

WHO LEADS AND WHO LAGS BEHIND? WOMEN MPs IN THE SPANISH REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS

Andrés Santana (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Susana Aguilar (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), y Xavier Coller (Universidad Pablo de Olavide)

ABSTRACT

Using systematic criteria, this article offers a descriptive analysis of the evolution in the percentage of women MPs in the 17 Spanish regional parliaments along 1980-2011. The fluctuating gender composition of these parliaments is analysed in terms of thresholds, patterns of evolution, and paucity of the changes. These dimensions, under-studied in the literature on descriptive representation, are essential to understand the growing feminization of the legislature. Three different regional models of incorporation of women MPs, forerunner, mixed and laggard, are identified, which provide valuable information about when the different ratios of women vs men representatives are attained, how stable or unstable the growth in the percentage of women is, and whether the changes are gradual or abrupt. We show that legislative quotas have a different impact depending on the specific regional model they are applied to. Considering the steady, comparatively fast and homogenous process of feminization of all the regional chambers, their relatively gender-balanced composition seems secured and so is the attainment of the goal of the parity laws.

KEY WORDS: Gender and politics, Spain, women MPs, regional parliaments.

RESUMEN

Mediante criterios sistemáticos, este trabajo realiza una descripción analítica de la evolución en el porcentaje de mujeres parlamentarias en los 17 parlamentos regionales españoles en 1980-2011. Se analiza su fluctuante composición por género a través de umbrales, pautas de desarrollo, y ritmos de los cambios. Estas dimensiones, poco estudiadas por la literatura sobre representación descriptiva, son cruciales a la hora de entender la creciente feminización del legislativo regional. El análisis identifica tres modelos de incorporación de las representantes, el precursor, el mixto, y el rezagado, que proporcionan una valiosa información en relación a cuándo se alcanzan las distintas ratios de mujeres vs hombres, si la evolución en el número de parlamentarias es estable o no, y si los cambios son graduales o bruscos. Se comprueba que las cuotas legislativas de género tienen distintos efectos que dependen del modelo regional sobre el que se apliquen. Considerando el constante, y comparativamente rápido y homogéneo proceso de 'feminización' de los legislativos regionales, parece que su composición por género relativamente equilibrada está asegurada, así como el cumplimiento de las leyes de paridad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Género y política, España, mujeres parlamentarias, parlamentos regionales.

Introduction

At the turn of the century, 13.5% of the national MPs in the world were women. This percentage has increased to 21.8% in 2013 (IPU, 2014). Numbers show important variations nonetheless: from the highest 42.0% in Nordic countries to the lowest 13.1% in the Pacific. The countries with most women in the legislative are Rwanda (63.8%), Andorra (50.0%), Cuba (48.9%) and Sweden (44.7%), and a few ones, such as Vanatu, have no women at all. Comparatively speaking, Spain (36.0%) ranks amongst the top countries: 21st position out of 187 and 8th within the EU. The Spanish percentage of female parliamentarians is also slightly higher than that of the European Parliament (35.2%).

An increasing number of women are entering the legislative. This rise has been shared by almost all countries (IPU, 2014) and regions in the globe (Vengroff, Nyri and Fugiero, 2003), most notably in the West (Cheng and Tavits, 2011; Beckwith, 2007; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Studlar and Matland, 1996). Yet, a gender gap still exists (Ruedin, 2012; Welch, 2008; Vengroff, Nyiri and Fugiero, 2003; Reynolds, 1999; Matland, 1998). The debate about this gap has spawned enormous scholarly interest, both in Spain (Díz and Lois, 2012; Verge: 2011; 2006; Ruiz: 2006; Sánchez Herrera: 2004; Valiente, Ramiro and Morales, 2003; Álvarez: 2000; Biglino: 2000; Linz, Gangas and Jerez: 2000; Sánchez Ferriz: 2000; Trujillo: 2000; Uriarte: 1999; Jerez: 1997; Jerez and Morata: 1995; García de León: 1994; Astelarra: 1990) and elsewhere. This has led to an increasing number of publications, particularly over the last two decades (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes, 2007), to the point that they outnumber “comparative research on any other recruitment factors” (Patzelt 1999: 257).

Following this debate, we set out to offer a ‘thick’ description of how the percentage of women MPs has evolved in the 17 Spanish regional parliaments along 1980-2011¹. Descriptive representation should be attached the highest relevance because the percentage of female representatives “is the glue that binds the several dimensions of representation together” and “the keystone to the representation of women” (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005: 423, 422). Thick description is also pivotal because, as King, Keohane and Verba (2000) have stressed, the “insightful description of complex events is not a trivial endeavour” and constitutes “an important step for explanatory studies” (29). We also concur that “it makes no sense to try to explain what has not been previously described with a reasonable degree of precision” (55). The need to address descriptive questions before indulging in explanatory hypotheses has been defended by a wealth of social scientists and methodologists, both in Spain (Santana, 2013; Lago, 2008) and elsewhere (Walliman, 2011; Blaikie, 2010; Combessie, 2000). This is precisely what a great bulk of studies on gender and politics have done, by first embarking upon useful

¹ The empirical evidence comes from a data base (Bapolau) which has been built along nine years and collected information on the 5,353 regional deputies that have occupied any of the 9,664 seats in 1980-2011. Bapolau has received financial support of the Spanish Ministry for Science and Technology; projects BSO2003-02596, CSO2008-02525 and CSO2012-32564. Bapolau is a registered database with the number SE244-14. See Coller, Santana and Jaime (2014) for more information on Bapolau.

descriptive accounts of various sorts in countries such as France (Murray, 2013, 2008), Germany (Davidson-Schmich, 2006), Great Britain (Cowley and Childs, 2003), the United States (Arceneaux, 2001), Canada (Studlar and Matland, 1994) and Spain (Ortega and Trujillo, 2011; Martínez and Calvo, 2010; Verge, 2008, 2004; Delgado and Jerez, 2008), as well as in cross-country comparisons (Reynolds, 1999; Matland, 1998; Rule, 1987).

