propensity among political parties of the left to rely on government intervention and among parties of the right to rely on the market.

From a different perspective, party mandate theory (Budge & Hofferbert, 1990; Klingemann, Hofferbert, & Budge, 1994) suggests that political parties compete by giving more salience to those issues that are seen as more beneficial for their electoral purposes. Some political parties are identified by the electorate as more competent to deal with some issues (and to give a more efficient policy solution); thus, political parties respond to the preferences of the electorate by giving more salience to the issues they “own” (Green-Pedersen, 2006; Klingemann et al., 1994). It is assumed that political parties have strong preferences and party leaders will give especial importance to the values and the ideology of their own party, leaving for a second stage any other preferences like their own success as political leaders (Baumgartner, Brouard, & Grossman, 2009; Baumgartner et al., 2011). Accordingly, we should expect that differences in the governing political parties result in significant differences in the issues that capture most of the attention in each CCAA. More precisely, we should expect increasing similarities across regional legislative agendas when the same political party (or enclosed in the same federation) is governing in each CCAA. By the same token, we should expect increasing similarities between the Spanish and regional legislative agendas when the same political party (or enclosed in the same federation) is governing at the national and regional levels.

The capacity of national and regional governments to prioritize some issues also depends on whether the executive has the majority of seats in the Parliament. When the governing party does not control a majority, it is forced to make compromises and to negotiate the legislative agenda with other political forces (Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008; Soroka & Wlezién, 2010). This was the case from 1993 to 1996 when Felipe González (PSOE) governed a minority with the support of the Catalan conservative nationalist party (CIU); from 1996 to 2000 with José Maria Aznar leading a minority government with the support of CIU and the Basque conservative nationalist party (PNV); and also beginning in 2004 when José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) governed with the support of the Catalan nationalist party of the left (ERC) and the far left (IU; see Table 2). During these periods, in which Spanish government formation depends on regional political parties, we expect to find increasing similarities between the Spanish and the Catalan or/and the Basque Country legislative agendas.

By the same token, we expect increasing similarities between the Spanish and regional legislative agendas when a regional government depends on the support of the political party governing at the national level. This was specially the case in Catalonia from 1995 to 2003 when the CIU had a minority

Table 2. Spanish Governments, 1977-2008

Prime minister	Time in office	Duration in office (months)	Government party	Parliamentary seats (%)	External support	Majority or minority
Suárez I	7/77-4/79	22	UCD	47	No	Minority
Suárez II	4/79-1/81	22	UCD	48	No	Minority
Calvo Sotelo	2/81-10/82	21	UCD	48	No	Minority
González I	12/82-6/86	43	POSE	58	No	Majority
González II	7/86-10/89	40	PSOE	53	No	Majority
González III	12/89-6/93	43	PSOE	50	No	Majority
González IV	7/93-3/96	33	PSOE	45	Yes (CiU)	Minority
Aznar I	5/96-1/00	45	PP	45	Yes (CiU, PNV, CC)	Minority
Aznar II	4/00-2/04	47	PP	52	No	Majority
Zapatero I	4/04-2/08	47	PSOE	47	Yes (IU, ERC)	Minority
Zapatero II	4/08-	—	PSOE	48	Yes	Minority

Source: Gunther and Montero (2009).

government with the support of the PP. Similarities across legislative agendas occur because minority governments are forced to negotiate and to introduce (or remove) some issues to the legislative agenda that directly respond to the priorities and ideological preferences of other political parties that are pivotal to the government formation. The introduction of fiscal reform by José María Aznar in the late 1990s, the exclusion of moral issues of the legislative agenda of the last government of Felipe Gonzalez, and the support of CIU of the Plan Hidrológico Nacional (National Hydrological Plan) introduced by the PP in the Spanish Parliament are some examples of these changes in issue prioritization that, in most of the cases, imply abandoning some of the electoral promises of the governing political party.

Finally, the type of government is also a relevant institutional factor for explaining the capacity of regional political parties to generate shifts in political authority. As discussed above, the Spanish Constitution defines an open-ended system of distribution of political jurisdiction, which allows for permanent negotiation between the national and regional governments. Regional political parties play a key role in this process of negotiation, imposing some of their preferences when the Spanish government depends on their support. They are ideologically diverse but single minded in the sense that they converge in encompassing more regional authority and a greater share of resources for the regional government. CIU and PNV are on the economic

right, whereas others such as Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) are on the left, but all agree on these demands for more autonomy (Hooghe et al., 2010; Requejo & Caminal, 2010). We expect that the capacity of regional political parties to increase their level of political autonomy (measured by the transfers of competences) will increase when the national government is under minority leadership. We also expect that legislative agendas will be more fragmented as the national government delegates political authority over a larger range of issues to regional governments.

