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Alfred Montero
Carleton College

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The Limits of Decentralisation: Legislative Careers and Territorial Representation in Spain

ALFRED P. MONTERO

Scholars of decentralisation in comparative perspective have argued that these reforms should lead to a 'territorialisation of politics'. For the party system and the legislature this means that subnational interests will increasingly influence rules and practices as well as positions on policy choice. This study tests this proposition in Spain, which has undergone extensive decentralisation during its democratic history (1977–present). By examining the career trajectories of deputies in the ruling lower house, the study finds little evidence that decentralisation expanded the influence of subnational representatives within the party system or the parliament of democratic Spain. This was true despite the growing cohort of deputies with subnational experience in the Congreso, the ability of subnational party offices to recruit and place candidates on electoral lists, and the increasing importance of regional issues in national elections.

Scholars of decentralisation in Europe argue that the process creates a 'territorialisation of politics' in which subnational/regional identities reshape the internal workings of parties and legislatures.¹ Some predict that decentralisation will cause organisational power within parties to shift from national to subnational levels so that subnational actors (party leaders and activists) will increasingly influence rules and practices as well as positions on policy choice (Harmel 1981; Hopkin 2002; Maor 1998; Panebianco 1988). Greater territorialisation of representation should cause parties to reconfigure their internal rules, allowing for greater diversity of subnational interests and experiences within the organisation (Tuschhoff 1999).²

Perhaps no European country is a better candidate to test the logic of these arguments than democratic Spain (1977–present). During the 1970s, the inauguration of a decentralised state known as the State of the Autonomies coincided with the development of a democratic party system. The nationalist regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country led the way in

Correspondence Address: amontero@carleton.edu

the creation of the federal system. These regions, and Galicia, enacted Statutes of Autonomy (subnational constitutions) during the ill-fated Spanish Republic (1930–36) only to have them abrogated at the beginning of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1938–75). Catalanian and Basque nationalist parties seized on the reinstatement of the autonomy statutes as the basis for their claims to greater self-rule in the aftermath of the centralising Franquist regime. As Spain's 15 other regions petitioned for and gained constitutional autonomy, subnational political forces emerged as important actors in the building of the modern state-wide parties. Organised as they were around socialist, centrist, and conservative poles, the state-wide parties (re)emerged during the transition largely through the combination of regional party offices and previously unaffiliated political groups with localised bases of support. This was true of the Socialists (PSOE), the centrist Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD),³ the Popular Party (PP; formerly the *Alianza Popular*), and the former Communist United Left (IU). These organisations joined the modern, nationalist parties – the Catalan nationalist *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), the Galician National Bloc (BNG) and the Canary Island Coalition (CC), among others, to form the contemporary Spanish party system (Moreno 2002: 405; Pallarés and Keating 2003).

The territorial dimension of representation became a major aspect of Spanish democracy as it influenced the way parties operated internally and the way that they formed coalitions to govern. All of the Spanish parties maintained subnational offices that became important recruiters of candidates for elected positions and for supporting campaign efforts during regional, municipal and national contests. During most of the democratic period, one of the two principal state-wide parties – the PSOE or PP – held an absolute majority in the governing lower house (PSOE during the II–IV terms, 1982–93, and PP during the VII term, 2000–04). But at times they needed to form coalitions with the regional parties to retain a governing majority in the Chamber of Deputies (also known as the *Congreso*). Subnational interests in this way exerted unprecedented leverage in the *Congreso* during the 1990s (PSOE during the 1993–96 period (fifth legislature) and PP during the 1996–2000 period (the sixth legislature) with CiU, PNV, and CC).⁴ The PSOE government during the most recent term, 2004–08 (the eighth legislature), enjoys a slim majority over the PP thanks only to nationalist support. Therefore the territorialisation of representation continued on two dimensions: as a vertical link between national parties and their subnational offices and as a horizontal link between state-wide and regionalist/nationalist parties.

The vertical dimension became more important as national party leaders decentralised resources in response to demands by their subnational affiliates or allied regional parties (Boix 1998). Where party brokers resisted these pressures, as in the case of UCD leaders who embraced centralisation, the organisation they served did not survive (Hopkin 1999: 145–9).

These dynamics transformed the Spanish party system into an archetypal, decentralised structure (Colomer 1998; Lancaster 1999).

Despite the salience of these decentralising forces, the present study finds that this process failed to fundamentally change the political career trajectories of Spanish politicians in the way that the territorialisation literature predicts. Although the emergence of the national party system during the democratic transition favoured the role of regional organisations, this did not produce a party system in which regional interests held sway. Nor did the substantial fiscal and administrative decentralisation of the state during the subsequent 25-year period make subnational politicians especially influential in either their national party offices or in the parliament. Analysis of the career trajectories of subnational politicians in democratic Spain shows that decentralisation created *disincentives* for these individuals to pursue positions in national politics. Decentralisation created two political classes – one national and one subnational – with little circulation between the two levels. This process actually *weakened* subnational representation within the parties and the national legislature.

Our focus on career trajectories of national legislators is especially well suited to testing the effects of decentralisation on intra-party dynamics. Political career paths highlight where the pyramids of power are in any political order, and they are particularly useful in complex, multi-level polities (Montero and Samuels 2004: 23). Observers of the Spanish case have made the point that the rules governing the parties and the legislature are less reflective of the real power dynamics within representative institutions than are the career patterns of politicians (López Nieto 2000). The evolution of the State of the Autonomies reshaped the ideological, interest, and professional cleavages underlying the Spanish party and legislative systems. Inquiry into how political institutions work can therefore best be served by examining the motivations, career goals, and behaviour of members of the Spanish political class.

