

# Between accommodation and secession: Explaining the shifting territorial goals of nationalist parties in the Basque Country and Catalonia

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**ABSTRACT** This article examines the shifting territorial goals of two of the most electorally successful and politically relevant nationalist parties in Spain: the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and Convergència i Unió (CiU). Whilst both parties have often co-operated to challenge the authority of the Spanish state, their territorial goals have varied over time and from party to party. We map these changes and identify key drivers of territorial preferences; these include party ideology, the impact of the financial crisis, the territorial structure of the state, party competition, public opinion, government versus opposition, the impact of multi-level politics and the particularities of party organisation. These factors interact to shape what nationalist parties say and do on core territorial issues, and contribute to their oscillation between territorial accommodation and secession. However, the way in which these factors play out is highly context-specific, and this accounts for the different territorial preferences of the PNV and CiU. These findings advance our understanding of persistent territorial tensions in Spain, and provide broader theoretical insights into the internal and external dynamics that determine the territorial positioning of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties in plurinational states.

**KEYWORDS** Spain; Basque Country; Catalonia; territorial goals; party strategies; nationalism; regional autonomy.

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Article received on 04/10/2016, approved on 17/03/2017.

## Introduction

A defining feature of the stateless nationalist and regionalist party family (SNRPs)<sup>1</sup> is their demand for some kind of self-government for a sub-state territorial community that is considered to be distinct in some way (for example, based on linguistic, cultural or economic considerations).<sup>2</sup> However, the precise nature of these parties' territorial demands has always varied considerably, ranging from the protection of specific rights, to devolution, federalism or independence.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, however, there is evidence of new shifts in these parties' political priorities. On the one hand, an increasing number of SNRPs—for example, in places such as South Tyrol, Veneto, Wales and Galicia—have come to see independence as the only way to guarantee a sub-state territorial community's control over its own affairs. Many of these parties have sought to advance this agenda by holding (often unofficial) independence referendums, although not all have been successful in doing so. On the other hand, some SNRPs—such as the Flemish Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA)—have pursued more pragmatic territorial strategies, whereby ambitions to radically overhaul the territorial organisation of the state have been put aside in order to focus on other more pressing policy challenges (such as socio-economic issues) facing the territory in question.

As a first step towards explaining these more recent shifts in SNRPs' territorial goals, this article examines and compares the evolving territorial projects of the largest nationalist parties in the Basque Country and Catalonia respectively, namely the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and *Convergència i Unió* (CiU). These cases exemplify the shifting territorial positions outlined

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This article is a result of a broader research project carried out thanks to the support provided by the University of the Basque Country (GIU 14/30), the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (HAR2015-64920-P) and the European Regional Development Fund. The research undertaken by Anwen Elias for this article was funded by the Nuffield Foundation (ref: NCF/36360).

1. As Hepburn, "Introduction", 481, notes, a huge variety of labels has been used to define this group of parties. The terminology of 'stateless nationalist and regionalist parties' allows inclusion of parties that emphasize a more regionalist orientation, as well as those that define themselves as nationalists and claim to represent a specific national community. We use the term 'nationalist' to refer specifically to the Basque and Catalan parties examined here given that they fall into the latter category.
2. See De Winter, "Conclusion", 190.
3. Ibid, 191-93; Hepburn, "Introduction", 484; Massetti, "Explaining".

above. In recent years, CiU has moved from a moderate stance focused on accommodating Catalan distinctiveness within Spain to demanding Catalan independence; in contrast, the PNV's long-standing ideological commitment to Basque independence has been played down to focus on implementing and broadening existing autonomy provisions and tackling the Basque Country's economic problems.<sup>4</sup> Existing work that has examined SNRPs' territorial goals and strategies provides the basis for developing hypotheses about the key drivers of these parties' shifting objectives. These are then tested in an empirical analysis that draws on party documentation (e.g. manifestos, speeches), public opinion data and secondary academic sources. We argue that whilst both parties share similar interests (enlargement of self-government) and face common challenges (the evolution of Spain's decentralisation settlement, the financial crisis), a combination of external (territorial structure of the state, dynamics of party competition and multi-level politics, government vs. opposition, public opinion) and internal (party ideology and organization) factors have influenced territorial goals in different ways, and to different extents, in each case. The findings provide new insights into the complex ways in which SNRPs' territorial goals are subject to a common set of external and internal pressures, which play out in party—and context-specific ways.

These findings also constitute an important contribution to our understanding of territorial politics in Spain. Tensions over the territorial organization of political authority have been present within the Spanish state since its creation at the end of the 15th Century, as a result of the failure of successive attempts at nation-building to integrate distinctive political, social and cultural communities within the state's territory.<sup>5</sup> From the nineteenth century onwards, managing this territorial dilemma became more difficult due to the emergence of strong Basque and Catalan nationalist movements. The 'state of autonomies' model of territorial relations outlined in the 1978 Spanish constitution was considered by many scholars to have been relatively successful in containing Basque and Catalan demands for greater self-determination until the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Since then, however, the territorial organization

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4. See Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia"; Requejo and Sanjaume, "Recognition and political accommodation"; Martínez Riera and Zubiaga, "Nation and State Building".

5. See Linz, "Early state-building"; Mees, "Rückständiges Zentrum, modern Peripherie".

6. See, for example, Gunther et al., *Democracy*, 7.

of the state has been challenged anew by nationalist actors in these two autonomous communities, most recently in the form of Catalan demands for independence from Spain.<sup>7</sup>

However, in spite of their key role in contemporary Spanish politics, there has been surprisingly little comparative study of Basque and Catalan nationalist movements. With two recent exceptions<sup>8</sup>, there has been little direct comparison of these two cases, and the limited literature that exists was mostly published over two decades ago.<sup>9</sup> The analytical and methodological scope of these studies also varies considerably, with different emphases on the sociological, cultural and political contexts of nationalist mobilisation in both places. More recent work has made a strong argument for the need to compare these two cases in order to understand the re-emergence of territorial tensions in Spain in recent years.<sup>10</sup> This article takes up this challenge by identifying the key factors that have led two parties that at times have considered themselves to be allies in the struggle against the Spanish state, to espouse divergent ambitions for territorial re-configuration.

The article begins by drawing on scholarly studies of the SNRP phenomenon to formulate a set of hypotheses about the expected political, economic and intra-party determinants of these actors' territorial goals. These are then tested empirically through detailed case studies of the PNV and CiU from their establishment until the Basque regional elections of 25 September 2016. The article then proceeds to evaluate the explanatory capacity of the hypotheses, and identifies a set of common factors that, to different extents and in different ways, have shaped parties' territorial goals and strategies. The article concludes by considering the significance of the findings for understanding the on-going territorial tensions in contemporary Spanish politics, and SNRPs' strategies in pursuit of territorial re-configuration in plurinational states more broadly.

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7. See Nagel, "Catalonia's struggle for self-determination".

8. Field, and Hamann, "Framing Legislative"; Gillespie, "Contrasting Fortunes".

9. For example, Conversi, *Basques, Catalans and Spain*; Díez Medrano, *Divided Nations*; Ross, "Nationalism and party competition"; Guibernau, "Spain".