Data and Method

To analyze variations in issue attention across time and CCAA, in this article we focus on just one form of political activity, the production of laws. The so-called law agenda is defined as the set of issues on which statutes are enacted by the national and regional parliaments (Adler & Wilkerson, 2008; Brouard et al., 2009). Laws are a form of political attention shaped by considerations that are both similar to and different from other forms of political attention (such as oral questions or speeches). We depart from the fact that different forms of issue attention serve different purposes and face different constraints—cognitive and institutional. The key advantage of using laws is that they are a direct measure of government activity—going beyond the analysis of statements—but laws are rarely used in the regulation of some issues—for example, foreign affairs. In this sense, we expect a study of laws to be informative but also limited in terms of capturing all of the different means by which political elites attend to different issues (Chaqués & Palau, 2011; Chaqués, Palau, Muñoz, & Wilkerson, 2008).

The analysis relies on the databases created by the Spanish Policy Agendas Project (www.ub.edu/spanishpolicyagendas) following the methodology of the Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.org; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Each law at the national and regional level has been coded according to a universal coding system based on 19 major topic categories (Table 3) and 247 subcategories. This coding system, first developed by Baumgartner and Jones in the United States, has been adapted to the characteristics of the Spanish political system, including some revisions to take into account elements that have no equivalent in the United States, such as questions dealing with the national health system or ETA⁶ terrorism.

As Table 3 illustrates the 19 topic categories have been merged into four main categories—economic issues, welfare issues, environmental issues, and basic state functions. The data include all the laws passed by the national and

Table 3. Policy Agendas 19 Major Topic Codes

Economic issues	1. Macroeconomics 4. Agriculture 5. Labor 8. Energy 10. Transportation 15. Commerce and industrial policy 17. Science and technology 18. Foreign trade
Welfare state issues	3. Health 6. Education 13. Social policy 14. Housing
Environmental issues	7. Environment 21. Public lands and water management
Basic state functions	12. Internal affairs and justice 2. Civil rights 16. Defense 19. International affairs 20. Government and public administration

regional parliaments. At the national level, the data set covers the period 1977 to 2007, and at the regional level the data sets begin with the year the Estatutos de Autonomía were passed—from 1980 in the case of Catalonia and the Basque Country and from 1982 in the case of Andalusia and Galicia. Accordingly, most of the comparative analysis covers the period 1982 to 2007. As a whole, the database from 1982 to 2007 includes a total of 2,911 laws—1,511 passed at the national level, 526 in Catalonia, 299 in Galicia, 318 in the Basque Country, and 257 in Andalusia.

Comparing Law Production

The analysis of law production in Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country indicates that regional policy makers are paying attention to similar issues with important variations across time. Regional law agendas are linked to each other, and this was especially the case in the 1980s. As Table 4 illustrates, when we consider all issues and the whole period (1982-2007), correlations are significant and moderately similar across CCAA—the mean correlation is .32. But correlations across the regional law agendas decrease gradually—the mean annual correlation between law regional agendas

Table 4. Pearson Correlations Between the National and Regional Agendas (1980-2008)

	Catalonia	Basque Country	Galicia	Andalusia	State
Catalonia	I	.247**	.335**	.364**	.340**
Basque Country	.247**	I	.333**	.301**	.378**
Galicia	.335**	.333**	I	.343**	.366**
Andalusia	.364**	.301**	.343**	I	.379**
State	.340**	.378**	.366**	.379**	I

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

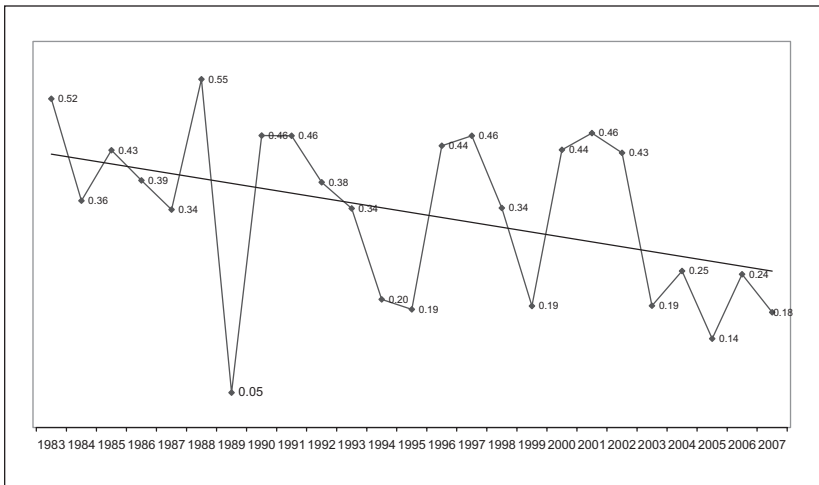


Figure 2. Mean annual correlation between regional agendas (1983-2007)

is .5 in the 1980s, whereas from 2003 it is less than .2 (always significant; Figure 2). This demonstrates that regional authorities are increasingly paying attention to different issues, and this trend is intensified in the new millennium.

