Gender and Devolution in Spain and the United Kingdom

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The starting point of this essay is that the emerging literature on gender politics and state architecture needs to take seriously the insights from devolving multilevel states, as well as from formal federations and classic unitary states. The formal components of state architecture, and the dynamics of scale, are important — but hitherto neglected — features to consider in any gendered analysis of politics. We argue, however, that it is impossible to read off in any straightforward manner whether a particular form of state architecture provides a "gendered advantage." Instead, we argue that the *practice* and *interplay* of state architecture and political actors is as important as formal features.

We take up Vickers's (2009) question about whether changes in state architecture are "good" or "bad" for women. And we do so by comparing the impact of devolution and multilevel dynamics in Spain and the United Kingdom on the issues of women's descriptive representation and the performance of political parties. While we address the wider context in both states, we focus in particular on two devolved "regions,"[1] both of which have taken leading roles in campaigns for women's representation — Catalonia (Spain) and Scotland (UK).

To date, the literature on gender and state architecture has underplayed the role of political parties. We argue that this important (and two-way) relationship needs further exploration: Political parties comprise the majority of the political elite (especially in strong parliamentary democracies) and, as such, they initiate processes of constitutional change and state restructuring. Changes in state architecture also exert an impact on parties — for example, through the creating of new logics of party competition (Swenden and Maddens 2009).

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1. While we acknowledge that this term is a contested one, we use it to denote the "key meso-level of government in each state" (Swenden and Maddens 2009, 3).

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Spain and the United Kingdom Compared

Comparing Spain and the UK highlights a number of important factors that shape reform opportunities and outcomes in multilevel systems. First, in both countries, regional party actors have played an important role in setting the political agenda on women's representation. In Spain and the UK, debates over women's representation have largely centered on gender candidate quotas in political parties. Even in Spain, where legal quotas have recently been introduced, these "hard" measures come 25 years after the start of party commitments to women's equality (Verge 2010).

While research on women's representation in Spain focuses largely on the central-state level (see Threlfall 2007; Valiente 2005), in fact, gender quotas were pioneered by the Party of the Catalan Socialists (PSC), an independent regional party that is federated with the left-wing statewide Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Inspired by wider European trends — particularly the experiences of the Socialist Party (PS) in France — the PSC guaranteed 12% of seats in party committees and party candidate lists for women in 1982 (Verge 2010). It took six more years for the statewide PSOE to follow its regional counterpart and institute its first gender quota of 25% for party offices and electoral lists.[2]

In the case of the UK, processes of decentralization and campaigns for home rule for the historic nations of Scotland and Wales and the contested territory of Northern Ireland opened up new possibilities for regional feminist actors to push for gains in representation, after limited success at the UK level. Whereas the devolution debate in Wales was largely driven from the top down, in Scotland women activists working inside and outside the political parties — in particular, the Scottish Labour Party, as well as civic reform groups such as the Scottish Constitutional Convention and its Women's Issues Group — successfully introduced a gendered perspective to these wider reform debates (Russell, Mackay, and McAllister 2002). Responding to these pressures, all of the Scottish parties declared their concern for more women in politics, although only the Scottish Labour Party implemented a formal

2. The PSOE has subnational federations in each Autonomous Community–with the exception of the PSC in Catalonia, which operates as a "sister" party rather than as a territorial unit. While the PSOE's vertical integration with its subnational units is very tight and the party works as a largely centralized structure, the relationship between the PSOE and the PSC is more of a confederal type (Threlfall 2007; Verge 2009).

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candidate quota-type mechanism — the "twinning" scheme[3] — in the run-up to the first Scottish Parliament (SP) elections in 1999. Equal numbers of male and female Labour members of the SP were elected, and, overall, women comprised 37.2% of the Scottish Parliament: almost double the proportion of women parliamentarians then sitting in Westminster.