Yet, little is known about the particularities of the process whereby women have been acceding to parliamentary positions. First, which are the countries and regions that have led the rise in women's representation, and what do they have in common? We have identified forerunners and laggards and shown that regions that have pioneered this upward trend share some traits. Knowledge about these traits is bound to improve our understanding of the causes behind the reduction of the gender gap in political representation. Second, is the rise stable or unstable? The answer to this question is crucial because if the identified upward trend turns out to be unstable, then the share of female representatives might be reverted and women's gains would not be guaranteed. Third, is this rise abrupt or gradual? Awareness on the pace at which women's representation is increasing is needed in order to find the appropriate explanatory factors for this phenomenon: it is well-known that abrupt changes are seldom provoked by social or cultural factors (Evans, Heath and Payne 1999; Matthews, 2005), so if a growth in women MPs is sudden, it is likely to be connected to political variables. Finally, we discuss where the regional chambers are heading for and if the changes in women's representation might be explained by legislative quotas.

We focus on these questions because they should be explored before explanations for the growing feminization of the Spanish regional parliaments can be ventured, and do so by means of a longitudinal (31 years and 138 elections) and cross-regional (N=17) analysis. This type of endeavour has not progressed in Spain at the same pace as in other developed countries² (Valiente, Ramiro and Morales, 2003). Further, in contrast to the growing number of studies on the gender composition of national chambers, there is limited research on the sub-national ones³, partly due to the lack of data at this level (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes, 2007). Absence of data is most surprising in view of the increasingly important functions carried out by meso-governments (be they regional, state, cantonal, counties or provincial) in today's democracies (Sharpe, 1993), and the on-going trend of devolution of power from the central government to the states. Different studies have also unveiled that women find regional chambers more accessible because they are characterized by less competitive seats and less costly campaigns, and impose fewer demands in terms of relocation away from the family

² Some examples of research on MPs at the regional level are: Santana, Coller and Aguilar, 2014; Coller, Sarciat and Santana, 2011; Ortega and Trujillo, 2011; Verge, 2011; Martínez and Calvo, 2010; Rodríguez, 2010; Verge, 2009; Coller, 2008; Delgado and Jerez, 2008; Feliu, 2005; Morata, 2004; Linz, Jerez and Corzo, 2003; Valiente, Ramiro and Morales, 2003; Roig, 2002; Linz, Gangas and Jerez, 2000; Calvet, 1999; Sevilla, 1997; Jerez and Morata, 1995; Morán, 1989; Pitarch and Subirats, 1982.

³ Another area that has been little studied is "the distinctive opportunity structure offered by a federal system that permits politicians to shuttle back and forth between state and national legislatures, and between executive and legislative posts at both level" (Patzelt, 1999: 260).

(Lovenduski, 1986)⁴. Finally, the subnational level because might be the springboard from which women run for higher positions state-wide (Sanbomatsu, 2002).

Thresholds in women representation

Beginning in the 90s', the international women's movement and certain global institutions started to stress out the importance of thresholds for women in politics. Critical mass, gender quotas and gender balance were concepts on the rise (Paxton, Hughes and Green, 2006).

Critical mass refers to how the attainment of a given share of female representatives (threshold) has a positive effect upon substantive (the policies debated and approved) and symbolic (institutional legitimacy) representation (Bolzendahl and Brooks: 2007; Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes: 2007; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler: 2005; Thomas: 1991). It also implies that "increases in women's parliamentary presence are related to women's electoral mobilization at the mass level, heightened interest in electoral politics among women, and increases in women's voting turnout" (Beckwith, 2007: 28). Furthermore, a certain number of elected women can encourage the presence of additional women in the parliaments (Kunovich and Paxton, 2005; Studlar and McAllister, 2002; Caul, 1999; Rule, 1987). In this article, we do not set out to identify the potential consequences of the critical mass: not only is the evidence regarding these effects unclear (Bratton, 2005) but the specific percentage of women that might ignite policy changes is unspecified (Beckwith: 2007). Instead, we defend that the time process behind the increasing presence of women in the chambers has to be analysed in greater detail by first identifying thresholds.

Many studies concur that the critical mass threshold ranges between 15 and 30% (Beckwith, 2007). The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women considers that it is reached when 30% of women are in parliament. For Kanter (1977), whose seminal work has been the foundation for a great number of these studies, the threshold is however 40%. This is also the aim of the parity laws, which defend that no gender should be given less than 40%, or more than 60%, of the representation.

Based on the proportion of women to men in a large corporation, Kanter distinguished among (1) uniform groups, which incorporate only members of one group (100% vs. 0%), (2) skewed groups, in which one group clearly outnumbers the other (85% vs. 15%), (3) tilted groups, where the ratio between the two groups is less distorted (65% vs. 35%), and (4) balanced groups, when the composition nears perfect balance (60% vs. 40% or 50% vs. 50%)⁵. In Table 1, we follow this distinction to classify Spanish regional chambers according to the percentage of women MPs they incorporate in every electoral cycle. Longitudinal cross-regional

⁴ In Spain, the comparison of the share of women MPs in the national Congress (36%) and the regional parliaments (42%) confirms this. A comparative study including 536 meso legislative bodies in 29 countries found out that the mean percentage of women in those bodies (21.5%) was higher than the figure for national ones (20.8%) (Vengroff, Nyri and Fugiero, 2003).