The allocation of attention between the national and regional level follows a different pattern. Overall, the law agendas of each CCAA and the national government are moderately correlated—the mean correlation is about .36 for each CCAA as illustrated in Table 4—but some important differences exist across CCAA and over time. The law agendas of the Basque Country and Andalusia show a tendency toward less convergence with the national agenda,

and this is especially the case after 1996, when the PP won the elections, whereas the opposite occurred in Catalonia and Galicia.

The analysis of percentages of attention by issue gives further information about these differences across time, across CCAA, and across levels of government (Table 5). First, most of the laws passed by both the national government and the CCAA are related to economic issues. More than 50% of the laws passed by the Spanish Parliament are related to the economy, a percentage similar to that for the Basque Country (48%), which has a special fiscal regime, recognized in the Spanish Constitution. On the contrary, only 37% of the laws passed in Catalonia are related to the economy. Second, state-related issues capture an important share of the law agendas at the national and regional levels (about 30%), with important differences across issues. As far as jurisdiction is monopolized by the national government, none of the CCAA devotes attention to defense, and in the case of foreign affairs, there is only a marginal number of laws, most of them passed in the 1990s and related to foreign aid and cooperation policy.⁷ In the case of law and justice, important differences exist between the national and regional levels, with the exception of Catalonia, which devotes almost the same percentage of attention as the Spanish government (9.2% of the law agenda, almost double the rest of CCAA). The Catalan parliament passed 28 laws related to civil law (54% of the laws related to law and justice), mainly because the Spanish Constitution recognizes a special jurisdiction of Catalonia over this issue.

Third, Table 5 also illustrates that welfare issues are highly decentralized. Overall, each CCAA devotes about 23% of the law agenda to welfare-related issues, versus 9.7% of the national law agenda. Most of these laws are related to primary and secondary education and universities (about 10%), with some differences across CCAA. The number of laws about universities is higher in Catalonia and Andalusia compared to other CCAA (De Miguel, 2002), whereas attention to primary and secondary education is higher in the Basque country and mostly related to the *ikastolas* (the Basque primary and secondary schools). Finally, attention to health issues is especially important in Andalusia (5%), which has had a leading role in the regulation of biotechnology since the late 1990s, whereas in Catalonia and the Basque Country, attention to health issues has decreased across time and captures only about 2.5% of the law agenda.⁸ Fourth, important differences exist in the regulation of environmental issues at the national and regional levels. Despite competences over environmental issues being highly decentralized, the national government devotes more than 6% of the law agenda to these issues. Catalonia is the regional government that legislates more about the environment—more than 10% of the laws passed in Catalonia are related to the environment—in

Table 5. Percentages of Attention by Policy Areas (% of laws passed per issue)

	Galicia	Basque Country	Andalusia	Catalonia	National government
Economic, R&D, and industrial policy					
Economy	15.8	24.2	19.3	12.2	17.7
Agriculture	9.4	3.0	1.6	3.6	4.4
Labor	1.7	3.0	2.0	1.4	6.1
Energy	0.7	1.3	0.8	0.4	1.8
Transport	2.0	3.7	2.8	4.3	5.8
Industry	11.1	10.4	11.0	11.7	13.4
Research and development	1.7	2.3	6.7	4.1	2.9
Total	42.4	47.9	44.1	37.7	52.1
Welfare state					
Health	3.7	2.3	5.5	2.2	2.7
Education	9.1	9.7	11.4	9.7	4.5
Social issues	4.7	5.0	3.9	5.2	1.1
Housing	5.1	5.7	2.4	4.8	1.5
Total	22.6	22.7	23.2	21.9	9.7
Environment					
Public lands	2.4	1.3	3.9	3.6	4.0
Environment	5.1	1.7	2.4	7.2	2.7
Total	7.4	3.0	6.3	10.8	6.7
State basic functions					
Rights	3.0	3.0	2.4	1.8	3.1
Law and justice	4.4	3.0	3.5	9.2	10.0
Foreign affairs	0.3	1.3	0.8	0.7	3.5
Government	19.5	18.8	19.7	18.0	10.9
Defense	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.1
Total	27.5	26.1	26.4	29.6	31.5

contrast to the Basque Country, which devotes only 3% of the legislative agenda to these issues.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate that there are also important variations in issue attention across time. As expected, regulation of government affairs was particularly important during the 1980s. In this period, about 24.0% of the law agenda at the regional level and 14.2% at the national level was devoted to the regulation of basic political institutions, intergovernmental relations, the organization and financing of political parties and elections, and/or the functioning



Figure 3. Percentage of issue attention to governmental issues in four regional governments