It is in the Congreso, the governing lower house of the Cortes (the Spanish parliament), that the myriad logics shaping the organisation of parties – the motives to win elections and control policy decisions – are formed and are played out (Delgado 2000; Santamaría 1994). Internal party organisation determines legislative behaviour so that what happens in the legislature says a great deal about how parties are organised, the extent to which they are centralised, disciplined and institutionalised (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). The Congreso's membership reflects the internal dynamics of the parties given the predominant role internal party struggles play in determining the placement of candidates on electoral lists and, therefore, who gets a seat in the Chamber of Deputies (Morán 1996). Specifically, this study argues that the pattern of career trajectories of deputies in the Congreso says much about the relative importance of experience in subnational offices for determining who composes the leadership of the assembly and who manages to survive multiple mandates. The longevity and

importance of these ‘subnational representatives’ in the Congreso is a prime indicator of the relative strength of the intergovernmental cleavage in the party system.⁵

Political trajectories are long in Spain so they afford much data for comparison. While all political experience could be expected to be short during the first legislatures, surveys estimate that almost a quarter of all deputies in the Congreso between 1982 and 1995 had several years of prior political experience before gaining a seat in parliament and over 80 per cent of those in 1996 identified themselves as professional politicians (López Nieto 2000: 20; Uriarte 2000: 114–16). As in other established democracies, the ranks of those who live from politics in Spain have grown over the years.

The importance of having subnational elected experience is seen by many observers of the Spanish case as the result of the increased professionalisation of politics and the territorialisation of the country’s party system. Some scholars have argued that the data on legislative careers illustrate a clear tendency of politicians building their careers by first gaining regional experience and then using that background to secure a position on their party’s national list (Morán 1996; Gangas 2000).

All of this has implications for the extent to which the party system represents the growing importance of subnational interests. If politicians with subnational experience are more likely to identify with the interests of their region, then we might predict a growing degree of representation of the regions’ interests in the Congreso and we might be able to explain which politicians will become most important in the lower chamber by serving the most terms, gaining the advantage of incumbency, and achieving positions of parliamentary leadership on behalf of their parties (López Nieto 2000). The longer these deputies serve, the greater their influence will be.⁶ The length of a deputy’s incumbency in the Congreso is a determinant of a deputy’s informal ties and understanding of the parliamentary process (López Nieto *et al.* 2003: 19). Deputies who sit for a single term have less access to the ‘kitchen’ of the Congreso where the details of legislation are formed. Also, the greater their positions of importance by becoming party spokespersons for particular pieces of legislation (*ponentes*) or serving on the powerful rules committee, the greater their influence as representatives for their region. Thus, assuming that deputies with the most experience at the subnational level are the most motivated and the best placed to articulate their region’s interests, the extent to which this cohort serves long terms and holds leadership positions will confirm that decentralisation has reinforced territorial representation in the party and legislative systems.

This study analyses the career trajectories of the subnational cohort in the Congreso for the entire democratic period (1977–2004). The data demonstrate that subnational representation in the Congreso is weak, that service to the national party bureaucracy is a more important predictor of parliamentary longevity and leadership than is representation of regional interests. Ambitious politicians who have made a career in shaping their

region's interests do not tend either by the efforts of their regional party offices or the national party to gain influence in the Congreso. Moreover, the data show that service in subnational government operates as an impediment to a political career at the national level. Contrary to the expectations of those who claim that decentralisation deepens the territorial cleavage in modern European parties, the evolution of the State of the Autonomies has not altered party or legislative authority structures in democratic Spain. The main implication of this for intergovernmental relations is that the arena of the national parliament and its party organisations will not be the place where the evolving politics of centre-periphery conflicts will develop.⁷

The next section examines how intra-party dynamics should 'normally' shape career trajectories in the decentralised Spanish democracy. On the face of it, the territorialisation of the Spanish state offers an array of incentives and opportunities for party leaders to promote the careers of regional notables. Such subnational representatives have space for exerting the interests of their region in legislative politics. And national parties, particularly those in government, face strong pressures for integrating these perspectives especially when matters of public policy require the support of particular geographic constituencies. Nevertheless, the subsequent section – the quantitative analysis of deputies' careers – demonstrates that these pressures and incentives are muted in the Spanish case.

The Institutions of Intra-Party Dynamics in Spain

The relative centralisation of parties is a key factor in determining the autonomy of subnational interests in the organisation (Maor 1998). The existence of closed-list proportional representation rules in which party leaders determine placement on the electoral list and voters must cast their vote for a list and not for individual candidates, bolsters the discipline of rank-and-file politicians (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997: 421–9). Internal party rules and the institutions governing the legislative process also determine to what extent national party brokers command the behaviour of backbenchers. Where the range of action of individual deputies is constrained by these norms, legislation and electoral strategy are more likely to follow the preferences of the national partisan leadership.

The Spanish electoral, party and legislative systems contain all of these characteristics. National party leaders have the final say over the composition of closed electoral lists in multi-member districts. The rules governing the legislative process leave little room for individual deputies to articulate views independent from those held by their 'parliamentary group' (political party). All legislation, including amendments and committee work, is shaped by the whips (*portavoces*) of the parties. Deputies daring to stray from the party line on electoral or legislative matters can be routinely punished according to the internal regulations of the parties (Field 2003).