⁵ In order to avoid gaps in between the percentages assigned to each group, Kanter places them in a graph where the numbers go from 0% to 0-20%, 20-40% and 40-60% (1977: 967).

differences in these percentages have allowed us to identify three models of incorporation of female representatives:⁶

- a) Forerunners (those regions that leave the skewed group and reach the 40% threshold, or balanced group, earlier than the rest).
- b) Laggards (regions that take longer to abandon the skewed group and, with the exception of Galicia, have not reached the 40% threshold at the end of the period).
- c) Mixed (those that do not conform to either of the former patterns because they exhibit problematic transitions towards the tilted and the balanced groups, or neither lead nor lag behind as compared to the other regions).

Table 1 Women MPs: Thresholds and Models of Incorporation

Region	Leg1 1983	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Model	Mean	Seats (min)	Seats (max)
Mean	6.0	7.3	13.1	19.5	28.2	34.5	39.7	42.1		24.4		
Castile La Mancha	2.3	8.5	19.1	21.3	38.3	48.9	48.9	49.0	Forerunner	29.9	44	49
Madrid	12.8	16.7	20.8	26.2	32.4	40.5	46.7	45.0	Forerunner	31.3	94	129
Valencia	5.6	5.6	13.5	29.2	40.4	41.6	45.5	40.4	Forerunner	28.1	89	99
Basque Country	6.7	10.7	12.0	21.3	25.3	28.0	33.3	52.0	Mixed	26.4	60	75
Andalusia	5.5	7.3	12.8	23.9	30.3	35.8	38.5	45.9	Mixed	25.0	109	109
Balearic Islands	5.6	11.9	18.6	27.1	30.5	35.6	45.8	45.8	Mixed	27.8	54	59
Cantabria	8.6	7.7	2.6	15.4	38.5	43.6	43.6	43.6	Mixed	25.6	35	39
Asturias	8.9	13.3	22.2	17.8	33.3	31.1	42.2	42.2	Mixed	26.4	45	45
Castile Leon	3.6	3.6	8.3	20.2	27.7	36.6	41.0	40.5	Mixed	22.6	82	84
La Rioja	11.4	12.1	21.2	21.2	36.4	39.4	42.4	39.4	Mixed	27.8	33	35
Navarre	4.0	8.0	14.0	24.0	28.0	30.0	36.0	36.0	Mixed	22.5	50	50
Galicia	4.2	1.4	9.3	10.7	21.3	33.3	33.3	46.7	Laggard	20.3	71	75
Catalonia	5.9	8.9	11.1	13.3	13.3	23.7	29.6	38.5	Laggard	20.8	135	135
Extremadura	4.6	3.1	13.8	16.9	26.2	32.3	41.5	38.5	Laggard	22.1	65	65
Murcia	4.7	0.0	13.3	17.8	17.8	26.7	37.8	37.8	Laggard	19.6	43	45
Aragon	6.1	1.5	7.5	11.9	28.4	32.8	32.8	35.8	Laggard	19.6	66	67
Canary Islands	1.7	1.7	6.7	10.0	30.0	36.7	46.7	35.0	Laggard	21.0	60	60
Balanced (40.1%-50%)	0	0	0	0	1	4	10	10	Forerunner	29.8	n	3
Tilted (20.1%-40%)	0	0	3	9	14	13	7	7	Mixed	25.5	n	8
Skewed (0.1%-20%)	17	16	14	8	2	0	0	0	Laggard	20.6	n	6
Uniform (0%)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	ALL	24.4	N	17

Source: Bapolau. The dates in the first row refer to the electoral cycles in the 13 regions without special status. Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country organize their electoral contests. Catalonia and the Basque Country held a 9th election in the period analysed with 43.0% and 44.0% of women, respectively. See table A1 in the appendix for details.⁷

⁶ For a different classification of regional chambers up to 2005, see Coller, Ferreira do Vale and Meissner (2008).

⁷ The means for each term are calculated by dividing the number of all women by the number of all MPs. By doing so, we avoid attaching the same weight to chambers with different sizes, such as La Rioja and Madrid in the 8th term (33 and 129 seats, respectively). Hence, these means do not coincide with the un-weighted simple means of the 17 regions. Regional means are calculated likewise and do not necessarily

According to our criteria, three regions are forerunners, six are laggards, and eight, mixed. The averages of women for all forerunners are above the total average (24.4%). All six laggards have averages below the 24.4%, and all but one (Galicia) have not attained the balanced status in the 8th term. Regions in the mixed model have global averages between the 22.5% in Navarre (higher than that of any laggard) and the 27.8% in La Rioja and the Balearic Islands (lower than that of any forerunner).

If we disaggregate the results by electoral cycles, two cases stand out: Murcia in the 2nd term had no women and belongs to the uniform group, while women outnumbered men (52.0%) in the Basque Country in the 8th term. During the first two terms (1983 and 1987), all chambers were skewed and only three of them (Asturias, La Rioja and Madrid) increased women's presence over 20% (thence falling into the 'tilted' category) in the 3rd.

The 4th term initiated a trend whereby tilted chambers started outnumbering skewed ones (nine against eight). Valencia (in the 5th term) as well as Cantabria, Castile-La Mancha and Madrid (in the 6th) pioneered the passage towards balanced chambers, although the predominance of those over the tilted group took place later on: in the 7th term and continued well into the 8th. At present, balanced groups have ceased to be a minority: ten chambers out of 17 have attained, or surpassed, the 40% benchmark. According to Kanter (1977: 970, 987), "women's scarcity in skewed groups pushes them into classical positions" and token women "operate under a number of handicaps in work settings". When they achieve a reasonable ratio to men, women become a potential subgroup, cease to attract disproportionate attention (visibility), no longer are differences with their male partners exaggerated (polarization), and their attributes are not distorted to fit prejudiced views (assimilation). This means that, with minor regional deviations, women MPs were tokens during the 1st, 2nd and 3rd terms, shifted to the minority status during the next three cycles, and became a potential subgroup in the last two.