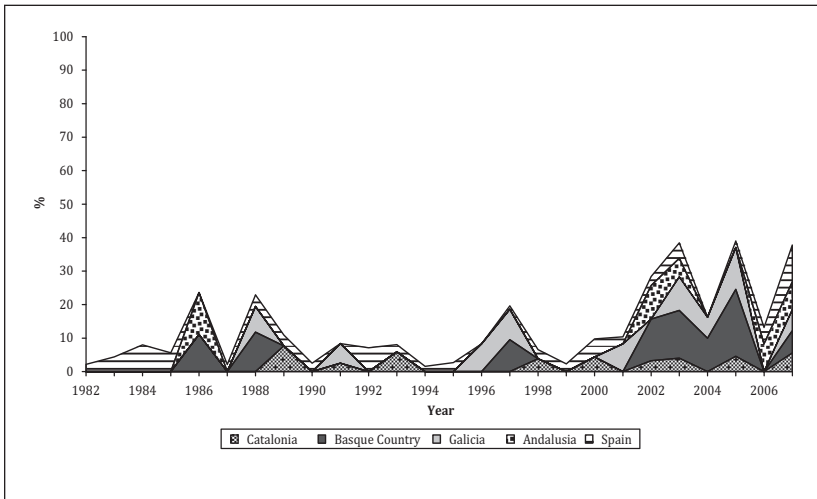


Figure 4. Percentage of issue attention to rights in four regional governments

of public administration. Attention to these issues decreased during the 1990s and increased again only during the new millennium in those CCAA that reformed their Estatutos de Autonomía (Catalonia in 2006 and Andalusia

in 2007).⁹ The same occurs for the case of some welfare-related issues and especially for the case of education and culture. Most regulation in these issues was passed during the 1980s and early 1990s, when regional authorities defined the basic principles and institutions of the welfare state. On the contrary, as Figure 4 illustrates, most of the laws related to rights were enacted in the new millennium—the regulation of rights issues in the 1980s was 1.5% of the total law agenda and increased to 5.4% after 2000, and most of them are related to gender equality, patients' rights, data protection, and accessibility policies. A detailed analysis of these laws shows how Andalusia and Catalonia are leading a process of policy change on right issues, especially those related to moral concerns.

In the case of the economy, the Basque Country has progressively devoted less attention to economic issues, contrary to the other CCAA, which increasingly have given more attention to the regulation of economic and fiscal issues since the fiscal reform was put into practice in 1997. This is especially the case of Catalonia, which has taken the opportunities created by this fiscal reform to enlarge as much as possible its political autonomy. As an example, Catalonia is the only CCAA to have created (in 2007) an *Agència Tributària* (tax office) responsible for the management, liquidation, and inspection of national (transferred) and regional taxes. The increasing attention paid by regional authorities to economic issues contrasts with the decreasing attention that the national government has paid to this issue: In the early 1990s the economy captured 19.7% of the national agenda, whereas in the new millennium attention has declined to 14.9%. This is an example of the zero-sum power game that, according to Gunther and Montero (2009, p. 93), has characterized center-periphery relations in Spain for years, with a fixed amount of political power within the state, so that if regional governments gain power, the national government necessarily loses the same amount.

The analysis of annual correlations and percentages of attention also illustrates that differences in issue attention across time and CCAA cannot be related simply to institutional factors and issue jurisdiction. The fact that Andalusia is devoting more attention to health related issues should be related to party preferences and the willingness of policy makers to respond to policy problems such as biotechnology and embryo-research techniques. By the same token, despite the fact that the Spanish government has jurisdiction to develop the basic legislation on research and development activities, there is not a specific national authority (or audiovisual council) responsible for the regulation of the audiovisual policy (TV contents, publicity, licenses, etc.) until 2010. On the contrary, Andalusia and Catalonia devote a higher percentage of attention to R&D than Spain and the rest of CCAA, especially

from 2003, creating an independent authority—the audiovisual council—in the mid-2000s.

Important differences also exist across CCAA in the regulation of police. The creation of a regional police in the early 1980s is one of the priorities of the Basque Country and Catalonia. The possibility recognized by the Spanish Constitution to establish regional policies opened a policy window for regional intervention that was taken by these two CCAA to consolidate their special status. It was a way to reassert their strong self-government will and to create institutions completely differentiated from those established by the national government. For the case of the Basque Country the establishment of a regional police in 1982 was also related to the fight against ETA terrorism. On the contrary, this issue captured some of the attention of regional policy makers only in Galicia in the mid-2000s, whereas in Andalusia this issue was almost nonexistent.

Finally, as explained above, one of the main features of the Spanish quasi-federal system is its flexible and open-ended character. There is a gradual process of increasing regionalization oriented to expand the range of issues under the jurisdiction of regional governments that in some cases deeply alter the level of political autonomy, such as the fiscal reform of 1997. Accordingly, one of the questions we ask is whether this process of increasing regionalization has led to an increasing fragmentation of the legislative agenda of the *Comunidades Autónomas*. To do that we compute Herfindahl scores for each law agenda in each year. The Herfindahl is defined as the sum of the squared percentage of attention devoted to each issue. We use the normalized version of the Herfindahl index that ranges from theoretically perfect competition (0) to monopoly (1). An H score less than .1 is generally taken to indicate a lack of concentration, between .1 and .18 a moderate concentration, and greater than .18 a high concentration of the agenda. Figure 5 displays the results for different CCAA.