10. Gillespie, and Gray, *Contesting Spain?*

## Explaining Stateless Nationalist and Regionalist Parties' Positioning on Territorial Issues

Whilst SNRPs have become a permanent feature of the political landscape in most West European democracies,<sup>11</sup> in many places they have also become influential political players that have influenced the dynamics of party competition, government formation and policy-making.<sup>12</sup> Whilst early studies of this party family focused on the cultural, economic and political conditions in which SNRPs emerged, subsequent scholarly effort has emphasised the political and (to a lesser extent) economic factors which have shaped the subsequent development of these parties. This work, and the broader literature on political parties on which it often draws, provides the starting point for formulating hypotheses about key factors expected to shape SNRPs' shifting territorial goals over time.

As noted in the Introduction, SNRPs have in common their shared demand for a reform of the territorial structure of the state in which they operate, in order to provide some kind of self-government for a distinctive territorial community. The exact territorial demands made by SNRPs reflect the particular centre-periphery conditions within which they have emerged, and this specific context furnishes them with a fundamental and enduring set of ideas about how the state should be re-organised.<sup>13</sup> Whilst SNRPs rarely confine themselves to territorial issues,<sup>14</sup> these core values serve as a touchstone of identification for party elites, members and voters. Venturing beyond them risks being seen as a betrayal of a party's fundamental identity.<sup>15</sup> A party's core territorial ideology is thus expected to constrain the range of options for territorial re-structuring that an SNRP can credibly hold.

SNRPs' rootedness in the centre-periphery cleavage also constitutes a prism through which these parties interpret and respond to new policy challenges.<sup>16</sup> One recent such challenge is the financial and economic crisis, which has seen

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11. Hepburn, "Introduction", 477.

12. Elias, and Tronconi, *From Protest to Power*, and "From protest".

13. Elias, *Minority Nationalist Parties*, 148-150; Massetti, "Explaining".

14. Elias, et al., "Position".

15. Alonso, *Challenging the State*, 24.

16. Elias, *Minority Nationalist Parties*, 29.

the European economy experience its deepest recession since the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> To date, scholars of territorial politics have not examined the implications of this crisis for SNRPs and their territorial projects in any detail. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that historical disparities in economic development between peripheral territories and the centre, and opposition to the central government's model of economic management, was a key driver of SNRP mobilisation in many plurinational states.<sup>18</sup> Such disparities have often led SNRPs in relatively rich regions to denounce the transfer of regional resources to poorer regions via state re-distribution policies, whilst those in poorer regions have tended to criticise the state for failing to create the conditions for regional economic development.<sup>19</sup> SNRPs which perceive that the recent financial crisis has had a negative impact on their territory's economic status can thus be expected to give renewed emphasis to long-standing economic grievances, and make new demands for self-government on the grounds that this would empower the territory to propose a different path to economic recovery.

However, whilst party ideology may provide the broad parameters for SNRPs' territorial projects and goals, there is also substantial evidence that other shorter-term influences arising from the domestic political context within which these parties operate may also shape what territorial goal a party chooses to pursue. Crucially, "these may push and pull parties in a different direction... and may not necessarily fit in with the basic ideological preferences of a party".<sup>20</sup> One such consideration is the extent to which SNRPs can claim exclusive ownership of the territorial dimension in party competition. For example, state-wide parties<sup>21</sup> have shown themselves to be highly adept at developing their own territorial profiles in an attempt to undermine the appeal of SNRPs.<sup>22</sup> There may also be competition from more than one regionalist party on the territorial issue dimension.<sup>23</sup> In both cas-

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17. European Commission, *Economic Crisis*.

18. Massetti, "Explaining".

19. Massetti, and Schakel, "From Class", 873.

20. Elias, *Minority Nationalist Parties*, 34.

21. Following Detterbeck, *Multi-level Party Politics*, 53, we define state-wide parties according to their territorial coverage; they are parties that are present organisationally and participate in elections in all, or nearly all, parts of the state's territory.

22. Mazzoleni, "Saliency of Regionalization"; Alonso, *Challenging the State*.

23. Massetti, "Explaining", 515.

es, the dynamics of party competition may result in a SNRP coming under pressure to shift its own territorial goals in order to distinguish itself more clearly from its rivals.

Whether such a pressure results in a moderation or radicalisation of the party's territorial ambitions, is expected to depend on several other contextual factors. Firstly, public opinion towards different models of territorial re-organisation is expected to constrain the territorial options considered by SNRPs. Whilst it has long been recognised that political parties play a role in shaping voter preferences<sup>24</sup>, it is also the case that "parties seeking votes do not buck majority opinion"<sup>25</sup> since doing so risks making them appear out of touch and irrelevant. We focus on the latter role of public opinion in this article, and expect SNRPs to think twice about adopting territorial positions that have little public support. Secondly, whether or not an SNRP aspires to enter government is also expected to have a bearing on the territorial goals it chooses to pursue. There is substantial evidence that office-seeking SNRPs have moderated their territorial goals in order to broaden both their electoral and coalition appeal<sup>26</sup>, whilst those that prefer to remain as opposition parties are in principle freer to espouse more radical options for territorial re-structuring.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, SNRPs' territorial demands are expected to be informed by opportunity structures derived from the territorial structure of the state within which these parties operate. In other words, decentralisation, and the creation and empowerment of a regional tier of government, is expected to incentivise SNRPs to shift their territorial preferences.<sup>28</sup> This is because of the new opportunity structures opened up to SNRPs as a result of the creation of a new regional political space. For example, these parties have been shown to benefit electorally from voters' preference for political parties with a strong regional profile in regional elections.<sup>29</sup> As a result, SNRPs have often become important electoral players in regional party

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24. For example, see Bartolini, "Electoral and party competition", 97.

25. Budge, "Theory and measurement", 81.

26. Elias, "From marginality"; Elias, and Tronconi, *From Protest to Power*, 351-356.

27. Massetti, "Explaining", 515.

28. Toubeau, "Regionalist nationalist parties", 429-30.

29. Jeffery, and Hough, "Regional elections".

systems, and this makes entering regional government a far more realistic prospect.<sup>30</sup> State-wide parties faced with strong SNRPs in regional settings are also much more likely to enhance their own territorial profiles as suggested above.<sup>31</sup> Decentralisation is thus expected to increase the impact of factors such as dynamics of party competition and government incumbency on SNRPs' territorial goals.

Decentralisation may also, however, create new opportunities and constraints for SNRPs as a result of the multi-level nature of party systems in plurinational states, and the new vertical links between different levels of government that often emerge.<sup>32</sup> SNRPs often operate in regional and state-level party systems simultaneously.<sup>33</sup> Legislative and/or coalition agreements with state-wide parties may allow SNRPs to secure new concessions on self-government. But co-operating with parties with very different territorial priorities may also result in a pressure on SNRPs to shift or downplay their own territorial ambitions.

How are SNRPs expected to manage the tension between remaining true to core territorial values, and incentives emanating from their operating environment to shift their territorial position in a different direction? In their study of the party politics of territorial reforms in Europe, Toubreau and Massetti<sup>34</sup> argue that power relations within political parties are a crucial determinant of "how structure and ideology determine the strategy that is adopted". This is because political parties are rarely homogenous actors, but are composed of different coalitions of actors with different priorities; the balance of power between these competing power bases influences the strategic direction a political party takes.<sup>35</sup> How SNRPs choose to respond to competing pressures on their territorial positioning will thus be conditioned by internal power relations, and which interests prevail in the process of selecting a territorial strategy to pursue.