Crucially, in both Spain and the UK, change came only after women had obtained institutionalized spaces in the organizations of these left-wing parties. Party feminists used them as a springboard for wider influence in party decision making, pushing for further and farther-reaching reforms. In the case of the PSOE in Spain, the turning point came in 1984, when party leaders decided to institutionalize the women's caucus at the federal executive level. From this position, party feminists were able to campaign for women's representation, aided by members of the Women's Institute, the central-state women's policy agency, which was led by many former PSOE members (Valiente 2005). In the case of the statewide Labour Party in the UK,[4] women first gained influential positions in the party as a result of internal party quotas in the early 1990s. These included women from the Welsh and Scottish branches of the party who — along with trade union women and women's organizations — played an active role in the devolution campaign, ensuring that equal political representation became a key aim in the plans for new political institutions in Scotland and Wales (Russell, Mackay, and McAllister 2002).

Evidence from Spain and the UK also points to the need to take into account how regional party systems *interact* with each other and with the statewide party system (Swenden and Maddens 2009). In Spain, for example, while regional political actors played a pioneering role in campaigns for women's representation, the statewide PSOE subsequently took the lead on the issue, endorsing the principle of "parity democracy" in 1997.[5] Evidence from Spain also points to the emergence of a "contagion effect" both within and across regional party systems and

3. Twinning involved pairing constituencies on the basis of winnability and geography. Under this scheme, the female applicant with the highest number of votes would be selected for one of the constituency seats, while the male applicant with the highest number of votes would be selected for the other seat (see Russell, Mackay, and McAllister 2002).

4. Prior to devolution, the British Labour Party already had regional party branches in Scotland and Wales, although these had limited autonomy from the center. Postdevolution, the party remains highly centralized, although pressure for internal party decision making to be devolved downwards has led to some minor constitutional changes, for example, in the areas of candidate and leadership selection (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006).

5. In which any sex is entitled to neither less than 40% nor more than 60% of representation in party committees and candidatures.

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statewide party systems — in which the adoption of quotas by one political party induces other parties to follow suit (Matland and Studlar 1996). Women's representation has been a key area of party competition in Spain. In 2002, for example, the conservative Partido Popular (PP) legally challenged the use of gender quota mechanisms in the regional electoral laws of Castilla-La Mancha and Baleares. In response, the PSOE voluntarily implemented quota mechanisms on its party lists for elections in both regions in 2003, resulting in the most feminized parliament to that point in Castilla-la Mancha (51.2% women). The PP responded in turn by making a rhetorical commitment to full gender equality in party positions and institutional representation in 2004 (Verge 2010).

In the run-up to devolution in the UK, Scottish feminist party women and their allies took the lead in promoting candidate selection reforms, including the design of new mechanisms. Because of the statewide Labour Party's highly centralized structure, once the center was persuaded, it was able to enforce reforms in both Scotland and a recalcitrant Wales in order to ensure gender balance in candidate selection (Russell, Mackay, and McAllister 2002). Although Labour was the only party to implement strong equality guarantees in both regions, there is some (limited) evidence of a "contagion effect" in 1999. In response to Scottish Labour's use of equality measures, the Scottish National Party implemented *unofficial* measures encouraging women to stand for election, as well as using an approved panel of candidates and implementing equal-opportunity measures (Russell, Mackay, and McAllister 2002). The issue of women's representation, however, has not retained high salience for Scottish political parties since 1999, nor has it remained a matter of party competition (Mackay and Kenny 2007). By contrast, women's representation was highly politically salient in the UK general election in 2010, although ultimately none of the British statewide parties has met its own targets for women's representation, nor have the parties come close to matching the levels attained in Scotland and Wales.