As Figure 5 illustrates, agenda fragmentation is always higher in Catalonia than the other CCAA, especially in relation to Galicia and Andalusia.¹⁰ In the case of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia there is also a moderate trend toward more fragmentation from the late 1980s to the present—in the case of Catalonia the average level of fragmentation in the 1980s was .14, whereas from 1997 to the present the level of fragmentation has declined to an average of .07. These results illustrate the willingness of these CCAA (with the exception of Andalusia) to increase their political autonomy and to make decisions by law about a wider range of issues; and these results give some

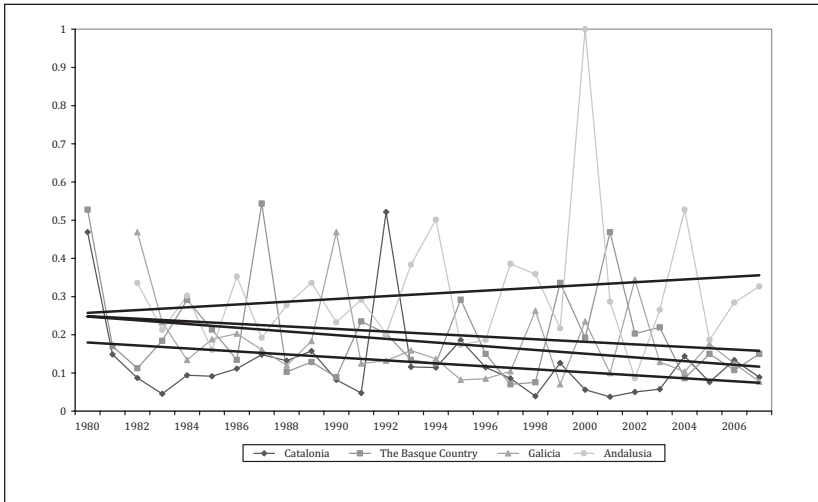


Figure 5. Fragmentation of the regional law agendas, 1982-2008

evidence regarding the impact of the fiscal reform in the 1990s over the fragmentation of the regional law agenda.

Summing up, issue attention across the law agendas in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, and Andalusia follows a similar pattern, and these similarities are especially important during the 1980s and for the case of governmental issues and education. But there are indeed important differences especially from the 1990s to present in relation to the economy, the police, the environment, research and development, and rights. These similarities and differences in issue attention cannot be explained simply by the formal distribution of political competences (or issue jurisdiction) between the national and regional governments. To explain the similarities and differences in the law agenda we should take into account other factors related to the political system, such as the type of government and changes in the party ideology of the government.

Type of Government, Partisan Politics, and Issue Attention

To test the effects of type of government, partisan politics, and changes on issue jurisdiction (transfer of competences) on the variability of law agendas

across CCAA and between levels of government, we have developed three different models. The first model is aimed to test the variability of the regional and the Spanish law agendas and it is defined as follows (Equation 1):

$$\text{VRegNat} = C + \beta_1 \text{NatP} + \beta_2 \text{TGov} + \beta_3 \text{PCoin} + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where

- VRegNat: variability between the regional and Spanish law agendas (measured using annual correlations);
- NatP: party governing at the national level (PSOE = 0, PP = 1);
- TGov: type of government (majority = 0, a regional party is pivotal in the formation of the national government, or a regional party depends on the support of a national party for the formation of the regional government = 1);
- PCoin: the same political party is governing at the national and regional level (no party coincidence = 0, party coincidence = 1).

Table 6 summarizes the results of a generalized ordinary least squares regression for this model. The significant coefficients in Equation 1 illustrate that the Spanish and the regional law agendas are more similar when (a) the regional and Spanish governments depend on each other for the formation of government and (b) the same political party is governing at the national and regional levels. In the case of Catalonia, the annual correlation between agendas increases by .12 when the PSOE is governing in Madrid and the PSC is governing in Catalonia (2004-2007).¹¹ During this period, the annual correlations of the Spanish and Catalan law agendas are high, reaching .7 in 2004. An example of these similarities between the socialist agendas at both the national and regional levels is the regulation of the rights of the victims of the civil war and the dictatorship. In 2007 both the Spanish and Catalan parliaments passed a law related to this issue (Ley 52/2007 de la Memoria Histórica and Llei 13/2007 del Memorial Democràtic). This was done with the support of the other political parties, to be sure, but the PP never identified this issue as a priority, and the ERC did not give support to the Spanish law because it believed that the law should go further in the recognition of rights. Catalonia is the only regional government that regulates this issue, responding to the demands of most citizens, but also to the preferences of the political parties that formed the coalition government from 2003 to 2010 (ERC and Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds).