Short of losing their seats, they may lose their partisan affiliations and therefore their capacity to have any effect on the legislative process or keep their seats during the next electoral cycle.⁸

Yet the structure of the Spanish party system also has aspects that broaden the range of views that may be represented within the partisan hierarchy. Decentralised party offices based in regional capitals and even more locally have an important say in the composition of the lists for the Congreso. They are also the chief vehicles through which the national parties, and particularly the state-wide parties (PSOE, PP, and IU), integrate the interests of the regions and then articulate the organisation's position on questions of local importance. Decentralisation of the party system, then, has increased the autonomy of subnational partisan offices in three key areas in which this autonomy matters most: recruitment, agenda-setting for electoral campaigns, and strategies of representation in policy-making.

Candidate Selection

Some scholars have argued that subnational party leaders exercise the most influence in determining the composition of electoral lists at the regional level in Spain (e.g. Morata 1992). In practice, the electoral committees of the subnational offices select politicians according to a variety of criteria. Not surprisingly, service to the party is the most important factor in getting any single politician on a party's list. A rough indicator of this is that the average period of party affiliation most often exceeds the number of years a deputy has held political posts (Uriarte 2000: 116). This is logical given that in order to receive a viable placement on the electoral list or an *alta* (direct placement in the Congreso to replace a retiring member during a legislative session) aspiring deputies must stand out in their service to the party. It might be argued that doing so is more costly when a politician holds a public office simultaneously since that politician must divide his or her time between activities on behalf of the party and responsibilities as an elected or appointed official. Despite this, a large number of deputies have served in subnational appointed or elected office (43.8 per cent from 1977 through to 2004). Forty-three per cent of all deputies have also served in official capacities in their subnational party offices. Holding office in regional and local government and holding a position in the subnational party are positively and significantly correlated at the .001 level for both office-holding and number of years working in either capacity (.188 and .321, respectively). So there is no *prima facie* reason to believe that there is a zero-sum relationship.

However, a more evident trade-off exists between holding subnational office and working for the national party bureaucracy. The general correlation is negative and insignificant, and if number of years in subnational office is used, the negative correlation is significant ($-.054$, $p < .05$), demonstrating a trade-off.⁹ This finding has implications for the

kind of party service that determines deputies' career possibilities in the Congreso. Subnational representatives are more likely to depend upon their affiliations with their subnational party offices than the national party in order to secure promotion in parliament.

Agenda-Setting

Do politicians whose political careers in the Congreso are promoted by their subnational party offices articulate the interests of their regions? The few polls of national deputies that have been done in recent years offer a mixed picture of the salience of regional representation. Using survey data gathered by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS), Delgado (2000) and Martínez and Méndez (2000: 235) argue that deputies identify first with the interests of the provincial electorate in which they were elected. National representation and partisan interests are considered secondary. Yet in a poll of 212 deputies done at approximately the same time as the CIS study, Uriarte (2000) reports that only 3 per cent of the respondents thought that representing their region was a major motivation driving their political careers. Universalistic ideals such as 'serving society' and 'generating social change' stand out in deputies' motivations. Given that the poll data are so inconclusive it is difficult to assess the motivations of deputies. There is sufficient evidence, however, to conclude that at least some deputies identify their representative functions with their region. It is also safe to assume that those deputies with the most experience in subnational politics are most likely to articulate the interests of their region.

Internal party rules and those of the Congreso offer individual deputies a limited but still appreciable opportunities for representing subnational interests, if they are so inclined. Several regional and national party officials report that individual deputies with the strong support of their regional party offices can have a tremendous say over particular pieces of legislation or amendments that are of importance to their districts.¹⁰ This influence most often manifests itself in the form of informal contacts and pressure politics in 'the kitchen' of the Congreso, that is, in an extra-legislative setting. Yet individual deputies may also ask formal questions during committee sessions that can reflect their region's interests.¹¹ More aggressive and rarer forms of subnational interest aggregation in the Congreso might also occur. As a last recourse, individual deputies may threaten to leave their parties or actually do so without losing their seats. Under Spanish constitutional law, seats in all legislatures belong to individual deputies and not to their parties (Esteban 1990). Yet how frequent or how effective these threats have been in representing some crucial interest of a subnational government is difficult to assess. In any case, acting on the threat removes the deputy's influence on his/her former party, and merely threatening will probably lead to the deputy's removal from the party's electoral list in the next cycle.

Time and position are the two proximate factors that explain the extent to which any deputy with extensive subnational experience and close ties to their subnational party office will influence the content of the legislative or electoral agenda. Members of the subnational cohort who hold multiple terms and leadership positions are more likely to be heard on matters of particular importance to them and their local bailiwicks.

Partisan Centre–Periphery Relations

The promotion of the careers of deputies with extensive subnational experience may also be a priority of national party brokers, if these legislators offer the party a particular advantage in an electorally important region. Decentralisation creates incentives not only for subnational party offices to articulate themselves as the defenders of their region's primary interests, it gives national party strategists incentives to listen to those located in regions and electoral districts where the seats of rival parties are vulnerable. Capo Giol (2000: 72–3) shows that certain electoral districts are more important to the two centrist parties (PSOE and PP) than others in gaining seats to form an absolute majority in the Congreso.¹² Therefore, the hierarchy of important regions for each party will not only be different but will be based on mixed criteria. Generally, parties will be motivated to reinforce the support of co-partisan regions but they will also wish to expand their parliamentary positions by undercutting the electoral support of regions currently supporting their rivals.