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30. Elias, and Tronconi, "From Protest".

31. Alonso, *Challenging the State*.

32. Massetti, "Explaining", 512.

33. Elias, and Tronconi, *From Protest to Power*, 4.

34. Toubreau, and Massetti, "Party Politics", 307.

35. Katz, and Mair, "Evolution of Party Politics"; Kitschelt, *Transformation*.



## Mapping the Shifting Territorial Goals of the PNV and CiU

### The Origins and Evolution of the PNV and CiU

The PNV was established in 1895, and from the outset advocated the secession of the Basque territories from Spain and France and their re-constitution as an independent confederation.<sup>36</sup> In subsequent years, this stance was moderated to demand a statute of autonomy for the Basque Country, a goal that was achieved in 1936 under Spain's Second Republic.<sup>37</sup> However, secessionist goals were never formally abandoned and the demand for restoration of the *fueros* (medieval institutions for self-government that had been abolished in the nineteenth century) was sufficiently ambiguous to accommodate both territorial positions.<sup>38</sup>

The PNV's dual territorial position remained unchanged during the period of the Franco dictatorship. However, a split from the party in 1959, and the creation of the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) as a secessionist movement committed to using political violence to achieve this goal<sup>39</sup>, constituted a new pressure on the PNV's territorial strategy from the 1960s onwards. For example, in discussions on the design of Spain's new democratic institutions after Franco's death in 1975, and in a context of ETA's escalating political violence, the PNV argued that the only solution to the ETA problem was far-reaching self-government through "recovering the sovereignty contained in the system of the *fueros*".<sup>40</sup> In practice, however, this long-standing ideological goal was complemented by a more moderate discourse that supported Basque autonomy as a first step towards future sovereignty.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, CiU was established in 1978 as an alliance between two key actors in growing Catalan opposition to the Franco dictatorship during the

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36. Pablo, and Mees, *Péndulo patriótico*, 1-26.

37. Granja, *Nacionalismo y II República*.

38. Pablo, and Mees, *Péndulo patriótico*, 27-210; Mees, *Nationalism, Violence*, 9-20.

39. Elorza, et al., *Historia*.

40. Pablo, et al., *Documentos*, 151.

41. Pérez Nievas, "Modelo de Partido".

1960s and 1970s, namely *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC).<sup>42</sup> CiU's territorial goal was that of securing autonomy for Catalonia within Spain, and this was pursued via a strategy of negotiation with the central state. This "Spanish vocation of Catalan nationalism"<sup>43</sup> had already been in evidence in previous years, with CDC's Miquel Roca acting as the mouthpiece of Catalan and Basque nationalism in the process of configuring the new Spanish state (although the PNV also sought to exercise direct influence through bilateral meetings with the Spanish President, Adolfo Suárez).<sup>44</sup>

This formal cooperation between CDC and PNV continued a tradition of collaboration between Basque and Catalan nationalism against a common adversary, the Spanish state, that can be traced back to the 1920s. However, this solidarity had always been, and would continue to be, little more than a symbolic gesture. Differences in ideological principles and strategic priorities limited the scope of political co-operation, and led the PNV and CDC (subsequently CiU) to pursue different pathways to securing autonomy during the transition period. This divergence was evident in the referendum on the Spanish Constitution held in December 1978: whilst CiU voted in favour of a document that it had helped to draft, the PNV advocated abstention in an attempt to balance the party's historical opposition to any kind of Spanish Constitution with the pragmatic recognition of the legal framework for achieving Basque autonomy on offer.

## 1980 to Mid-1990s: The Consolidation of Spain's 'State of Autonomies'

From 1980 to the mid-1990s, CiU displayed remarkable strategic stability in pursuit of its territorial goal of accommodating Catalan distinctiveness within the Spanish state. This goal was summarised by Jordi Pujol, the alliance's leader during this period, in the following terms: "what we want is a statute of self-government... with a broad scope for making our own political

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42. Barberà, *Alianzas Políticas*.

43. Barrio, "Organización", 320.

44. Ibid.

decisions... rather than administrative decentralization which is controlled and continuously eroded".<sup>45</sup>

CiU's autonomist strategy can be attributed largely to its electoral and political hegemony within the Catalan political space during the 1980s and 1990s. Patterns of dual voting (where voters favour parties with strong territorial credentials in regional elections) and differential abstention (whereby voters of the largest state-wide party, the PSC, were more likely to abstain in regional elections) allowed the party to dominate the regional political space during this period.<sup>46</sup> CiU also reaped electoral benefit from rival parties' poor credibility as defenders of Catalonia's interests. On the one hand, CiU's main nationalist rival, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), struggled to define a distinctive ideological profile and had limited electoral appeal as a result.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC) suffered from being associated with the attempts of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in central government to centralise political authority in the mid-1980s.<sup>48</sup>

Taken together, these electoral and party competition dynamics in Catalonia enabled CiU to occupy regional government between 1980 and 2003. From this position, the party had the resources and opportunities to implement and advance Catalan self-government within the framework of the Spanish state, and as part of a nation-building process.<sup>49</sup> These achievements underpinned growing popular support for self-government during this period, with 70.6% declaring themselves to be satisfied with the operation of Catalan autonomy in 1992.<sup>50</sup>

Further advances in enhancing self-government were made in the mid-1990s when state-wide parties lacked governing majorities in central government (PSOE from 1993-1996; Partido Popular [PP] from 1996-2000), and CiU's legislative support in the Spanish parliament allowed it to extract further concessions on decentralisation. That such concessions on de-centralisation could be

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45. Pujol, *Pensament polític*, 25.

46. Riba, "Voto dual".

47. Culla, *Esquerra*.

48. Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism*, 80.

49. Lo Cascio, *Nacionalisme i autogovern*.

50. ICPS, *Sondeig 1992*.

achieved reflected the broader constitutional context within which territorial dynamics took place. Whilst the ‘state of autonomies’ model for managing territorial relations within Spain set out in the 1978 Spanish Constitution foresaw the decentralisation of political authority to Spain’s seventeen autonomous communities, questions about what and when competencies should be transferred were left to bilateral negotiations between regional and central governments.<sup>51</sup> This provided a strong structural incentive for CiU to focus on the implementation and consolidation of Catalan autonomy during this period.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the stability of CiU’s territorial approach was also ensured by the lack of internal contestation of the alliance’s strategic direction by its component parties. CDC and UDC’s shared Catalanist vocation provided sufficient common ground for agreeing on a single territorial strategy, whilst other ideological differences between them (CDC’s social democracy in contrast to UDC’s Catholic values)<sup>53</sup> were deliberately played down in order to take full advantage of the political opportunities to implement Catalan autonomy.<sup>54</sup> The centralisation of decision-making in the hands of the leaderships of CDC and UDC also served to deal with any intra-party tensions, whilst the charismatic personality and popularity of Jordi Pujol allowed him to transcend inter-party disputes and exercise strong strategic leadership at the helm of the Catalan government.<sup>55</sup>

In the PNV’s case, its territorial strategy during the transition period appealed to a wide spectrum of voters, and this contributed to it emerging as the Basque Country’s primary political force (with 38.1% of votes) in the first autonomous elections held in 1980.<sup>56</sup> In this and subsequent regional elections, patterns of dual voting and differential abstention also bolstered the party’s regional electoral performance, albeit to a lesser extent than in Catalonia due to voters’ strong party identification, and therefore electoral loyalty.<sup>57</sup> The party was also aided by the weak Basque profile of state-wide parties contesting regional elections, whilst ETA’s strategy of political vio-

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51. Aja, *Estado autonómico*, 56-61.