If we now compare (Table 2) the current distribution of national parliaments world-wide with Spanish regional chambers, we can see that more than half of the legislatures (53%) around the globe are skewed whereas none of the Spanish regions is. Further, a majority of the Spanish regions (59%) belongs to the balanced group whereas only five per cent of the world parliaments have attained this status.

Table 2 Thresholds in National Parliaments World-Wide (2013) and Spanish Regional Parliaments (around 2011)

Type of groups	National (World)	Regional (Spain)
Balanced groups (40%-50% vs. 50%-60%)	5% (N=9)	59% (N=10)
Tilted groups (20%-40% vs. 60-80%)	40% (N=74)	41% (N=7)
Skewed groups (0.5%-20% vs. 80%-99.5%)	53% (N=99)	0% (N=0)

coincide with the simple means for each region if the size of the chamber has changed: Madrid is also a good example (N = 94 in the 1st term and 129 in the 8th). The figures for the 9th term in Catalonia and the Basque Country have been taken into account in the computation of means.

Uniform groups (0%-0.5% vs. 99.5%-100%)	3% (N=5)	0% (N=0)
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Source: Own elaboration. Data on www.ipu.org and Bapolau

Patterns of evolution

Studies that deal with the evolution of female political representation have provided valuable information regarding the narrowing down of the gender gap (Cheng and Tavits, 2011; Beckwith, 2007; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Studlar and Matland, 1996). In line with this, table 3 shows that 86 out of 119 Spanish regional parliaments (72.3%) have experienced an increase in the percentage of women representatives:

Table 3 Number of Parliaments that Increase, Maintain or Decrease the Share of Women

Change from t to $t+1$	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Total
Increase	9	16	15	15	15	11	5	86 (72.3%)
Unaltered	3	0	1	2	0	2	2	10 (8.4%)
Decrease	5	1	1	0	1	0	2	10 (8.4%)
Within balance	0	0	0	0	1	4	8	13 (10.9%)
Overall change (%)	1.3%	5.8%	6.4%	8.7%	6.3%	5.2%	2.4%	119 (100.0%)

Source: Bapolau.

There have also been ten cases (8.4%) in which the percentage of women did not change, and another ten in which the figure actually decreased (in five cases, or half of this group, the fall took place in the 2nd term). Finally, 13 instances (10.9%) belong to the category 'within balance'. This embraces those cases that stay within the 40-60% interval and experience fluctuation that are not considered because they do not affect our classification of regional chambers⁸.

However, the focus on overall trends has diverted the attention from other features affecting the patterns of female representation, such as stability along time. Research on the latter is important because of two reasons: first, trends in women's political recruitment might be relevant or not depending on how stable they are; and second, stability might be associated to different models of incorporation of women into the chambers, and the combination of both is important to understand the evolution of women's representation.

In order to make up for this derelict topic, we have distinguished between two patterns: *consistently increasing* up to the attainment of a balanced gender distribution; and *unstable or inconsistent*, a pattern in which both falls and rises in the percentage of women MPs can be traced.

⁸ Indeed, four of them are ups, another four are downs, and five do not change. The 9th term in Catalonia and the Basque Country (a rise and a movement within the balanced category, respectively) have not been considered in the overall computations.

We consider a trend to be consistently increasing if: (a) as long as the 40% threshold has not been reached, the evolution in the percentage of women MPs is not subject to fluctuations; notice that this definition is not over-demanding insofar as it only requires weakly (as opposed to strictly) increasing trends (i.e.: Catalonia qualifies as stable in spite of its halt in the 5th term); (b) once the 40% threshold has been reached, the number of women MPs in the region does not fall below this mark, and thus stays within the balanced group category. When regional chambers are balanced (40% to 60%), there is little room for the percentage of women MPs to keep on growing. Regions that do not fulfil these conditions are therefore unstable.

According to our criteria, nine regions fit the 'consistently increasing trend' group and eight the unstable one. Two questions spring to our minds: first, are these patterns of stability related to the models of incorporation detected in the previous section?

Table 4 Models and Patterns of Evolution in Women MPs

Model	Stability		
	Increasing Up to Balance	Unstable trends	All
Forerunners	Castile La Mancha, Madrid, Valencia		3
Mixed	Andalusia, Balearic Islands, Castile Leon, Navarre, Basque Country	Asturias, Cantabria, La Rioja	8
Laggards	Catalonia	Aragon, Canary Islands, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia	6
All	9	8	17

Source: Bapolau.

Table 4 suggests that there is a close connection between the patterns of time stability and the models of incorporation of women: the forerunners always follow a stable path while the laggards tend to conform to the unstable pattern (five out of six do so). These results do not allow to establish a causal relationship between the two but they do point to several lines of research that have not been undertaken yet: (i) to what extent is the relationship between stability and leadership valid for other cases?; (ii) does the relationship detected imply that the patterns of evolution can condition the models of incorporation?, for instance, is stability necessary to be a forerunner in women's political access to the chambers?; (iii) or does the causal relationship run the other way round?

The second question is: are the regions that have been grouped together in this two-fold scheme similar or dissimilar in socioeconomic and cultural terms? Let us not forget that the literature has identified contextual factors of various sorts (such as income and education, access of women to the labour market, and religion) as conducive to augment (or decrease) women's political presence (Studlar and Matland, 1994). Focusing on two of these factors, GNP and religion, we may tentatively conclude that they do not affect substantially the percentage of female representatives in Spain. First, income (measured as GNP) is meant to be related to

women-friendly environments, but the mean GNP of the Spanish regional forerunners (22.025) is below that of the mixed group (23.608). Second, Catholicism has been found to impinge negatively upon women's political representation (Davidson-Schmich, 2006; Cook, 1985; Rule, 1984). Although all Spanish regions are nominally Catholic and religion cannot therefore work as a discriminant factor, it has not prevented women from acceding any legislature along time in substantial numbers either.