Does recruiting and elevating politicians with subnational experience play an important part of the strategy of gaining the support of these high-priority districts? Once again, time and position are important. If the longevity and leadership position of deputies is a proximate factor in their influence, are members of the subnational cohort from priority districts more likely to have successful careers in the Congreso?

The Effects of Subnational Experience on Legislative Longevity and Leadership

The growing availability of congressional archives and biographical data on Spanish deputies' careers makes possible a systematic analysis of the professional political trajectories of all 1,597 members of the eight legislative sessions beginning with the Constituent Assembly (1977–79) and continuing through the seven subsequent legislatures until the 2000–04 congress.¹³ Furthermore, experience as a representative at either the national or subnational levels of government occurs in discrete periods of time, making sequencing easier to map out. Since January 1985, the Law of Incompatibility prohibited parliamentarians from holding elected office at the subnational or national level concurrently with their positions in the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate.¹⁴ Additionally, the major parties instituted their

own incompatibility norms. Practical impediments too, such as the growing complexity of political office on the national and subnational levels, make combining responsibilities prohibitive (Delgado 2000).

While there are few studies on the sequencing of political careers in Spain, studies based primarily on surveys of politicians consistently indicate that most respondents begin their political lives in local government (e.g. Delgado 2000; López Nieto 2000: 14; Uriarte 2000). The current study demonstrates that the actual number is below 50 per cent (43) for all deputies (although it is above 50 per cent for the latter three legislatures). The data, summarised in Table 1, also confirm that prior experience with legislative positions is clearly more important for recommending a member of the subnational cohort to the Congreso. Municipal councillors (45 per cent) and regional deputies (39 per cent) compose a larger share of the subnational cohort than regional chancellors¹⁵ (18 per cent) or mayors (17 per cent). This finding agrees with López Nieto (2000), who found in her surveys of mayors a general reluctance to move on to a national legislative career.

This last finding may be indicative of a general inhibition on the part of former executives in subnational politics to move to the Congreso. The tendency is most apparent for former presidents of the regions. López Nieto (2002: 72) notes in her study of the first four legislatures that 18 of the 42 regional presidents served in the Congreso prior to becoming subnational executives (43 per cent). However, only five (or 12 per cent) went to the Congreso after serving as regional presidents. This is the same number that went to the much less powerful upper house, the Senate, after serving as regional executives. It is reasonable to assume that having congressional experience helps regional presidents lobby for their region's concerns. Yet parliamentary parties do not gain the benefit of the experience of these regional presidents when they leave office.

Some scholars have argued that the circulation of elites in several subnational positions prior to going to the Congreso can be thought to reinforce subnational experience in this cohort (e.g. López Nieto 2000: 22). While this is logical, the current study finds that there is not much circulation of subnational elites. Most of the 699 cases of deputies with subnational experience held only one kind of office (mayors, town councillors, regional legislators, regional chancellors (subnational ministries), or other appointed/elected office). Not surprisingly, 79 per cent held elected office while 31 per cent held appointed office.¹⁶

The depth of subnational experience, measured by the number of years in appointed and/or elected office at the regional/local level is also substantial. Fifty per cent were in office 1–4 years, 26 per cent 5–8 years, and 24 per cent nine or more years. With time, it can be expected that more politicians with subnational experience would make it to the Congreso. Table 1 confirms that subnational experience increased with each legislature. Perhaps most striking is the role of particular forms of subnational experience at the

TABLE I
REGIONAL EXPERIENCE, LEGISLATURES LC-VII

Term	% Regional experience	Appointed office ^a	Elected office ^a	Regional deputies	Municipal council	Mayors	Regional chancellors	Other ^b	Average years
LC	24.0	10.9	16.2	9.4	6.6	2.2	9.7	5.2	1.11
I	27.8	12.6	19.1	10.8	8.2	3.1	11.1	6.2	1.28
II	36.2	15.6	24.0	11.5	13.5	4.1	9.7	13.8	1.79
III	41.1	13.3	30.4	14.0	16.1	7.1	9.2	13.0	2.18
IV	49.2	14.7	38.4	20.1	21.9	8.8	8.8	17.5	2.91
V	52.1	14.3	43.5	24.3	23.3	10.8	9.6	18.4	3.49
VI	58.2	17.1	46.5	24.0	27.6	9.8	7.6	22.0	3.98
VII	59.7	16.1	51.3	25.0	32.9	8.4	8.9	18.4	4.26

N = 1597.

All figures are percentages except the final column.

^aThe sum of the second and third columns does not equal the first because some deputies were counted twice for having both kinds of experience.

^bIncludes regional presidents and positions in the subnational bureaucracy below the chancellor level, provincial and municipal appointments and elected office.

municipal level and not just in regional parliaments. Decentralisation produced career avenues for municipal as well as regional politicians to make their way to the Congreso.