Finally, evidence from Spain and the UK confirms that the relationship between state architecture and party organization is not straightforward, and that this relationship has important consequences for women's representation. Ultimately, the impact of gender equality reforms, such as quotas, depends on the willingness of political elites to implement and enforce these policies. In the case of the PSOE in Spain, the success of the party's gender equality reforms is largely due to the

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effective implementation and enforcement of these policies at both central and regional levels (Threlfall 2007). Even within regional party branches, the process is still highly centralized; the regional party executive committee establishes the order of candidates in the list and is in charge of implementing the party's parity principles (Verge 2009). In the case of the Labour Party in the UK, the trend post-1999 has been one of internal devolution within the party. In Scotland, for example, central party control over candidate selection procedures has now been devolved to Scottish Labour, although these decisions take place within a framework of centrally prescribed principles (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006). But despite the authority that has been devolved from the center, the Scottish party has increasingly withdrawn from the selection process post-1999, signaling a return to the party's past tradition of decentralized constituency-based selection (Kenny 2011). The party has also been reluctant to implement or enforce strong equality guarantees, which has had a detrimental impact on wider trends in the recruitment and election of female candidates over time (Mackay and Kenny 2007).

Conclusion

In focusing on political parties in devolved regions, we point to the ways in which particular multilevel contexts can provide both opportunities and constraints for gendered institutional innovation. Moments of constitutional and institutional restructuring can open up possibilities for change — for example, opening up new arenas for party competition, increasing the probability that women will be selected and elected. Yet, at the same time, the relationship between constitutional change and party organizational change is not straightforward. Internal party dynamics and institutional legacies can "filter, absorb, and even overturn the pressures arising from institutional change" (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006, 136). We argue that these are *gendered* dynamics and *gendered* legacies that can limit the potential of gender equality reforms.

In returning to Vickers's question of whether decentralization is "bad for women," the picture is mixed: There is not straightforward linear progress in either country, and gains at one level may obscure or be undermined by shortfalls at other levels. We need to be clear about what is meant by decentralization in different contexts, and what the implications are for women's politics. For example, in both Spain and the UK, political decentralization has not necessarily resulted in the same degree of party decentralization. Even when decentralization does result in the

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devolution of party powers such as candidate selection decisions to the regional level, it remains an empirical question whether parties at this level will retain control to the *regional center* or relinquish decisions (formally or informally) to *local* party elites. The statewide British Labour Party, for instance, has devolved candidate selection to the Scottish Labour Party, as part of wider party restructuring post-1999. In *practice*, however, most decisions about candidate selection are made instead by local constituency parties. Furthermore, the regional party does not actively oversee or enforce agreed-upon equality principles or policies. As a result, local actors have been left with considerable leeway to circumvent or subvert reforms and to return to past practices of local patronage and the privileging of "favourite sons" (Kenny 2011).

This essay provides insights for the emerging literature on feminism and state architecture, which tends to neglect devolved systems and parties as actors, as well as for the burgeoning field of territorial politics, which places political parties at its center but is noticeably silent on issues of women and gender. National particularities in state architecture, as well as different understandings of what constitutes gender equality, present challenges for future comparative work; hence, highly contextualized research strategies are needed. In doing so, researchers need to remain agnostic about which configurations of actors, levels, and institutions are most important for understanding processes over time and outcomes for women and for gender equality.

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State Structures and The Politics of Child Care

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New and reconfigured structures of policymaking and governance present fresh challenges to gender equality seekers, especially in federal systems. In a world in which policy functions are increasingly being "uploaded" to international or supranational levels, "downloaded" to meso-level units, or "offloaded" to civil society and private enterprises (Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht 2003), the links among institutional design, policy activism, and policy outcomes provide fruitful opportunities for empirical research and theory building. This essay asks what impact state architectures have on women's political mobilization around child care. How might we theorize the effects of different types of federation and multilevel governance on child-care activists' political opportunities and achievement of policy outcomes? How adequate are existing frameworks for explaining links among policy actors, state institutions, civil society, and international business? We sketch some preliminary answers and show how recognizing the significance of the multiple scales and layers involved in contemporary governance can expand feminist research agendas and promote gender-sensitive policymaking. Child care is

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