Rhythms of change

Women are entering the legislatures at varying paces world-wide and the rhythms may be different on the national and the sub-national levels. The relative paucity by which women have been elected to Congress in the United States (Lawless and Pearson, 2008: 67) can be compared to the mounting speed at which they were becoming MPs in the 80s' and 90s' in Canada (Studlar and Matland, 1994). In the US, "the first substantial jump in women's candidacies happened in 1972, in concert with the rise of the women's movement. The biggest jump in the number of female candidates occurred in 1992's 'Year of the Woman'" (Lawless and Pearson, 2008: 70). In Canada, "the 1984 election was the turning point: the number of female candidates for all three major parties nearly doubled, and the percentage of female MPs jumped from five to ten" (Studlar and Matland, 1994: 53-4). If we move to the sub-national level, women's representation in the Canadian provinces along the 1975-1994 period has followed a gradual trend towards the increase of female candidates and legislators since the end of the 80s (Studlar and Matland, 1996a). The percentage of women in state chambers in the US has grown approximately from six percent at the beginning of the 60s to 22% at the turn of the century (Sanbonmatsu, 2002).

When growth in women's representation is unexpected and sudden, it may respond to international forces: a United Nations funding programme in Bangladesh might have paved the way for an increase in the percentage of women from seven to 30%. Similarly, UN training in Vietnam might have contributed to a growth of women MP's from 18 to 26%. Acts of political voluntarism can equally explain surprising gains in women's political representation, as it happened when the Peruvian parliament approved gender quotas without prior domestic demands under the pressure of president Fujimori (Paxton, Hughes and Green, 2006). Another example of abrupt change is that of the British Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair: it got 418 seats (out of 659) in the House of Commons in 1997 and 101 women became Labour MPs (24.2%). A total of 120 women entered the lower chamber, a record number in British politics (Cowley and Childs, 2003). Most legislatures, however, have followed an incremental pattern.

As a general rule, we expect slow and incremental changes to be more likely to sustain along the time than fast and unexpected ones (unless gender quotas, which can bring about enduring changes 'out of the blue', are considered). In order to tell the former apart from the latter, we have labelled a change as abrupt when it departs more than two standard deviations

from the average change ($\pm 2 * 5.8\% +5.0\%$ in our data); conversely, changes will be considered gradual if they lie within (-6.6% to +16.6%). Gradual changes are then divided into moderate (larger than one standard deviation, and hence outside the -0.8% and +10.8% bounds) and slow ones (comprised within this smaller interval).

Table 5 Rhythms of Change in Women MPs

Rhythms	Change	Cases	Frequency
Abrupt increases (> +2 std)	(> 16.6%)	4	3.3%
Abrupt decreases (< -2 std)	(< -6.6%)	2	1.7%
Moderate increases (+1 std, +2 std)	(10.8%, 16.6%)	13	10.7%
Moderate decreases (-2 std, -1 std)	(-6.6%, -0.8%)	13	10.7%
Slow increases (0, +1 std)	(0.0%, 10.8%)	73	60.3%
Slow decreases (- 1 std, 0)	(-0.8%, 0.0%)	1	0.8%
No changes	(0%, 0%)	15	12.4%
Total changes		121	100.0%

Source: Bapolau.

Applying the former classification, four abrupt increases (in the Canary Islands, Cantabria and Castile La Mancha in the 5th term, and in the Basque Country in the 8th), and two abrupt decreases (in the 8th term in the Canary Islands and the 9th in the Basque Country) have been identified. Thirteen moderate increases (mostly in the 4th and 5th terms, with four cases each) and an equal number of moderate decreases (concentrated in the 2nd and 8th terms, with five cases each) have also been detected: two out of these five cases affect forerunner regions (Valencia and Madrid) which had nonetheless surpassed the 40% threshold in the 7th election and did not fall below this benchmark in the subsequent election. Finally, 74 changes (61.1%) are slow (all of them being increases but one) and the remaining 15 (12.4%) show no change at all⁹. Laggard regions, previously characterized by time instability in the process whereby their women MPs have been acceding to the regional chambers, have experienced relevant decreases (and no gains in certain cycles) as well. Table 6 helps to appreciate how the largest increases are concentrated in the 5th term, while the largest decreases have taken place at the beginning or the end of the period under study.

Table 6 Outstanding Changes in the Share of Women Representatives

Largest increases			Largest decreases		
Region	Term	Change	Region	Term	Change
Canary Islands	5	23.1%	Canary Islands	8	-11.7%
Cantabria	5	20.0%	Basque Country	9	-8.0%
Basque Country	8	18.7%	Cantabria	3	-5.1%
Castile La Mancha	5	17.0%	Valencia	8	-5.1%
Aragon	5	16.4%	Murcia	2	-4.7%

⁹ See table A3 for details.

Source: Bapolau.

All in all, 42.1% women (mean) are sitting now (8th term) in the regional chambers and this has been attained in only 31 years. This result is even more remarkable if put in a comparative perspective: in 1894, the first woman was elected to a state legislature (Colorado) in the United States, and Canada had her first female representative in a provincial chamber (Alberta) in 1917, and yet their mean percentage of women is at present 24.5 and 23.4 respectively. In Germany, some Länder held their first regional elections in 1946, 34 years before the first electoral contest at the regional level in Spain, and they are still lagging nearly 10 points behind in female representatives (33.0%; own elaboration based on CAWP, PoC, and the web pages of the 16 Länder).