Some scholars have argued that analysis of career trajectories in the upper house, the Senate, is more indicative of subnational representation given that this is constitutionally the 'chamber of territorial representation'. Yet the Senate's relative weakness in composing legislation makes it an unlikely focus for subnational party offices interested in promoting 'their' politicians. The Senate functions as a second reviser of legislation, making technical changes in laws, but it does not have any power to initiate or radically change legislation without the consent of the Congreso. Furthermore, its members are elected through a plurality system, which in comparison to the closed-list PR system that governs the rest of the legislature in Spain, favours the promotion of candidates that are easily recognisable to their constituents (Morán 1989: 79). This may advantage individual politicians who take on the mantle of 'regional representatives' but partisan discipline helps to keep all 252 senators in line with the wishes of governing parties and coalitions in the Congreso. Partisan discipline controls even the behaviour of the 44 senators elected by the unicameral regional parliaments. More important for our purposes, there is little evidence senators provide a regional representation function linked to the life of the Congreso. Analysis of senatorial careers shows that these politicians tend to be generally inexperienced in parliamentary offices (Morán 1989: 78). The present study finds that only 154 deputies (9.6 per cent) served in the Senate prior to serving in the Congreso.¹⁷ And even if the Senate were the chamber of territorial representation, the average senator with legislative experience does not spend much time there. Over 97 per cent spent two terms or less there as compared with 76 per cent for the same number of terms in the Congreso.

Given that there is a substantial and growing cohort of deputies in the Congreso with significant experience in subnational elected office, one might expect this group to exert a noticeable influence on legislation and the workings of their parties. That influence depends upon the length of incumbency and the leadership position of deputies in the subnational cohort. If decentralisation has fundamentally altered the structures of partisan careers and subnational party offices have gained autonomy in promoting 'their' politicians, then members of the subnational cohort should hold positions of leadership and retain the advantages of incumbency to a degree above what would be expected of politicians without experience in subnational office.

Longevity

All studies of the Congreso have demonstrated that legislative careers are short-lived (e.g. Gangas 2000; López Nieto 2001; Morán 1989, 1996).

This study confirms that 52.5 per cent of all deputies served only one term in the Congreso; only about 13 per cent served four terms or more. Given that 17.5 per cent of all deputies also failed to complete their terms, we can conclude that the extent of turnover in the Congreso is high. In the seventh legislature, for example, 41 per cent of deputies were new to the lower house.

While their stay in the Congreso is on average short, political careers in Spain are long. The long-standing culturalist view in Spain that adopting 'politics as a profession' is frowned upon is not verified by what people who go into politics actually do. How then can we account for the generally short careers of deputies in the single most powerful political forum in Spain?

The two most prominent, mutually-supporting reasons given by scholars of the Congreso are that parliamentary life is unrewarding (i.e. low salaries compared with the private sector, little office space, the overpowering nature of party leadership) for ambitious politicians and the Law of Incompatibility reduces career politicians' access to patronage (e.g. López Nieto 2001: 225; Morán 1989: 79–80). If these reasons are true, we should see much circulation of ambitious career politicians through the Congreso on to more promising political positions, and particularly executive ones given the high job approval ratings reported by mayors and regional presidents.¹⁸

If political careers are long in Spain, and the extensive years of experience in subnational elected and appointed office for a large proportion of deputies suggests that they are, then two salient trajectories involving parliamentary mandates should be evident: (1) politicians with extensive subnational experience complete their careers with a stint in the Congreso or (2) politicians pursuing careers pass through the Congreso and then return to subnational office. Table 2 demonstrates that the second tendency is particularly weak. Relatively few deputies take positions in subnational appointed or elected office (11.8 per cent) once they leave the Congreso. The data also show a *declining* trend in the percentages of deputies for each legislative session that continue their political careers at the subnational level. This is striking for terms III–VI as this was precisely the most active period for the development of the State of the Autonomies. Decentralisation, then, promoted a movement of politicians from the subnational level to the national level but not the reverse. The evidence suggests a predominant 'topping-off' tendency. This has implications for how decentralisation affects legislative careers. Observers of the State of the Autonomies have speculated that the emergence of regional governments

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF DEPUTIES CONTINUING CAREERS IN SUBNATIONAL
OFFICE, LC–VII

LC	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII ^a
17.5	18.1	13.8	11.0	9.3	7.6	4.2	1.1

^aOnly includes deputies that left *during* their terms.

would cause an increasing number of deputies to extend their political careers by seeking office at the subnational level (e.g. Morán 1989: 78). Since topping-off is a greater tendency than passing-through, and Senate experience is negligible, the most experienced politicians in the Congreso are members of the subnational cohort and these politicians, like those without subnational experience, tend to end their political careers in Madrid.

The topping-off tendency puts even greater weight on the relative longevity of deputies in the Congreso. Since these politicians are unlikely to extend their experience and influence beyond this body, if they represent subnational interests, the regions, cities, and subnational party offices must get the most out of these politicians while they serve in the Congreso. The preference of subnational interests would be to extend the number of legislative terms these politicians serve to maximise their own influence.

Leadership

Placing 'their' deputies in leadership positions in the parties and the Congreso is central to any attempt by subnational interests to project their preferences onto the legislative process. Longevity and leadership are intertwined as those politicians who have the longest runs in the Congreso also assume positions of leadership. They become the spokespersons or whips for their parliamentary groups, they assume the job of *ponente* or the spokesperson on legislative committees,¹⁹ and they serve as representatives for their parties on the important rules committee of the chamber.