Table 6. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results: Variability Among Law Agendas

	National and regional agendas (Equation 1)		Between regional agendas (Equation 2)	
	Catalonia–state	Basque Country–state	Catalonia– Andalusia	Catalonia– Basque Country
	National party	−0.78**	−0.02	—
Minority government	0.11**	0.18**	—	—
Party coincidence ^a	0.12**	—	0.16**	0.19**
Transfer of competences ^b	—	—	−0.03**	−0.01
Constant	0.32	0.31	0.45	0.19
N ^c	375	375	375	375
R ²	.07	.14	.16	.10

a. To analyze the variability between the law agendas of Catalonia and Andalusia, and Catalonia and the Basque Country, the transfer of competences variable includes only transfer of competences to these CCAA.

b. In the case of the Basque Country the party coincidence variable was excluded from Equation 1 as in this CCAA the same political party has never governed at the national and regional level.

c. We cover 15 codes over a period of 25 years (1983-2007), which gives us N = 375 (15 × 25). We do not consider 1982 in the regression analysis to avoid including a third political party (UCD) that was governing until October 1982. We use a dummy variable (0, 1) to analyze differences between the PSOE and PP, the two main political parties that have governed in Spain since the consolidation of democracy. We include 15 codes (Code 16 was dropped from the analysis since there are no laws on defense at the regional level, and Codes 7 and 21, and 15, 8, and 18 were merged since Codes 21, 8, and 18 have a very low percentage of attention at the regional level).

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01.

Our results also indicate that the type of government has some impact on the pattern of similarities (or differences) of the law agendas across levels of government. The annual correlation between the Spanish and Catalan legislative agendas increases by .11 when CIU is pivotal in the formation of the national government (1993-2000) and when CIU depends on the support of the PP for the formation of government in Catalonia (1999-2003). It is during this period that the PP used its veto power to remove some issues from the Catalan law agenda, especially all demands related to increasing political autonomy. Once the government of CIU depended on the support of the PP, all issues related to the so-called Declaració de Barcelona disappeared from

the agenda.¹² By the same token, the minority government of CIU gave support to the budget laws introduced by the PP from 1996 in the Spanish Parliament and also to some of the most controversial laws introduced by José Maria Aznar, such as the law of the Plan Hidrológico Nacional (National Hydrological Plan) in 2001, aimed at redefining water policy in Spain against the preferences of most environmentalist groups and some regional governments.

The case of the Basque country corroborates these results. Annual correlations between the Basque and the Spanish law agendas increase by .18 when the PNV is pivotal at the national level and when the PNV depends on the support of the socialist party (PSE) for the formation of government in the Basque Country. Once the PP got into power, the law agendas in Spain and the Basque Country became increasingly divergent—annual correlations decrease from .5 to .2—mainly because while the PP was giving special attention to labor issues and the reform of labor market, the PNV was giving priority to governmental affairs. Contrary to the case of Catalonia, from 1999 Juan José Ibarretxe prioritized those issues related to the transformation of the territorial distribution of power in Spain to increase political autonomy and to open the path toward Basque self-determination. The Basque Parliament passed a set of new laws oriented to carry out important institutional reforms such as the reform of the Basque public administration and the electoral rules and the so-called Plan Ibarretxe, which defined a new model of political relations with Spain that was never put into practice.

Our second model tests to what extent the variability of the prioritization of issues across regional law agendas depends on partisan politics. We expect that when the same political party (or a political party with a similar ideology) is governing in different CCAA, law agendas will be more similar than when two different political parties are governing in each CCAA. Different political parties have governed Andalusia, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia for almost the whole period—the PSOE has always been in power in Andalusia, the PNV in the Basque Country, CIU in Catalonia until 2003, and the conservative PP for almost the whole period in Galicia, with the exception of 3 years in the late 1980s. Accordingly, we have limited our analysis to test whether the law agendas in Catalonia and Andalusia are more similar when socialists are governing both CCAA (2004-2008) and whether the law agendas are more similar in Catalonia and the Basque country when conservative nationalist parties are governing in both CCAA (1980-2003). The model is defined as follows (Equation 2):

$$VReg = C + \beta_1 PCoin + \beta_2 TComp + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where

VReg: the variability between regional agendas (measured using annual correlations);

PCoin: a political party defending a similar ideology is governing at the regional level (0 = no ideological coincidence, 1 = ideological coincidence of political parties);

TComp: the percentage of competences transferred to regional authorities.

Again our results corroborate the initial hypothesis. As expected (see Table 6), regional law agendas are more similar when the socialists are governing in Catalonia (in coalition with ERC and ICV) and Andalusia—annual correlations between regional agendas increase by .16—and when nationalist parties (CIU and PNV) are governing in Catalonia and the Basque Country—annual correlations increase by .19. From 2003 to 2009, Catalonia and Andalusia led a process of regulation of rights issues (especially gender related issues) and telecommunications policy. In 2004, both regional governments passed a law aimed to regulate the goals, structure, and functions of the audiovisual council (different in each CCAA) which is responsible for the regulation of TV content, publicity, licenses, and other issues related to audiovisual and media policy.