Legislative quotas and regional women MPs

Does the relatively fast feminization of the Spanish regional chambers have to do with legislative gender quotas? In the Spanish regional context, they do not appear to have caused a dramatic change. So far, four regions have introduced quotas in the electoral legislation: the Balearic Islands (Law 6/2002) and Castile-La Mancha (Law 11/2002) have pioneered the move, and the Basque Country (Law 4/2005) and Andalusia (Law 5/2005) have followed suit. The first two regions, which approved a 50% of positions for each gender, could not apply their laws in the 2003 regional elections because the PP state government lodged a constitutionality appeal against them. The Basque law reserves a minimum of 50% of the party lists for women and allows exclusively-feminine candidacies. In Andalusia, the parity law has adopted the shape of zipper lists (Verge, 2008). Once in power, in 2004, the PSOE withdrew the appeal and the affected pieces of legislation were restored. However, the application of this legislation in the 8th electoral term has overlapped in time with the putting into practice of the state 2007 equality law. Only one region had been able to use its own regional law before the state law was enacted: the Basque country in 2005. The Basque law went hand in hand with a jump in women's representation from 33.3% (2001) to 52.0% (2005) but, in the last elections held (2009), the percentage decreased to 44.0%. In Andalusia, where the regional zipper-law and the state parity law were applied in the 8th term, the percentage moved up from 38.5% (2004) to 45.9% in 2008. The percentage of women MPs remained unchanged between 2007 and 2011 in the Balearic Islands (45.8%), and almost so in Castile-La Mancha (48.9 and 49.0%). Out of the four abrupt increases that have been detected for all regions, only one is related to gender quotas: the 33.3% to 52.0% increase in the Basque chamber.

Let us now turn to the state 2007 Law on the Equality between Women and Men of the Socialist government of Zapatero (2004-11), heralded as a paving stone in the path towards gender equality. This law mandates that in small districts (around 38%), where less than five candidates are elected, the presence of women and men on party lists should approach a perfect balance, whereas in those whose magnitude equals or is above five candidates, the 40%-60% should be the rule. It was first applied in the 2007 regional elections for the 13 regions

which share a common regime, in 2008 in Andalusia, in 2009 in both the Basque Country and Galicia, and one year later in Catalonia.

Table 7 Impact of the 2007 Parity Law

	Level (Before)	Growth (Before)	Growth (After)	Growth Differential (After -Before)
Forerunners	43.7	6.6	3.3	-3.3
Mixed	36.0	3.7	7.6	3.8
Laggards	33.4	5.8	8.0	2.2
All	36.4	5.0	7.0	2.0

Source: Own data-base.

Table 7 shows that the forerunner regions have been barely affected by the 2007 law. Their growth rate in women MPs after the law is the lowest (3.3%) and their growth differential is actually negative. The law has more important consequences for the laggard (8.0% growth rate) and the mixed groups (7.6%), both of which have positive growth differentials.

We can conclude that the consequences of legislative quotas are contingent on earlier developments: they do not seem to have contributed much to speed up previously-initiated processes of women's incorporation into the legislatures but, when regions lag behind the rest, legislation does encourage them to push up the percentage of women MPs.

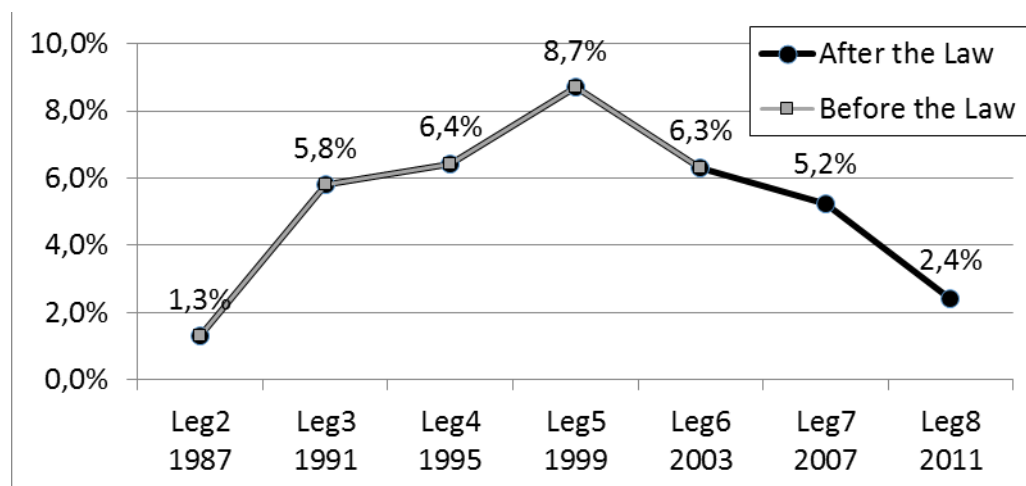
Some recent studies on the impact of electoral quotas have cast doubts on their efficacy for achieving total gender parity. For example, Martinez and Calvo (2010) have found that the PSOE and the PP have applied differently the 2007 law in the elections to the Congress and that partisan reasons are therefore relevant when accounting for the insufficient effects of the law. At the municipal level in Catalonia, Verge (2008) has concurred that parties have interpreted the law in a discriminatory way for women. Both studies have acknowledged that the 2007 law has reduced the gender gap but have simultaneously advocated the introduction of zipper lists and clear mandates as to the position of the candidates on the party lists in order to attain full parity. Similarly, Ortega and Trujillo (2011) have revealed that party quotas and the diffusion of gender recruitment practices across parties are more likely to have had an impact upon the increasing feminization of the national Congress and the Senate than compulsory legislation. Even though these studies focus on the party and ours has the regional chamber as the unit of analysis, we have reached a somehow different conclusion. It is true that the early introduction of party quotas by the left (the PSOE did so in 1988 and IU a year later) might have reduced some party leaders' reluctance to incorporate more women into their lists. Different authors have suggested that strategic reasons might explain this: when women cease to be perceived as liabilities and parties that do not field enough women run the risk of being outflanked by their competitors, traditional-minded political leaders might start promoting women (Sainsbury, 2010; Davidson-Schmich, 2006). In our case too, the fact that Castile-La Mancha has exhibited a high percentage of women MPs (49%) along 2003, 2007 and 2011 seems to be connected with the zipper lists used by the Socialists rather than with the quota laws. However,