Previous analyses have conjectured a strong relationship between party leadership, parliamentary leadership, and longevity (e.g. Morán 1989: 83) and the present study confirms this strong correlation. Of the total number of deputies, this study found 18.5 per cent held positions as *ponente* on committees, served on the rules committee of the chamber, or held the responsibility of party whip. Veterans of leadership positions tend to have longer stints in the Congreso compared with those who do not have this experience. In this study, committee membership (e.g. the position of *vocal*) in itself was not counted as leadership, nor was any leadership role in the party bureaucracy outside of parliament considered a position of legislative leadership. Only deputies serving in parliamentary offices with responsibility over the legislative process were considered leaders.

The Statistical Analysis

First we estimated the effects on longevity for all deputies (N = 1597) based on key explanatory variables representing regional experience, local and national party activity, and experience in the national bureaucracy of the Spanish state. Using an ordinary least squares regression analysis we constructed a model including two regional experience variables – a dummy

for subnational experience and a scale variable for years of experience. Additionally, we measured three variables for party activity (a dummy for holding an executive position in the subnational party office, an interval variable for the number of years the politician worked for the subnational party, and a dummy for holding an executive position in the national party). We also included dummy variables for holding a position in the national bureaucracy and being a parliamentary leader.

The results reported in Table 3 demonstrate that regional experience is not a predictor of longevity. This was the case even when we estimated using variables for elected versus appointed office and particular kinds of office (e.g. mayors, regional deputies, chancellors, town councillors, etc.). The years of subnational experience variable is significant but the sign runs in the wrong direction. This might be related to incompatibility norms and the inclusion of the first legislatures in which subnational experience was limited. We tested the model for the final three legislatures, which had the highest levels of subnational experience, yet we found the same negative and statistically significant relation. This was true for deputies who served for the first time in the fifth and seventh legislatures and for those serving in each of the final three legislatures. The correlation was insignificant for deputies who served for the first time in the sixth legislature only and the fifth and sixth and the sixth and seventh consecutively. This suggests that temporal trade-offs may explain some of the inverse relationship between subnational experience and longevity in the Congreso but some of the results suggest that other factors are relevant.

TABLE 3
ESTIMATE OF LONGEVITY IN THE CONGRESO, LC-VII

Explanatory variable	Model I	Model II
Constant	1.362** (.050)	1.474** (.051)
Regional experience	.094 (.092)	.093 (.097)
Years in regional office	-.039** (.011)	-.043** (.011)
Executive position in regional party	-.316* (.096)	-.352** (.100)
Years in service to local party	.085** (.007)	.091** (.007)
Executive position in national party	.603** (.068)	.774** (.070)
Prior position in state bureaucracy	.283* (.084)	.331** (.088)
Parliamentary leader	.953** (.079)	
Adjusted R ²	.325	.257
N	1450	1450

All unstandardised coefficients in bold are significant: **p < .001; *p < .01 (two-tailed tests). Standard errors in parentheses.

The consistent significance of the leadership and partisan variables underscore the role of service to the party apparatus at both the national and subnational levels as a reasonably strong predictor of longevity.²⁰ Yet the *type* of service to the local party office does differentiate the subnational cohort's trajectory in the Congreso. Deputies who have more experience working in a decision-making position in the subnational party office serve *fewer* terms in parliament. By contrast, experience in holding an executive position in the national party is more important than holding such a position at the regional level. Given the fact that experience in the national bureaucracy also proves important, deputies who desire long stints in the Congreso should develop their reputations at the national level. While years of experience working for the subnational party is also significant, this only suggests that sustained party activism is a more important credential than being a notable in the local party office or having elected or appointed office prior to taking a seat in the Congreso.

We estimated a second model to isolate the role of partisan factors independent of the leadership variable, which the first model confirmed is strongly correlated with longevity. Its removal underscores the importance of activism at the subnational level and proven leadership in the party at the national level in determining longevity. These factors remained robust predictors even when we ran models controlling for kind of affiliation, namely to the state-wide (PP and PSOE) and nationalist parties (e.g. CiU, PNV, PA, BNG, etc.). In short, career longevity in parliament is a function of service to the national party rather than service to the region or being a local party notable, even in the case of nationalist/regionalist parties.

One possible explanation for the shorter-lived parliamentary experience of members of the subnational cohort is that this group associates its public life more closely with directly serving constituents. The decisions of these politicians at the local and regional levels are more easily linked to specific social demands and communities. Mayors, regional deputies, and town councillors are also more accustomed to having greater influence over the legislative process, which helps to account for the relatively higher job satisfaction ratings these respondents provide in surveys when compared with the responses of national deputies (e.g. López Nieto 2000: 14–18).²¹ This logic is consistent with the data that highlight two types of career trajectories: public servants versus political servants. The subnational cohort is more likely to be composed of public servants, given that service to the party is more important than service to the public in elected and appointed office in determining longevity in the Congreso. This point also provides a partial explanation for the topping-off tendency, at least for the subnational cohort. Politicians dedicated to public service rather than party service are less likely to be satisfied with their experiences in the party-dominated legislative process. This point, however, requires further confirmation through data on subnational politicians in general, their links to subnational party offices, and their profile as public versus political servants.