52. Pujol, *Tiempo de construir*.

53. See Barberà, *Alianzas políticas*, 34-5.

54. Elias, “Catalan Independence” 85.

55. Barrio, and Barberà, “Convergència”, 85.

56. Pérez Nievas, “Partido Nacionalista Vasco”, 103; Mees, “Nacionalismo vasco”.

57. Pallarés, and Keating, “Multi-level Electoral Competition”; Llera, *Vascos y política*.

lence limited the electoral appeal of its political wing, Herri Batasuna (HB). The PNV entered Basque government in 1980, an office it retained until 2009. Just as for CiU, the broader constitutional framework provided a strong incentive from this point until the mid-1990s to implement the provisions of the Basque Statute of Autonomy approved by referendum in October 1979, although once again secessionist goals were never formally denounced. For example, in 1995 the party's President, Xabier Arzalluz, declared that 'a nation like the Basque one will never accept or recognize any sovereignty other than that of its own people'.<sup>58</sup>

However, internal tensions over who and what territorial level had the authority to determine party strategy, led to a split from the PNV in 1986.<sup>59</sup> Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), established as a social democratic and secessionist party, drew substantial support away from the PNV in the 1986 autonomous election, forcing the latter to seek new alliances in order to retain government office. The result was a period of coalition government between the PNV and the state-wide Partido Socialista de Euskadi (PSE)<sup>60</sup> between 1987 and 1998.<sup>61</sup> In spite of periodic disagreements over the extent of autonomy that should be pursued, the coalition continued with the work of implementing the Basque Statute of Autonomy and served to consolidate the PNV's moderate and pragmatic territorial strategy. This successful experience of regional cooperation also paved the way for the PNV to support the minority PSOE government in Madrid between 1993 and 1996, which resulted in additional transfers of competencies to the Basque regional institutions. As with CiU, this support was also extended to the PP in 1996-2000.

There were two other factors that contributed to the stability of the PNV's territorial politics during this period. Firstly, it was consistent with the party's strategy in relation to ETA, whose political violence escalated further during this period.<sup>62</sup> This trend, combined with the attacks of extremist right-wing groups and state-led reprisals, made the fight against terrorism a

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58. *El País*, "Arzalluz reivindica".

59. Pérez Nieves, "Partido Nacionalista Vasco", 115.

60. In 1993, the PSE merged with the left-wing Euskadiko Ezkerra to form the Partido Socialista de Euskadi-Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE).

61. This became a three-party government in 1994 when EA joined the coalition.

62. Mees, "Versión y gestión", and "Nationalist politics".

priority issue for the PNV in regional government. In particular, the PNV was under constant pressure from state-wide parties to distance itself from the radical political goals and strategy espoused by ETA. It sought to do so by establishing a common democratic front against the paramilitaries, and this was a key element of the coalition agreement reached with the Basque Socialists in 1987. The resulting Pact of Ajuria Enea (1988) committed all Basque political parties (with the exception of HB) to finding a negotiated solution to ending political violence. This approach enabled the PNV to be seen to lead the fight against terrorism in a context where electoral support for ETA's political fronts was declining; and it served to fend off rival parties' criticism of the PNV for sharing ETA's ultimate secessionist goal.

Secondly, strategic stability was also arguably a product of the PNV's distinctive internal organisational structures, which were crucial in managing the enduring ideological duality within the party between secessionist and autonomist positions. This duality had been reproduced over time through a network of cultural, educational, media, sporting and social organisations indirectly linked to the PNV and which resulted in strong loyalty to the party.<sup>63</sup> That the PNV's moderate territorial strategy in Basque government was not challenged by more radical sectors can be attributed to the long-standing and strict division of power between public and party office holders within the party.<sup>64</sup> Whilst the PNV in regional government focused on implementing Basque autonomy, leaders of the voluntary party were freer to talk of longer term aspirations for Basque sovereignty. This organisational model thus enabled the PNV to respond to, and satisfy, the competing territorial preferences of its membership.

## **From the Mid-1990s to 2016: Between Territorial Accommodation and Secession**

From the mid-1990s onwards, the territorial goals and strategies of both the PNV and CiU shifted. By 2003, the PNV was advocating the "free association" of the Basque Country with Spain.<sup>65</sup> What became known as the "Plan

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63. Pablo, and Mees, *Péndulo patriótico*, 136-140.

64. Pérez Nievas, "Partido Nacionalista Vasco", 112.

65. Gobierno Vasco, *Propuesta de Estatuto*.

Ibarretxe”, after the PNV leader of the regional government, Juan José Ibarretxe, was conceived as a “third way’ proposal stopping short of secession and retaining the Spanish state framework for a number of crucial issues”.<sup>66</sup> By the end of the decade, however, the PNV had shifted back to a more moderate position that insisted on the need to negotiate the implementation and updating of the 1979 Basque Statute of Autonomy.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, the party shifted its focus onto economic issues; self-government, when discussed, was propounded as the most effective tool in the fight against the recession and the protection of the welfare state.<sup>68</sup> In CiU’s case, historic support for territorial accommodation gave way to increasingly radical territorial goals: reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy in 2003<sup>69</sup>, a demand for “fiscal sovereignty” along the lines of the Basque *concierto económico*<sup>70</sup> by the end of that decade<sup>71</sup>, and by 2012 a commitment to creating “our own state”.<sup>72</sup> Subsequent efforts to establish a separate Catalan state—an endeavour that led to alignments with other pro-independence parties from 2012 onwards—fuelled internal divisions over CiU’s ultimate goal and how it should achieve it, culminating in the organisation’s definitive break-up in June 2015. Subsequently, whilst CDC<sup>73</sup> has committed itself to pushing forward with the process of separating Catalonia from Spain, UDC’s leadership has defended the more ambiguous goal of full sovereignty to be achieved through negotiation and compromise with the Spanish state.<sup>74</sup>

The evolution of the “state of autonomies” model provided the broader structural context within which both parties began to re-think their territorial ambitions. As argued above, CiU and PNV had been generally effective until the mid-1990s in negotiating bilaterally with the state in order to implement and expand regional autonomy provisions. However, these parties were also

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66. Keating, and Bray, *Renegotiating Sovereignty*, 354.

67. Partido Nacionalista Vasco, *Compromiso Euskadi*, 255-261.

68. Ibid.

69. CiU, *Tu ets primer*, 101.

70. The *concierto económico* is a legal instrument that regulates the financial relations between the Spanish state and the Basque territories. Established in 1878, it provides the Basque regional government with a high-degree of tax autonomy.