In the case of the Basque Country and Catalonia, the annual correlations between agendas decrease from .3 to .1 once the PSC rose to power. Although the PNV gave priority to issues such as education and industrial policy, the PSC focused more on the regulation of economic issues, governmental affairs, and science and technology. Some of these differences are explained by the process of institutional reform defined by the new Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya passed in 2006 by the Spanish government. The goals of the reform of the Catalan Estatut are much more moderate than the Basque Country initiative (or Plan Ibarretxe introduced 5 years earlier) but generate important shifts in issue jurisdiction. Some of the laws passed during this period, such as the creation of the Agència Tributaria de Catalunya (Tax Agency), are related to the delegation of some aspects of fiscal policy, whereas others introduce some changes in the functioning of basic political institutions, such as the law of the Catalan vice president (or Conseller en Cap) or the law of incompatibilities of public servants.

Finally, results of Equation 2 also illustrate that the process of transfer of competences is not statistically significant as an explanation of the variability among regional agendas. Indeed, we see no relationship ($r = -.03$) between

the agendas of Catalonia and Andalucía when the socialists are governing in both CCAA. This is, the similarities and/or differences across regional law agendas are not affected by the pattern of transfer of competences from the national level to regions. Moreover, the direction of this coefficient illustrates the fact that most of the transfer of issue jurisdiction occurs during the early 1980s, when Catalonia and Andalusia were governed by CIU and the PSOE respectively under majority government. As explained above, delegation of issue jurisdiction from the Spanish government to CCAA is mostly concentrated in the early 1980s—in the Basque Country 70% of the issues were transferred between 1979 and 1987, in Galicia and Andalusia 51% and 53%, and in Catalonia 44%—when regional governments are devoting most of their attention to the construction of their basic political institutions and to the regulation of welfare (Figure 1). Once this first wave of delegation of political authority is completed, the percentage of transfer of competences continues more slowly.

Another question is whether the type of government and partisan politics affects the process of delegation of political autonomy to regional authorities. Our next model is aimed to test whether regional authorities gain jurisdiction over a wider range of issues (measured by the transfers of competences) once they become a key element in the governability of Spain. To do that, we develop the following model (Equation 3):

$$TComp = C + \beta_1 NatP + \beta_2 TGov + \beta_3 Inst + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

where

TCompet: percentage of competences transferred to regional authorities;

TGov: when a regional party is pivotal for the national government formation (0 = no pivot, 1 = pivot);

Inst: the foundation and institutionalization of the autonomic state, from 1978 to 1987, when according to the constitutional agreement, the institutions and competences under the Estatutos de Autonomía had to be developed.

The results summarized in Table 7 (Equation 3) illustrate one of the main characteristics of the Spanish political system, which is the lack of stability of the distribution of political jurisdiction between the national and regional levels. First, according to these results, the percentage of transfer of competences to CCAA keeps increasing, although more steadily during the 1990s when the national government is under minority. As described above, this is

Table 7. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results: Transfer of Competences to Regional Authorities

	Transfer of competences (Equation 3)				
	Catalonia	Basque Country	Andalusia	Galicia	All four CCAA
National party	-0.05	0.51	-1.66**	1.95**	0.18
Minority government	1.64**	1.67**	1.71**	2.58**	1.9**
Regional government creation	2.2**	6.22**	6.90**	7.09**	5.42**
Constant	1.43	-0.22	1.41	-1.94	0.78
N	375	375	375	375	375
R ²	.31	.22	.46	.39	.59

*Significant at .05. **Significant at .01.

the consequence of a dual pattern of negotiation: On one hand the main national political parties (PSOE and PP) started a process of homogenization of issue jurisdiction defined in the Pactos Autonómicos of 1992, which led to a process of rising delegation of political authority to all CCAA. On the other hand, Catalonia and the Basque Country opposed this process of homogenization, calling for jurisdictional reform to increase their political autonomy in the policy-making process, contributing to the asymmetric character of the Spanish quasi-federal state.

The results of Equation 3 also illustrate that all CCAA have benefited from the willingness and capacity of negotiation of Catalonia and the Basque Country to increase their political autonomy. This is, when the Spanish executive was governing under minority rule the transfer of competences increased not only in those CCAA in which regional political parties—CIU in Catalonia and PNV in the Basque Country—are pivotal in the formation of the national government but especially in those CCAA—Andalusia and Galicia—that did not directly participate in this process of negotiation. In the case of Catalonia the transfer of competencies increased by 1.64, in the case of the Basque Country by 1.67, in Galicia by 2.58, and in Andalusia by 1.71. Moreover, our results indicate that the national political party is significant in explaining the transfer of competences to regional authorities, but only for the cases of Andalusia and Galicia. In Andalusia the transfer of competences was higher when the socialists were governing at the national and regional levels; and in Galicia the transfer of competences increased when the PP was governing at both levels of government (by 1.95). By contrast, when the PP was governing

in Spain and the socialists in Andalucía the transfer of competences decreased by 1.66, and the same occurred in the case of Galicia.