The results regarding longevity parallel the results for parliamentary leadership as shown in Table 4. We estimated the leadership of deputies using a binomial logistic regression analysis including the same independent variables plus an interval variable for number of terms served. Service to the national party and legislative terms served appear as the most robust predictors of parliamentary leadership. In this and multiple models, previous subnational experience measured as a dummy or by number of years served was insignificant. Unlike the estimations for legislative longevity, local party affiliation and the holding of partisan office were wholly unimportant factors in determining leadership. The model predicted correctly at an 81.2 per cent level.²² The results underscore the role of service to the national party.

Since one or the other state-wide parties controlled the Congreso, party affiliation may have an independent effect on leadership selection. Model two utilises dummies for each of the state-wide parties and a dummy for affiliation to a nationalist party. The only noteworthy result is that the Socialists would be less likely to become leaders. This finding may reflect the tendency of the PSOE, more than the PP or the nationalist parties, to

TABLE 4
ESTIMATE OF PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP IN THE CONGRESO, LC-VII

Explanatory variable	Model I	Model II
Constant	-2.888** (.164)	-2.712** (.180)
Regional experience	-.067 (.228)	
Years in regional office	.005 (.027)	
Executive position in regional party	.009 (.242)	
Years in service to local party	-.013 (.016)	
Executive position in national party	.713** (.155)	.642** (.150)
Prior position in state bureaucracy	.105 (.194)	.163 (.190)
Legislative terms served	.536** (.056)	.553** (.051)
PP		-.284 (.199)
PSOE		-.538* (.203)
Nationalist Party		.128 (.260)
Log-likelihood	1207.1	1312.8
% Predicted	81.2	81.3
Nagelkerke R ²	.201	.205
N	1450	1597

All unstandardised coefficients in bold are significant: **p < .001; *p < .01. Standard errors in parentheses.

concentrate leadership posts in a small (initially quite young) group at the national level during their 13 years in power. Nevertheless, particular affiliations and the holding of national appointments are not strong predictors of parliamentary leadership. Parliamentary leaders are those deputies most likely to serve the offices of the national party and have the benefit of experience in more than the average number of terms served in the legislature. Given that national party position was a strong predictor of longevity in the linear models, it is service to the national party that matters most in determining the success of deputies. Regional experience may even be a hindrance to ambitious deputies, as the linear models suggest.

The findings show that decentralisation did not produce systemic influence in parliament for politicians with subnational experience, but it does not exclude the existence of individuals from particular subnational regions and electoral districts that may exercise extraordinary influence on behalf of their regions. I argued above that the state-wide parties have a sense of which seats are most vulnerable to being lost to the rival party. It could be argued that the incumbent's party would prefer to place on these lists politicians that are familiar with these particular districts. To allow these politicians to serve as long as possible they should receive leadership spots and guaranteed upper-level placement on electoral lists over time. Using Capo-Giol's (2000) list of preferred districts we created an even four-fold hierarchy of 13 districts per tier. We focused our analysis on the final three legislatures to maximise the population of deputies with subnational experience. Table 5 reports the results. The figures indicate that incumbent parties in high priority districts place their most experienced deputies in these seats and these deputies also tend to be in leadership positions. However, subnational experience does not appear to be valued as much by incumbent parties. The *lowest percentage* for the indexed tiers of deputies with subnational experience is the highest priority category. While more than half of the entire cohort from the three latter legislatures tended to have subnational experience, these deputies did not tend to cluster in the high priority districts any more than those deputies without subnational experience. The same is true of the cohort of legislative leaders. The data do

TABLE 5
ELECTORAL DISTRICT PRIORITIES FOR PP AND PSOE AND DEPUTY
LONGEVITY AND LEADERSHIP, LEGISLATURES V-VII

District index	No. of deputies	Cumulative legislative terms	No. of leaders	Subnational cohort		
				No. with experience	Deputies (%)	Leaders (%)
Tier 1	241	639	57	120	50	42
Tier 2	151	371	26	94	62	62
Tier 3	167	364	31	102	61	65
Tier 4	90	205	14	56	62	29
Total	649	1579	128	372		

not indicate any advantage to subnational experience in the placement of leaders with such backgrounds in high priority districts.

Conclusions

This study found little evidence that decentralisation expanded the influence of subnational representatives within the party system or the parliament of democratic Spain. This was true despite the growing cohort of deputies with subnational experience in the Congreso, the ability of subnational party offices to recruit and place candidates on electoral lists, and the increasing importance of regional issues in national elections.

The data are also helpful for understanding the general trends in career trajectories in Spain. Legislative careers in the Congreso are short overall with few notable differences among parties. Why this is the case has much to do with the vacuity of parliamentary life for non-leaders. Yet this study also suggests that while parliamentary careers tend to be short, political careers are not. Politicians with extensive subnational experience do go to the Congreso, but they finish their careers there and only rarely return to subnational office subsequently. The prevalence of topping-off limits the benefits accrued from the circulation of elites from the Congreso to other institutions, including those at the subnational level. When this is considered alongside our finding that subnational experience is a poor predictor of legislative leadership and longevity, it becomes clear that regional representation is weak in the Congreso.

Another outcome of the study that has implications for understanding intergovernmental relations in multi-tiered states with disciplined parties and closed parliamentary processes is that subnational 'representatives' are more likely to stay in the domain of regional and municipal politics. Comparisons of the findings of this study with others on the career trajectories of regional politicians suggest that the national and subnational political classes in Spain may be very different. Where this study shows only a weak cohort of subnational representation in the Congreso, studies of the regional parliaments demonstrate that two-thirds of their composition is made up of politicians with experience and actual responsibilities in local and other regional positions (López Nieto *et al.* 2003; Morata 1992). The other third may be composed of individuals who try a period of public service at relatively low cost and then return to private life (Geser 1999: 6–7). Representation of place thus appears as a more important aspect of the regional parliaments than it does of the national one.