71. CiU, *Eleccions nacionals*, 82.

72. CiU, *Programa electoral 2012*, 15.

73. In July 2016, CDC was refounded as the Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català.

74. *La Vanguardia*, “CDC I UDC”.



frustrated by state-wide parties' efforts to modify the distribution of power between the state and the autonomous communities. For example, periodic pacts between the PSOE and PP introduced greater symmetry into Spain's territorial model by the mid-1990s, and removed any distinction between Spain's 'historic nationalities' (Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia) and other autonomous communities.<sup>75</sup> This prompted co-ordinated action between CiU, the PNV and the Galician Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) to demand a new territorial model that ensured legal and political recognition of the "national realities of the Spanish state".<sup>76</sup> More recently, and in response to the perception that the PP-led central government was re-centralizing a range of regional competencies under the guise of managing the effects of the 2008 financial crisis<sup>77</sup>, the CiU and the PNV announced their shared desire for "another state model".<sup>78</sup> On both occasions, however, these declarations were little more than symbolic gestures. Shared frustration with new developments in the operation of Spain's territorial model did not lead to any convergence between, or co-operation to achieve, these parties' territorial ambitions. Instead, other factors led the PNV and CiU to shift their territorial goals in different directions, and these reflected the different political and economic contexts within which the parties operated from the mid-1990s onwards.

In the PNV's case, territorial radicalisation was first and foremost a strategic response to changes in the Basque political context in this period. The failure of previous efforts to bring an end to political violence, an increase in the frequency and scope of ETA's armed struggle during the 1990s, and growing popular support for a tougher anti-terrorist policy, placed pressure on the PNV to pursue a different strategy vis-à-vis radical Basque nationalism. The party thus began negotiations with the paramilitaries, resulting in the creation of a new nationalist alliance to advance the struggle for Basque self-government. The result was the Pacto de Lizarra with other nationalist and left-wing organisations (including HB) in 1998 which called for political negotiations to achieve the unity and sovereignty of the Spanish and

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75. Aja, *Estado autonómico*, 56-61.

76. Declaration of Barcelona 1998, quoted in Guibernau, "Spain", 63.

77. See Muro, "When do countries recentralize?"

78. *La Vanguardia*, "PNV y CiU".



French Basque territories, and a ceasefire by ETA.<sup>79</sup> The PNV's new alliance with radical nationalists led the Basque Socialists to withdraw from regional government in 1998, and after new elections, the PNV secured the legislative support of Euskal Herritarrok (EH), a party close to ETA, for its minority government. This collaboration proved short-lived however: ETA broke the ceasefire in November 1999 and new elections took place in 2001. On this occasion, the PNV (in coalition with EA) won its highest ever level of support in Basque elections—42.7% of the vote—with new support from those opposed to ETA's actions and from others who objected to the aggressive criticism of the PNV by state-wide parties and the Spanish media for having negotiated with terrorists.<sup>80</sup> The PNV (in regional government this time with EA and Ezker Batua (EB), the Basque branch of the state-wide Izquierda Unida) launched the Ibarretxe Plan in the context of these shifting political alliances in the Basque Country.

However, Ibarretxe's sovereigntist discourse led to a deep crisis within the PNV, with moderate sectors opposed to the radicalisation of territorial goals and political alliances. In particular, critics perceived his strategy to have violated the historic balance of power within the party by marginalising the leadership of the voluntary party and leaving little scope for reconciling competing territorial preferences within the PNV. Ibarretxe's territorial radicalisation is also widely held to have lost the PNV votes (from 42.7% of votes cast in 2001 to 38.7%) and four seats in the 2005 Basque elections.<sup>81</sup> The more recent shift away from this territorial position has been driven by more moderate leaders of the PNV party organisation committed to restoring the internal balance of power between the voluntary party and the PNV in public office. Their efforts were facilitated by the defeat of the Plan Ibarretxe in the Spanish parliament in February 2005, and the party's exit from Basque government in 2009 as a result of its failure to form a new coalition government. These developments happened in a context of limited popular support for Basque independence—which at the peak of the PNV's electoral success in 2001 remained static at 21%—and at a time when unemployment

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79. Mees, *Nationalism, Violence*, 101-142.

80. Mees, "Nationalist politics".

81. For example, the day after the election an editorial in the Spanish newspaper *El País* argued that "now Ibarretxe knows that radicalization loses you votes" (*El País*, "Los vascos").

and terrorism were the most important issues in voters' eyes.<sup>82</sup> The Plan Ibarretxe, therefore, was an elite-driven project that (unlike in CiU's case—see below) did not respond to strong grass-roots mobilisation in support of radical constitutional change.

The PNV's exit from regional government reinforced internal support for a more moderate territorial discourse, as part of a strategy to re-establish its dominance of the political centre ground in Basque politics. At the same time, a shift of focus onto economic issues was also caused by a deteriorating economic context. The structure of the Basque economy and the higher level of fiscal resources derived from the operation of the *concierto económico* meant that the financial crisis was less severe than in other parts of Spain (such as Catalonia—see below).<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, unemployment increased from 5.8% in 2008 to 16.6% in 2012, whilst GDP per capita fell from € 31,243 in 2008 to € 29,233.<sup>84</sup> The PNV's re-focused territorial strategy contributed to the party PNV re-entering regional government in 2012<sup>85</sup>, a position it strengthened and extended in local and regional elections in 2015 and 2016.<sup>86</sup> This period of electoral ascendancy provides little incentive to shift away from a territorial goal that (as in earlier years) is deliberately ambiguous, with the possible options including further autonomy, a federal or confederal state, or a bilateral relation with the state through an updating of the “historical rights” granted by the Spanish Constitution.<sup>87</sup>

The decline of ETA, which ended its armed struggle in 2011, facilitated the PNV's strategic re-framing of its territorial politics. It has also paved the way for entry into party competition of new parties and coalitions with previous links to ETA, and their secessionist demands have increased as their Catalan counterparts have sought to move forward with the process of Catalan

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82. *Sociómetro Vasco* 17, 58, 65.

83. BBVA, *Situación*; Zubiri, “Análisis del sistema foral”.

84. Instituto Nacional de Estadística, “CRE. PIB per cápita”.

85. Gómez, and Cabeza, “Basque Regional Elections 2012”.

86. In 2015 the PNV secured governing majorities (with legislative support from the PSE-EE) in provincial governments, as well as the capital cities, of all three Basque provinces and of the regional government of Navarra. In the elections to the Basque Parliament in September 2016, the party increased its vote share from 34.61% in 2012 to 37.66%, and its number of seats from 27 to 29.

87. Mees, “Nationalist politics”, 55.

independence (see below). However, the Ibarretxe experience demonstrated that there was little support in the Basque Country for such radical constitutional options, and this has not changed in subsequent years. Support for independence rose to 30% in 2014, but dropped back to 23% in 2016.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, recent political discussion around the need to reform the 1978 Spanish Constitution has led some state-wide parties to argue for the elimination of key references to the historical foundations of Basque self-government (such as the ‘historical rights’ of the Basque nation and the *concierto económico*).<sup>89</sup> The risk of losing these key territorial provisions is a further incentive for the PNV to desist from pushing for full Basque sovereignty. These considerations have led the party to distance itself repeatedly from the secessionist process in Catalonia.<sup>90</sup>

In CiU’s case, the shift in territorial goals—from territorial accommodation to asserting Catalan sovereignty—must be understood in the context of the party’s declining electoral performance since the mid-1990s. This was a consequence of allegations of corruption in public office, internal tensions over Pujol’s succession as party leader, and unpopular legislative alliances with the PP in the Spanish and Catalan parliaments in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>91</sup> The latter in particular saw CiU agree not to propose the reform of Catalonia’s Statute of Autonomy, in spite of the party’s frustration with the implementation of these provisions (see above). Crucially, this was at a time of important shifts in public opinion on Catalonia’s governance arrangements: between 1992 and 2003, support for Catalonia to have more autonomy within a federal Spanish state increased from 17.1% to 27.2% (although support for Catalan independence remained steady at 18.4%).<sup>92</sup>

In contrast, rival parties in the Catalan political space sought to re-position themselves strategically to push for the further empowerment of the Catalan

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88. Sociómetro Vasco, *Sociómetro Vasco* 61.