the identification of three regional models of incorporation of women MPs has allowed us to obtain a more nuanced conclusion: parity laws have different effects depending on the region they are applied to. By leading the process in this incorporation, forerunners are little affected by the law, but all the other chambers have seen their percentages in women MPs grow at the same time as the 2007 piece of legislation was enacted. Would this result have taken place if the law had not been in place? Probably not. Further, the law prevents backsliding in the future because it will not allow the share of women to decline below the critical 40% threshold.¹⁰

Where are the regional chambers heading for?

Gender-balanced parliaments are attained when the percentage of MPs of each gender swings between 40 and 60%. In the last term covered (year 2011 for 13 out of the 17 regions), all Spanish regional parliaments are either close to or have reached the 40% balanced benchmark. Only seven chambers have failed to do so, but even the region with the lowest percentage of female representatives (35% in the Canary Islands) falls short by less than five percent. Among those (10/17) which have balanced parliaments, five have touched the 45% and Castile-La Mancha is on the verge of mathematical equality (49%). These figures suggest that there is little room left for further systematic increases in women representation in the Spanish regional parliaments –as a matter of fact, the 2007 Law places a cap of 60%. If this is so, the *growth rates* in the percentage of women MPs should be expected to fall.

Figure 1 Growth Rates in the Percentage of Women MPs (Aggregate Evolution)



Source: Own data-base.

Figure 1 shows that this is indeed the case. While the growth in the relative presence of women was initially very timid (1.3% in the 2nd term), it augmented at a mounting pace, reaching a peak of almost two digits (8.7%) in the 5th one (precisely the one in which three out of the four abrupt increases have been identified). Although the average proportion of women has kept on

¹⁰ We are thankful to an anonymous referee for this point.

growing since then, it has done so at a decreasing rate (down to 6.3% in the 6th term, 5.2% in the 7th, and reaching a bare 2.4% in the 8th term).

Figure 1 also provides some further clues as regards the effects of legislative quotas on the 17 regional chambers. The global growth rates in women MPs after the enactment of the 2007 law has been 5.2% in 2007 and 2.4% in 2011. These rates are lower than the ones found before the law came into existence, which means that compulsory gender quotas have not had a full impact because they have been applied when most chambers were on the brink of reaching a gender-balanced status. The law has simply rubberstamped a process that had been initiated before in certain chambers, although it has contributed to push up the percentage of women MPs in laggard and mixed regions. The relevant effect of the law upon these two groups is in line with the importance attributed to legislative quotas by different studies (Martínez and Calvo, 2010; Verge, 2008; Mateo 2005; Paxton 1997). However, the paradox of the 2007 parity law is that it could limit a potential growth in the number of female representatives beyond the 60% threshold in certain chambers.

Conclusions

This article has set out to offer a thick analytical description of how the percentage of women MPs has evolved in the 17 Spanish regional parliaments from their first election in 1980 up to 2011. A picture of increasing and intense feminization has come to the fore, because all the chambers started out with skewed chambers (under the 20% threshold) and, after eight elections (nine in the cases of the Basque Country and Catalonia), a majority of 10 have reached the balanced status (40-60%) and one is less than one point below (39.4%). All in all, women's average presence is now 42.1% which, if compared to their presence in long-established subnational legislatures in the United States (24.5% in 2012), Canada (23.4% in 2010-13), and Germany (33.0% in 2009-13), is the highest and epitomizes a significant proportion of female representatives.

Along a relatively short time-span (31 years), Spanish women MPs have become a potential subgroup at the regional level. Therefore, the rise in female representatives has occurred at a steady, if not fast, pace. In this swift process, three regions have been identified as forerunners, six as laggards, and the rest have fallen in between. All regions leading this upward trend have done so by following a stable time pattern, whereas all laggards (except Catalonia) have experienced instability in their evolution. Comparatively speaking, the latter group has also been more affected by abrupt changes and, most notably, by relevant decreases in the proportion of women MPs at specific points in time. The existence of the Socialist-led legislative quota will prevent potential drops in the future among this group, though. The association between models of incorporation of female representatives and time trends is an interesting finding that can be replicated in other legislatures world-wide. We have tentatively checked if contextual socio-economic and cultural variables are relevant to account for the

different regional models in Spain. Yet, neither the GNP nor religion has been shown to be correlated with cross-regional differences in women's access to the legislatures.

When compared to other subnational chambers elsewhere, our case does not show a substantial variation in the number of women MPs across regions: they range from a lowest 35.0% in the Canary Island to a highest 49.0% in Castile-La Mancha in the last electoral term. This differential (14%) is not as relevant as the one found in the United States (28.5%), from 12.5% in Louisiana to 41% in Colorado, or Canada (25.5%), from 10.5% in the Northwest Territories to 36% in British Columbia. Even more acute is the difference (33.7%) between the percentage of women (9.1%) sent by Nova Scotia to the Canadian federal chamber and that of Manitoba (42.8%). Therefore, the Spanish case departs from others in which the evolution in the number of women MPs disguises crucial disparities amongst regions and between different territorial levels of government.