One matter for further research is the issue of the subnational cohort's motivations and actions while in the Congreso. This is a notoriously understudied question in Spain and in comparative perspective (Delgado 2000; Putnam 1973). López Nieto (2000: 21) detected a bifurcation of her respondents into individualistic deputies and party-oriented ones. This is similar to the present finding that there may be a political servant/public

servant distinction in the Spanish political class. Yet she attempts to go further than the present study by asking ‘supply-side’ questions concerning what motivates public servants (Norris 1997b: 224–9). Most relevant to our interests on the effects of decentralisation, one might ask whether members of the subnational cohort behave in the Congreso in ways that identify them with the functions of ‘subnational representatives’, despite their limited influence. As scholars learn more about political careers in the Congreso, motivations will become a more salient focus of study.

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Notes

1. For a useful review of these trends, see Brzinski *et al.* (1999), Keating (1998), Downs (1998) and Van Houten (2003).
2. This assumption is consistent with how parliaments in established democracies have become more diverse due to the growing diversity of the class, gender, and education backgrounds of their parliamentarians (Norris 1997a: 6–7).
3. Following the 1982 general elections, this party eroded and its deputies mostly went to the Alianza Popular, the predecessor of the centre-right PP.
4. The first two legislatures, the Constituent Assembly and the first congress, were also minoritarian. UCD relied on alliances with nationalists and centrists.
5. The term ‘cleavage’ here does not refer to the conventional definition of societal groups forming the basis for mass parties. It refers instead to territorially-defined interests that include political elites and private actors and that are most represented by regional government.
6. The present study finds that leadership experience in the congress and number of terms served are positively correlated (.364, $p < .001$).
7. Research I have conducted and which is presented elsewhere demonstrates that distributional conflicts in the intergovernmental arena between the national government and regional governments explains the timing and degree of decentralisation over time. See Montero (2005).
8. Independent deputies are particularly weak since all unaffiliated representatives are lumped into the *Grupo Mixto* (Mixed Group – GM), a heterogenous group that finds it difficult to act as a single entity, as legislative institutions require any parliamentary group to have influence over the Congreso.
9. One obvious explanation for this is that working for the national party requires physical displacement to Madrid, making subnational public service less viable. This correlation may be weaker for the nationalist parties whose base is in the regional capitals, but it may exist nonetheless for nationalist municipal politicians whose service places them outside the regional capitals.
10. This observation is based on a series of interviews of organisational and general secretaries of the major parties and the nationalist parties, conducted by the author in seven Spanish regions during 2002–03 (see Montero 2005). The regions covered by this study were Andalusia, Asturias, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Madrid and Valencia.
11. This can include asking questions intended to reflect an agenda item of importance in regional politics or a particular perspective on an agenda item. I am now conducting a study

- of questions asked by deputies in the committees of the sixth and seventh legislatures to categorise such interventions, assess their frequency, and determine if career trajectory profiles explain them.
12. The formula and logic for Capo Giol's (2000) listing cannot be explained fully here. Its structure is based on the percentage of the vote swing in a given electoral district for the election of a single deputy by the largest rival to the incumbent's party. The author uses data from the general elections of 1993 and 1996 to compose two lists.
 13. The author gathered this biographical data from the archives of the Congreso and a recent comprehensive 'who's who'-type study of all deputies in the Spanish democratic period (Menéndez *et al.* 2002). Data for each legislature includes all deputies who served, regardless of whether they served complete terms or not. The years of the legislatures are: LC 1977–79; I 1979–82; II 1982–86; III 1986–89; IV 1989–93; V 1993–96; VI 1996–2000; VII 2000–04.
 14. Scholars of political careers most often argue that support for the incompatibility law is based on a pervasive cultural aversion to 'accumulating political offices' (*acumulación de cargos*). See Baena de Alcázar (1999), López Nieto (2000: 15), and Martínez and Méndez (2000: 255). For a history of incompatibility norms and laws in Spain, see García (1994).
 15. I use the term 'chancellor' to refer to the appointed heads of subnational policy secretariats or chancelleries.
 16. The ten point overlap in the numbers is for deputies who held both appointed and elected office.
 17. The average is higher for the last four legislatures (13.3) but notably inconsistent across these sessions (IV 11.9; V 14.5; VI 13.2; VII 13.7).
 18. Concerning the survey data in support of the greater attractiveness of mayoralties and the low turnover in municipal politics in comparison to the national congress, see López Nieto (2000: 14–15).
 19. These individuals are designated by their parties, usually those in the majority, to shape legislation in committee before taking draft law reports to plenary sessions. The *ponente* is the single most important figure on a committee.
 20. Pearson tests confirmed that there was little possibility of multicollinearity among the partisan variables and the legislative longevity and leadership dependent variables. All independent variables in the model had acceptable tolerance values.
 21. This is particularly true of mayors, most of whom enjoy absolute majorities on their respective municipal councils.
 22. In order to test the strength of the national party service variable, we ran a model that excluded legislative experience. National party service predicted parliamentary leadership even more robustly (1.170, $p < .001$) and state office remained insignificant. The goodness of fit, however, was inferior to model 2.

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