89. For example, the new party Ciudadanos has demanded the elimination of the Basque *concierto económico* (Ciudadanos, *Nuevo proyecto*), whilst the PP’s President of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, Cristina Cifuentes, publically rejected the *concierto* as “discriminatory, unequal and unjust” (*El Correo*, “Presidenta de Madrid”).

90. See for example Iñigo Urkullu, President of the Basque Government, quoted in *El País*, “Urkullu se aleja”.

91. Barrio, and Barberà, “Convergència”; Elias, “Catalan Independence”.

92. ICPS, *Sondeig 1992* and *Sondeig 2003*.

regional institutions. On the one hand, with the PSOE out of central government since 1996, the PSC re-branded itself as a Catalanist party committed to increasing Catalan self-government;<sup>93</sup> on the other hand, ERC adopted a pragmatic strategy that accepted gradual increases in self-government as a step towards the ultimate goal of Catalan independence.<sup>94</sup> By the early 2000s, these two parties had found common ground on the issue of reforming Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy and this—along with the prospect of a progressive left-wing alternative to CiU in regional government—created sufficient electoral support to allow the PSC and ERC (along with Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds) to enter Catalan government in 2003. CiU's initial shift to support reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy in 2003 was thus largely a reactive strategic response to other parties' demands for enhanced autonomy in a broader context in which frustration with Catalonia's existing autonomy settlement was growing.

From a position of opposition in the Catalan parliament between 2003 and 2010, CiU's priority was to regain electoral support and public office.<sup>95</sup> Further territorial radicalisation from this point onwards can be attributed in part to a process of organisational renewal led by CDC; it brought a new generation of pro-sovereignty activists into the party who were dissatisfied with CiU's historical strategy of advancing Catalan autonomy incrementally through bilateral negotiations with the central state.<sup>96</sup> This view became more widespread within CDC (as well as sections of UDC) from 2010 onwards, when the Spanish Constitutional Court annulled large parts of the revised Catalan Statute of Autonomy that had been approved by referendum in June 2006. The decision prompted large-scale and sustained mass mobilisation in favour of Catalan independence,<sup>97</sup> underpinned by broader shifts in public opinion on how Catalonia should be governed: in contrast to the stability of support for independence in the Basque case, in Catalonia this grew from 13.6% in June 2005, to 25.2% in November 2010.<sup>98</sup>

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93. Vallès, *Agenda imperfecta*.

94. Culla, *Esquerra*.

95. Elias, "Catalan Independence".

96. Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia".

97. Cramerí, "Political power".

98. Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, *Suport a la independència*.

CiU's shift to demand fiscal sovereignty for Catalonia was thus a response to internal and external pressures for a more radical conceptualisation of Catalonia's relationship with Spain. It was also a response to the effects of the financial crisis. One of the worst fiscal deficits of all Spain's autonomous communities<sup>99</sup> and rising unemployment (from 7.5% in 2008 to 23.8% in 2012) brought into focus Catalonia's position as a net contributor to Spain's common financing regime which re-distributes wealth from richer to poorer regions.<sup>100</sup> CiU blamed unpopular cuts to welfare policies on central government austerity policies, and argued that greater fiscal autonomy was the only way of providing Catalonia with the financial resources necessary to achieve economic recovery.<sup>101</sup> However, the PP in central government blocked attempts to negotiate a further increase in fiscal competencies, as well as CiU's subsequent efforts to hold a referendum on Catalan independence. Such opposition fuelled growing support for Catalan independence, which reached a peak of 48.9% in 2014,<sup>102</sup> and provided the context for a further shift in position, to assert the Catalan people's "right to decide" on their political future. Such a shift, however, undermined CiU's long-standing reputation as a moderate political party committed to the territorial accommodation of Catalan distinctiveness within Spain.<sup>103</sup> This, the superior independentist credibility of other parties (especially ERC) and CiU's controversial austerity policies, contributed to electoral losses in 2012.<sup>104</sup> Internal differences over how to respond to this electoral decline ultimately led to the break-up of CiU in June 2015. It paved the way for CDC and UDC to pursue very different strategies in the 2015 Catalan elections: the former as part of a new pro-independence alliance—Junts pel Sí (JpS)—that presented the elections as a *de-facto* referendum on Catalonia's future within Spain, and the latter as a party laying claim to CiU's historic territorial commitment to moderation and negotiation. In spite of on-going corruption investigations involving CDC and its long-time leader Jordi Pujol, JpS emerged as the largest party with 39.6% of the vote and, with other pro-independence parties, claimed a majority in the Catalan parliament which provided the basis for a declared intent to start a 'process

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99. *La Vanguardia*, "Ranking".

100. Castells, "Catalonia and Spain"; Gray, *Nationalist Politics*, 108-109.

101. For example, Mas, "Discurs del president".

102. Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, *Baròmetre*.

103. Elias, "Catalan Independence", 96.

104. Rico, and Liñeira, "Bringing".

of disconnection' from the Spanish state;<sup>105</sup> in contrast, UDC's 2.5% saw it fail to secure any parliamentary representation.

## Explaining the Shifting Territorial Goals of the PNV and CiU

The case studies show that, whilst the PNV and CiU have at times been symbolic allies in opposing the Spanish state, their territorial goals have varied both over time and from party to party. CiU has shifted from an accommodationist stance to a more pro-sovereigntist (for UDC) and pro-secessionist (for CDC) one, whilst the PNV has moved back and forth between these positions. This section considers the extent to which the hypotheses presented above can explain these changes.

### Party ideology

Whilst both the PNV and CiU have sought to function as 'broad churches' capable of accommodating a diversity of views within their organisations, the case studies confirm the role of party ideology as a fundamental and enduring constraint on these parties' positioning on territorial issues. For the former, this is apparent in the long-standing ideological duality (with support for secession as well as territorial accommodation) within the party. These values have underpinned a tendency to conceptualise territorial goals in a sufficiently ambiguous way to accommodate competing views. When this strategy was abandoned in the 2000s in favour of a more explicit assertion of Basque sovereignty, it caused the disillusionment of moderate activists and voters who had hitherto been comfortable with the PNV's catch-all territorial project. The PNV's ideological heritage thus provided a strong constraint on its efforts at territorial re-positioning, with the shift back to a more moderate accommodationist position reaping substantial electoral rewards.