We have equally ascertained that the 2007 Spanish Law of Equality was enacted when women were still increasing their presence in regional parliaments but their *growth rate* was already in decline. Thus, it would be tempting to conclude that the law had no relevant impact or that it merely rubberstamped an ongoing social trend. However, this view only suits the forerunners, but not the laggard and mixed regions. The classification of the regions according to their leadership in the incorporation of female representatives brings to the fore important effects of the law that might have been blurred by the temporal coincidence between the enactment of this piece of legislation and the overall fall in the growth rates of women MPs. Thus, our three-fold characterization of the regions as forerunners, mixed and laggards is not only useful for identifying the specificities of the process whereby women have been acceding to the parliaments, but it also serves to reconcile the seemingly controversial findings regarding the effects of legislative quotas. At present, the aim of the parity laws is within reach and the relatively balanced gender composition of the Spanish regional chambers seems secured.

Appendix

Table A1 Electoral Cycles

DATES	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Shared Regime	08/05/1983	10/06/1987	26/05/1991	28/05/1995	13/06/1999	25/05/2003	20/05/2007	22/05/2011	
Andalusia	23/05/1982	22/06/1986	23/06/1990	12/06/1994	03/03/1996	12/03/2000	14/03/2004	09/03/2008	
Catalonia	20/03/1980	29/04/1984	29/05/1988	15/03/1992	19/11/1995	17/10/1999	16/11/2003	01/11/2006	28/11/2010
Galicia	20/10/1981	24/11/1985	17/12/1989	17/10/1993	19/10/1997	21/10/2001	19/06/2005	01/03/2009	
Basque Country	09/03/1980	26/02/1984	30/11/1986	28/10/1990	23/10/1994	25/10/1998	13/05/2001	17/03/2005	01/03/2009

Table A2 Patterns of Evolution in Women MPs

Region	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Pattern
Andalusia	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Aragon	-	+	+	+	+	=	+	Unstable trend
Asturias	+	+	-	+	-	+	WB	Unstable trend
Balearic Islands	+	+	+	+	+	+	WB	Stable up to balance
Canary Islands	=	+	+	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Cantabria	-	-	+	+	+	WB	WB	Unstable trend
Castile La Mancha	+	+	+	+	+	WB	WB	Stable up to balance
Castile Leon	=	+	+	+	+	+	WB	Stable up to balance
Catalonia	+	+	+	=	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Extremadura	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Galicia	-	+	+	+	+	=	+	Unstable trend
La Rioja	+	+	=	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Madrid	+	+	+	+	+	WB	WB	Stable up to balance
Murcia	-	+	+	=	+	+	=	Unstable trend
Navarre	+	+	+	+	+	+	=	Stable up to balance
Basque Country	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Valencia	=	+	+	+	WB	WB	WB	Stable up to balance

Source: Bapolau. Increase, '+'; decrease, '-'; no change, '='; changes within the balanced group, 'WB'.

Table A3 Slow, Moderate and Abrupt Changes in Women MPs

Region	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Global (average)
Andalusia	1.8%	5.5%	11.0%	6.4%	5.5%	2.8%	7.3%	5.8%
Aragon	-4.6%	6.0%	4.5%	16.4%	4.5%	0.0%	3.0%	4.3%
Asturias	4.4%	8.9%	-4.4%	15.6%	-2.2%	11.1%	0.0%	4.8%
Balearic Islands	6.3%	6.8%	8.5%	3.4%	5.1%	10.2%	0.0%	5.7%
Basque Country	4.0%	1.3%	9.3%	4.0%	2.7%	5.3%	18.7%	4.7%
Canary Islands	0.0%	5.0%	3.3%	20.0%	6.7%	10.0%	-11.7%	4.8%
Cantabria	-0.9%	-5.1%	12.8%	23.1%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%
Castile La Mancha	6.2%	10.6%	2.1%	17.0%	10.6%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Castile Leon	0.0%	4.8%	11.9%	7.5%	8.9%	4.4%	-0.5%	5.3%
Catalonia	3.0%	2.2%	2.2%	0.0%	10.4%	5.9%	8.9%	4.6%

Extremadura	-1.5%	10.8%	3.1%	9.2%	6.2%	9.2%	-3.1%	4.8%
Galicia	-2.8%	7.9%	1.3%	10.7%	12.0%	0.0%	13.3%	6.1%
La Rioja	0.7%	9.1%	0.0%	15.2%	3.0%	3.0%	-3.0%	4.0%
Madrid	3.9%	4.1%	5.4%	6.1%	8.2%	6.1%	-1.7%	4.6%
Murcia	-4.7%	13.3%	4.4%	0.0%	8.9%	11.1%	0.0%	4.7%
Navarre	4.0%	6.0%	10.0%	4.0%	2.0%	6.0%	0.0%	4.6%
Valencia	0.0%	7.9%	15.7%	11.2%	1.1%	3.9%	-5.1%	5.0%
Mean	1.2%	6.2%	6.0%	10.0%	5.8%	5.2%	1.5%	5.0%
Standard deviation	3.3%	4.1%	5.2%	6.7%	3.7%	3.9%	6.9%	5.5%

For the calculus of the average changes in the percentage of women for each region, we have taken the simple arithmetic means of the changes in that region along the period. This procedure seems more straightforward than the alternative, which would have entailed to compute the average change as: $1 - \left(\frac{\text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM T} - \text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM 1}}{\text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM 1}} \right)^{\text{EXP} \left(\frac{1}{T-1} \right)}$. It is also preferable to geometric means, given the presence of null and negative values. For a coherent interpretation, average changes in the percentage of women for each term have been also calculated as simple means of changes across all the regions in that term.

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