In sum, the capacity of regional governments to have an influence on the Spanish law agenda and to gain jurisdiction over a wider range of issues increases when the national government depends on their support. Under these circumstances regional political parties engage in an intense process of bilateral negotiations with the Spanish government aimed at increasing the range of issues under their jurisdiction. Our results illustrate that the willingness and capacity of negotiation of Catalonia and the Basque Country have benefited not only these two CCAA but especially Andalusia and Galicia, which increase their degree of political autonomy without devoting much of their political resources to achieve this end.

Conclusion

In this article we have developed a comparative and empirical analysis about issue prioritization in a quasi-federal state using lens of the policy dynamics approach. By doing so, we contribute to the existing literature on comparative federalism and decentralization, moving beyond case studies and the analysis of vertical relations between levels of government. The development of large data sets about law production at the national and regional levels constitutes the point of departure for the study of how and why issue attention varies across time, across CCAA, and between levels of governments. By using this approach we increase our understanding about the dynamics of issue attention between levels of government but also across subnational governments, testing several hypotheses about the impact of institutions, party preferences, and type of government.

We have argued that, as expected, formal institutional arrangements that regulate power relations constitute a major source of stability and partly explain how shifts in political authority have occurred in the past decades. The asymmetric and open character of the Spanish quasi-federal state constrains the possibilities of action of the different actors involved in the policy-making process, generates important shifts in political authority, and limits the capacity of the CCAA to prioritize some issues in the legislative agenda. In this context, each CCAA prioritizes different issues according to its preferences and its capacity to negotiate with the Spanish government, taking into account the institutional framework defined in the Constitution and the Estatutos de Autonomía.

Our results indicate that party preferences and the type of government are relevant factors in explaining the pattern of prioritization of issues of the

legislative agendas at both levels of government. The regression models indicate that law agendas are more similar when the same political party (or a party with a similar ideological character) is governing at the national and regional levels and/or when the same political party is governing in two different CCAA (such as Catalonia and Andalusia from 2003). Our results also illustrate that when regional and national governments depend on each other for the formation of government, laws agendas are increasingly similar. Finally, our model indicates that when regional political parties are pivotal in the formation of national governments, regional governments gain jurisdiction over a wider range of issues, increasing their capacity to take decisions in their territories. This process of reallocation of authority benefits not only Catalonia and the Basque Country but also Andalusia and Galicia, which devote almost no political resources to consolidate this quasi-federal system of government called the *Estado de las Autonomías*. In this sense, this article gives further evidence of the fact that the willingness and the capacity of some regional governments, especially Catalonia and the Basque Country, to increase their political autonomy has benefited the rest of *Comunidades Autónomas*, and this is especially the case when the same political party is governing at the regional and national levels.

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Notes

1. All regional socialist parties (PSC in Catalonia, the PSE in the Basque Country, and the PSA in Andalusia) are part of the same federation. They do not have a specific parliamentary group in the Spanish Parliament, forming a unitary ideological group.

2. A CCAA is defined as a (regional) government of a coherent territorial entity of a certain size situated between the local and national levels with capacity for authoritative decision making.
3. The Spanish constitution also defines two ways to achieve the status of CCAA. The Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, and Andalusia, as historical nationalities, were granted on a fast track and gained autonomy in 1980 (Catalonia and the Basque Country) and 1982 (Galicia and Andalusia). The rest of CCAA followed the slow route with the exception of Valencia, Navarra, and Canarias, which negotiated a special route to achieve more political autonomy over some issues, especially welfare issues.
4. To define systematically the degree of political autonomy of regional governments in Spain we depart from the analysis of Hooghe, Gary, and Schakel (2010).
5. The Senado has two different goals: One is political representation, and the other territorial representation. Accordingly, most of the seats of the senate are distributed across the Spanish provinces following a majoritarian system of election. Each province receives four seats (with the exception of the islands), and the remaining seats are divided among the CCAA and selected directly for the assembly of each CCAA on the basis of one seat per million inhabitants with a minimum of one seat.
6. ETA refers to Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Liberty, Spanish terrorist group).
7. Although there is a tendency toward increasing participation of CCAA in this issue, the national government has monopolized foreign relations, especially in relation to the EU and international organizations, which capture more than 70% of the laws passed about foreign affairs.
8. In the case of Galicia, jurisdiction over health issues was not transferred from the national government until 1989.
9. The Basque government introduced in 2001 a proposal to reform its Estatuto (Plan Ibarretxe), which was not passed in the Spanish Parliament, and in Galicia a proposal for reforming the Estatuto was first introduced in 2005.
10. For some years issue concentration is very high because they are election years and only a few laws are passed.
11. During this period the PSC is governing in coalition with the support of ERC and Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (ICV). Both political parties are also giving support to the government of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in Madrid.
12. The Declaració de Barcelona was signed in 1998 by the three main regional political parties (CIU in Catalonia, PNV in the Basque Country, and BNG in Galicia) aimed to transform the Spanish quasi-federal state into a confederation formed by three of the historical CCAA (Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country) and the rest of Spain.

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