In CiU's case, the constraining role of ideology is also in evidence. The party's Catalanist profile during the 1980s and 1990s was built on the basis of an unambiguous and principled commitment to Catalan autonomy through

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105. Martí, and Cetrà, "2015 Catalan election".

negotiation with the central state. Whilst a combination of external and internal pressures pushed the party towards a more radical position from the mid-2000s onwards, such a stance did not fit with the party's more moderate reputation on territorial issues. For example, CDC's increasingly pro-independence position alienated traditional and more moderate CiU voters, and led to ultimately fatal tensions with UDC within the CiU party federation. At the same time, CDC also struggled to convince pro-independence voters of the sincerity of its new sovereigntist ambitions, especially when faced with rival nationalist parties with a longer ideological commitment to, and therefore stronger credibility on, Catalan independence. These examples reflect the tensions often faced by political parties between their core identity and values, built up gradually over time, and pressures to adapt to a changed political context.

## Impact of the financial crisis

The Basque Country and Catalonia have always been wealthier regions relative to Spain as a whole. On the basis of this common position vis-à-vis the centre, from the hypothesis formulated above one would expect a similar response to the financial crisis characterised by a demand for new competencies in economic management. However, whilst both the PNV and CiU denounced the central government's centralizing policy response to the financial crisis, only the latter took the further step of demanding greater self-government in the form of fiscal sovereignty. In part, this divergence between the two cases reflects the different way in which the financial crisis affected both territories, as a result of the specific structure of the economy in the two places. However, nationalist party responses to these effects were also mediated by the different financing regimes within which the autonomous communities operate, as specified in the Spanish Constitution. Whereas in the rest of Spain's autonomous communities all taxes are collected by the Spanish government, in Navarre and the Basque Country the provinces are responsible for this; these provinces contribute to the Spanish budget by transferring a fixed amount of money as payment for the services provided by the Spanish state in these territories.<sup>106</sup> This asymmetry in regional financ-

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106. For a detailed comparison of the two financial regimes, see Gray, *Nationalist Politics*, 97-112.



ing provisions dictated the institutional and financial resources available to the PNV and CiU regional governments in responding to the effects of the financial crisis, leading to new demands for self-government in the Catalan case but not in the Basque one.

## Territorial structure of the state

The discussion above provides the first confirmation of the way in which the territorial organisation of the Spanish state shapes the opportunity structures available to nationalist parties in pursuit of their territorial goals. Divergent competencies in regional financing served to differentiate party responses to the financial crisis. The Spanish Constitution also differentiates between the Basque Country and Catalonia in a further respect: whilst the “historical rights” (including the *concierto económico*) of the former are recognised, no such recognition is extended to Catalonia. In practice, however, the implementation of the basic principles of decentralisation set out in the Constitution have provided a common legal and institutional framework within which the PNV and CiU conceptualised and pursued their territorial goals.<sup>107</sup> Specifically, the ambiguity of the ‘state of autonomies’ model incentivised both parties to focus on implementing and expanding self-government during the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast, since the mid-1990s, and in response to the dynamics of standardisation and re-centralisation that were perceived to undermine Basque and Catalan autonomy, both parties sought to advance a common (albeit vague) agenda of territorial re-structuring.

However, the fact that the PNV and CiU responded very differently to these common challenges, indicates that within this broad constitutional framework, other factors were more important determinants of their territorial positions. As hypothesised above, many of these relate to the political context within which the parties operated. However, as expected, decentralisation has also transformed the way in which these dynamics play out, at the same time as creating new opportunities and constraints on SNRPs in pursuit of their territorial goals. The different ways in which this has happened are considered below.

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107. Herrero de Miñón, *Derechos históricos*.



## Dynamics of party competition

In line with other work that has examined the territorial strategies of SNRPs, the case studies confirm the strong influence of party competition on the territorial goals of the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties examined here. As expected, the interaction with two types of political actor are shown to be crucial, namely state-wide parties (and their branches in the regional political space) and other nationalist parties. However, the exact manifestation of these dynamics has varied over time and among the different cases, as a consequence of the specific conditions in which party competition takes place.

Firstly, state-wide parties have taken different stances on territorial issues in both places, with different consequences for parties' territorial positions. In Catalonia, from the 1990s onwards the PSC successfully challenged CiU's dominance of the regional political space by enhancing its own territorial profile. This strategy contributed to CiU's electoral decline from the late 1990s onwards, precipitating a process of territorial re-positioning in subsequent years. In contrast, since the early 2000s, the PP's increasingly anti-Catalanist discourse and refusal to countenance new concessions on self-government fuelled CiU's radicalisation. In the Basque Country, the PNV has been less vulnerable to the efforts of state-wide parties to encroach on its electorate due to the strong loyalty of its support base, a product of the organizational networks indirectly linked to it. State-wide parties also collaborated to reject the legislative advance of the Plan Ibarretxe in the mid-2000s. Electoral competition also focused much more on the issue of terrorism, and strong attacks on the PNV's failure to bring an end to ETA activism was a key driver of Ibarretxe's post-sovereigntist strategy during the 2000s. With the demise of ETA in 2011, this dimension of party competition has disappeared and has facilitated the PNV's territorial re-orientation in recent years.

At different times and to different extents, other SNRPs have also been effective in putting pressure on the PNV and CiU to shift their territorial goals. In the latter case, this was weak until the mid-1990s, but the strategic re-orientation of ERC from the mid-1990s and the emergence of other pro-independence parties more recently, generated new pressures on CiU to shift towards a more sovereigntist position. Its recent legislative alliances (ERC and CiU from 2012-15) and electoral alliances (JpS) represent a shift in party strategy in an

attempt to steer and advance the on-going debate on Catalonia's relationship with the rest of Spain. In contrast, in the Basque case intra-nationalist competition originated from splits from the PNV (to create ETA in the late 1950s, and EA in 1986). As argued above, the latter prompted the PNV to form a new coalition alliance that had the effect of consolidating its moderate territorial politics. However, it is the former—and the persistence of political violence in the Basque Country until 2011—that has constituted the most important influence on the PNV's goals and is thus the principal difference between the two cases considered here. For much of the 1980s and early 1990s, the PNV sought to distance itself from ETA's armed violence; this was shown in the focus on implementing Basque autonomy and the cross-party initiatives condemning political violence. The PNV's radicalisation from the mid-1990s reflected a new strategy of cooperation with ETA in order to create a new pan-nationalist political consensus on Basque self-government. ETA's ceasefire in 2011 fundamentally altered the Basque political context within which the PNV now operates and has facilitated the shift of focus away from radical territorial re-structuring, and onto the business of managing socio-economic responses to the economic crisis.

## Public opinion on constitutional change

As well as responding to the strategic behaviour of other parties in the political space, the case studies confirm the hypothesis that SNRPs will also take into consideration what voters think about different constitutional options. The constitutional preferences of the electorate are found to dictate the extent to which a nationalist party's territorial goal has traction beyond its core support base. In the Basque case, the relative stability of support for independence since the 1990s (usually between 20 and 25%) limited the popular appeal of the Plan Ibarretxe—even though the Plan's goal was not the foundation of an independent state—whilst the PNV's current territorial position is far more in tune with the Basque electorate's long-standing preference for strong autonomy within the Spanish state. In the Catalan case, constitutional preferences have taken a different trajectory with very different implications for CiU. Increasing support for reform of the status quo since the 1990s, and more recently a spectacular increase in support for Catalan independence, has incentivised the party to shift its own territorial position in order to retain electoral credibility as the party of Catalan self-government.

However, the case studies also suggest a second way in which public opinion may shape SNRPs' territorial preferences, since the relative importance of the issue of constitutional change to voters at a given point in time is also shown to matter. It is only in Catalonia in recent years that constitutional change has become a priority issue for voters, and its salience was one factor that contributed to CiU's radicalisation of its territorial demands in recent years. Otherwise, issues relating to economic performance and, in the Basque Country, terrorism, have consistently been more salient; the PNV's current strategy has responded to this by de-emphasising constitutional change and focusing on the day-to-day issues that matter more to voters. The analysis thus suggests that public opinion may shape not only how, but also how much, nationalist parties can talk about their territorial goals.

## The impact of being in vs. out of government

Both the PNV and CiU have always conceived of themselves as office-seeking parties, committed to using the opportunities and resources of government office to advance their territorial agendas.<sup>108</sup> As for SNRPs in many other places, dynamics of multi-level voting bolstered these parties' electoral, and consequently political, status in the Basque Country and Catalonia respectively; this contributed to the PNV and CiU being parties of regional government for most of the post-Franco period. The empirical analysis of these cases therefore does not allow a test of the hypothesis that parties that choose to stay out of government will adopt more radical territorial positions.

However, it does provide partial confirmation of the expectation that aspiring to, and occupying, government office, will exert a moderating pressure on SNRPs' territorial goals. For example, the strategy of negotiating strong autonomy with the state during the transition to democracy enabled both parties to secure enough electoral support to enter regional government in 1980. In the subsequent two decades, both parties also used the resources and opportunities of being in government to build up their credibility as moderate territorial parties able to implement and expand political autonomy. In the PNV's case, its coalition alliance with the PSE-EE between 1987

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108. Barrio, and Barberà, "Convergència"; Pérez Nieves, "Partido Nacionalista Vasco".

and 1998 consolidated this profile. And yet, the case studies show that being in government is no guarantee that SNRPs will pursue moderate territorial strategies in government: both the Plan Ibarretxe in the mid-2000s, and CiU's radicalisation more recently, were undertaken from such a governing position. As these two examples suggest, other pressures may prove stronger than the moderating effects of public office, with the effect that SNRPs are pulled in a different direction on territorial issues.

## **Dynamics of multi-level politics**

Like many other SNRPs, the PNV and CiU have always operated in regional and state-wide political arenas simultaneously. As hypothesised above, the multi-level nature of these parties' operating environment has provided both opportunities and constraints in terms of their territorial ambitions. On the one hand, PNV/CiU support for minority PSOE, and then PP, central governments (from 1993-1996 and 1996-2000 respectively) served to expand the scope of decentralisation and bolstered the credibility of the nationalist parties as moderate parties capable of delivering more self-government. On the other hand, the case studies also flag up the potential risks of such vertical linkages. For example, CiU's decision to collaborate with the PP—a party ideologically opposed to accelerated de-centralisation—constrained its ability to take the initiative on statute reform, and allowed rivals to successfully challenge its Catalanist credibility. Dynamics of multi-level politics, like other factors within SNRPs' operating environment, thus have the potential to push parties towards a territorial position that is at odds with core ideological values. As the next section argues, how these tensions are resolved boils down to the balance of power between different strategic preferences within SNRPs.

## **Party Organisation**

Finally, the case studies highlight the role of internal organisational dynamics in conditioning the territorial strategies of the PNV and CiU, although these are party-specific and reflect the distinct origins and evolution of each organisation. Factionalism has been a constant within the PNV since its earliest years, although the party's highly de-centralised organisational model structured around a broad network of social organisations has provided a

means of accommodating these divisions and mitigating their potentially destabilising effects. In the time period considered here, rivalry between pro-sovereigntist and accommodationist sectors was one of the factors that resulted in the split of EA in 1986, and incentivised the PNV to consolidate its moderate territorial strategy in the face of new competition from a pro-sovereigntist rival. Similar tensions resurfaced during Juan José Ibarretxe's time as president of the Basque government in 1999-2009, but were better managed, particularly as a consequence of the memory of the difficult split of 1986.<sup>109</sup> A crucial factor here was the long-standing organisational balance of power between different 'faces' of the PNV party organisation: moderate leaders of the voluntary party acted to mitigate Ibarretxe's radical territorial strategy, shifting the party back to its long-standing ambiguous territorial position which successfully reconciles competing ideological positions. That they were able to do so can be explained by the PNV's loss of electoral support during this period, its inability to forge new alliances and governing majorities, and the weakness of nationalist rivals who might otherwise have criticised the PNV's change of heart. The empirical evidence thus points to the mutually constitutive relationship between the internal life and external environment of political parties.

This interplay is also evident in CiU's case, although with a different outcome. In spite of its origins as an electoral alliance between two independent political parties, until the 2000s CiU displayed a higher degree of internal cohesion than the PNV. This was due to the strong leadership of CDC and UDC within the alliance, and elite-managed relations between them. CiU's electoral hegemony during the 1980s and 1990s was also crucial in sustaining this internal cohesion. In contrast, tensions between and within CDC and UDC accelerated once the question of sovereignty was raised in Catalan political debates from the 2000s onwards, and were exacerbated by generational change within the party and the refusal of the Spanish state to engage in bilateral negotiations from 2011 onwards. Efforts at managing these internal tensions ultimately failed: the irreconcilability of different visions of how to respond to CiU's changed context led to its collapse in 2015.

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109. Mees, "Nationalist politics".

## Conclusion

As noted in the Introduction, territorial relations in Spain have come under increasing pressure in recent years as a result of renewed nationalist mobilisation. Understanding how and why nationalist parties seek to challenge the constitutional stability and integrity of the Spanish state is a prerequisite for any future process of territorial reform. This article advances such an understanding by mapping and explaining the evolution of the territorial goals and strategies of two of the principal actors—the PNV and CiU—shaping centre-periphery dynamics. Our analysis highlights the way in which a common set of contextual and intra-party factors interact differently in the two cases, leading parties committed to the same fundamental goal (increasing self-government) and often facing common challenges (evolution of decentralisation, the financial crisis), to pursue very different territorial goals. We have not considered here the extent to which nationalist parties' shifting territorial goals are also underpinned by more fundamental changes in cultural and linguistic factors; this is an important avenue for future research given the importance of these dimensions to nationalist mobilisation in both places, and would complement the analysis presented here. Our findings are nevertheless significant because of the new insights they provide into the evolution of nationalist grievances in the Basque Country and Catalonia.

The findings also contribute to the broader literature on SNRPs in two ways. Firstly, this work provides a useful framework for understanding the ways in which SNRPs must try to reconcile long-standing territorial values, with shorter-term pressures emanating from the context within which they operate and which become stronger as parties become increasingly important players in regional party systems. Applying this framework to new cases, such as the PNV and CiU, is valuable in highlighting how a common set of factors can play out in specific ways in different places at different times. At the same time, however, the analysis serves to further refine this framework, by pointing to the role of internal power relations within parties in shaping SNRPs' responses to competing pressures on their territorial positioning. This factor has been largely overlooked to date, and future work should focus on undertaking a more systematic analysis of the extent to which it influences SNRPs to adopt a particular territorial stance. Secondly, we offer one of the first analyses of how the financial crisis has influenced SNRPs' territorial projects. Our findings suggest that party responses will be mediated by the

ideological, political and constitutional constraints within which SNRPs operate; future work should explore the extent to which such an argument holds in other cases.

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