A trip through the corridors of power: the evolution of the regional debate in Catalonia

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ABSTRACT

The regional debate has occupied a pre-eminent place in political discussions in Catalonia for several years and both citizens and the political class have been engaged in fierce debate on the subject. Moves towards independence in Catalonia and the demands made by other parts of Spain have shaken up the national and regional issue and forced political parties to take positions and come up with proposals for accommodating demands for a pluri-national state and for regional decentralisation. This paper gives a perspective on how citizens and parties have changed their positions on Catalonia as a region and as a nation. Through the analysis of survey data and parties' manifesto proposals, we show the size of the political changes and the direction they have taken. The paper ends by setting out future scenarios for Spain's regional model and the main points of agreement and of disagreement among the various players.

Keywords: decentralisation, pluri-nationalism, public opinion, political parties, surveys, secession, self-determination.

INTRODUCTION

If a political analyst had examined Catalonia ten years ago and compared his findings with the situation now, he would find things had changed greatly. During the period of 2010–2016, many of the attitudes defining Catalan citizens have undergone a sea change. Political behaviour, which was fairly stable up until the end of the first decade of the 21st century, has undergone a remarkable transformation. The result is a new, much more complex panorama of political parties and very different political attitudes. The political analyst from the past would find today's society one scarred by the economic crisis. He would also find a society that was more politically mobilised and interested in politics. That said, today's society is less willing to bend to the powers that be, not least because of the endless stream of corruption cases [affecting politicians in general and Spain's government in particular]. Last but not least, a sizeable chunk of Catalonia's citizenry has changed its preferences regarding the regional organisation of the state. Put another way, the number of citizens who support the regional status quo—Spain's so-called autonomous community model—is much lower than it was a decade ago.

In today's fast-changing world, it is all too easy to overlook this sea-change in Catalan politics. This paper offers a panoramic analysis of the relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish State from the post-dictatorship institution of self-government. Two intertwined strands are examined. One is the change in citizens' attitudes, the other is how these attitudes have changed parties' discourses.

It is well-known in political science that citizens' attitudes and political discourse follow an endogenous process. Thus, it is hard to unpick citizens' views from political discourse, given that the latter often changes in the light of public opinion. We therefore warn the reader that this paper does not seek a causal mechanism explaining attitudinal and behavioural changes whether in the political elites or in the general public. Such an aim would require more sophisticated methods than those used here. Instead, the paper's aim is show the reader both the scope and the direction of the changes that have taken place during this period. This is important for we can only know whither we are bound if we know whence we have come.

A CONFRONTATIONAL REGIONAL MODEL

After forty years of General Franco's dictatorship, Catalonia's 1979 Statute of Autonomy marked the recovery of Catalonia's self-government and opened a scenario in which Catalan institutions could decide on matters lying within their powers.

The Sau Statute was drawn up following a series of agreements between Spain's central government and the Catalan government. The fact that no party had an absolute majority in Spain's Parliament meant that votes from regional parties were needed to govern the country. Hence the central government's willingness to make concessions. These agreements led to the creation of an ambiguous regional model during Spain's transition to democracy. The model reflected a confused mixture

Figure 1: Self-government and shared government: states

SOURCE: Regional Authority Index. Hooghe et al., (2016)
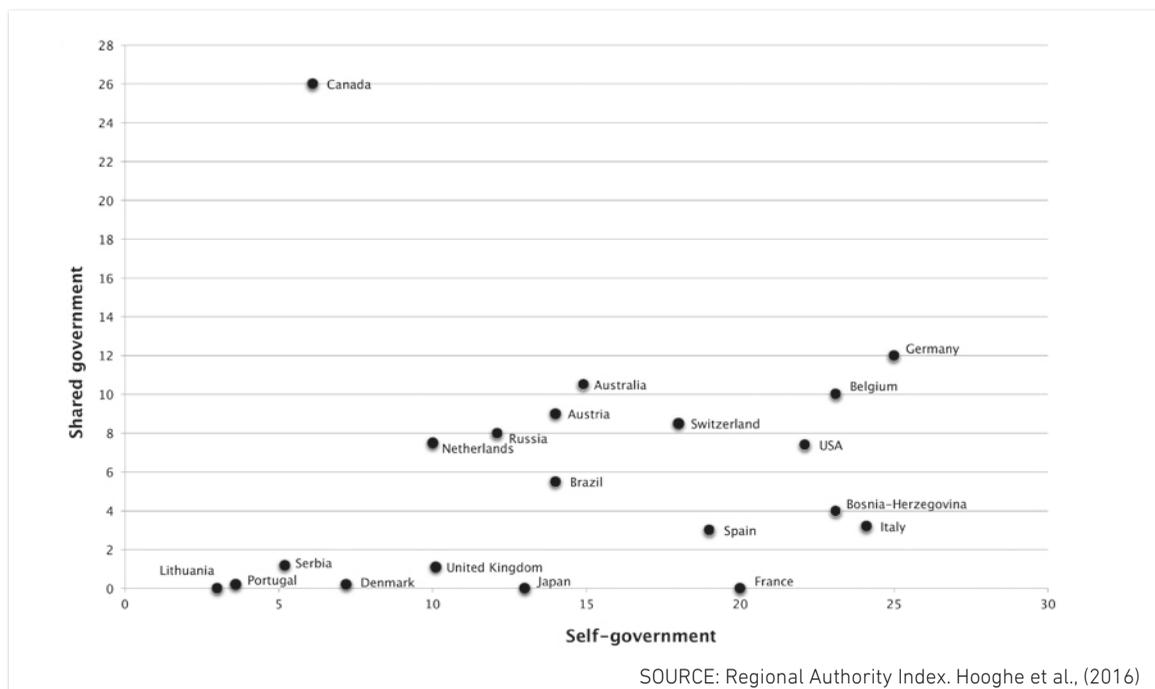
of ideas on regional government and put off the roll out of self-government until after approval of Spain's Constitution and any decisions the Constitutional Tribunal might make. The model finally adopted cut back the initial proposals for self-government and was one in which central government kept the whip hand. Pressure from Spain's army and other key players also shaped the model: the idea was that its shortcomings could be dealt with later in a piecemeal fashion.

The failed coup d'état on the February 23, 1981 redefined Spain's regional model. Spain's Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, abbreviated to PSOE), after years governing the country, passed the Autonomous Government Harmonisation Act (Spanish acronym: LOAPA). The Act set out to extend the model of autonomous government on the one hand, and to cut back on the degree of self-government in Spain's regions on the other. Although many of LOAPA's provisions were declared unconstitutional, it defined a

model based on a degree of self-government, symmetric powers in all regions, and a much lower level of shared governance. However, the model was also characterised by considerable instability in self-government given that it was fairly easy for the central government to re-assume powers whenever it saw fit (Guinjoan and Rodon, 2016).

Thus, as shown in the Regional Authority Index, Catalonia's powers in relation to self-government (the ability to design its own policies in various fields), at least at the formal level, is slightly below that of regions in Federal States in countries that are generally highly politically and economically decentralised. By in contrast, Spain's regional model exhibits a very low degree of shared government (that is to say, the regions' abilities to influence central government decisions); little regulation of Spain's pluri-national nature; and a very weak federal political culture (perhaps as a result of all the foregoing factors; Rodon, 2015b).

Figure 2: Self-government and shared government. Regions

SOURCE: Regional Authority Index. Hooghe et al., (2016)
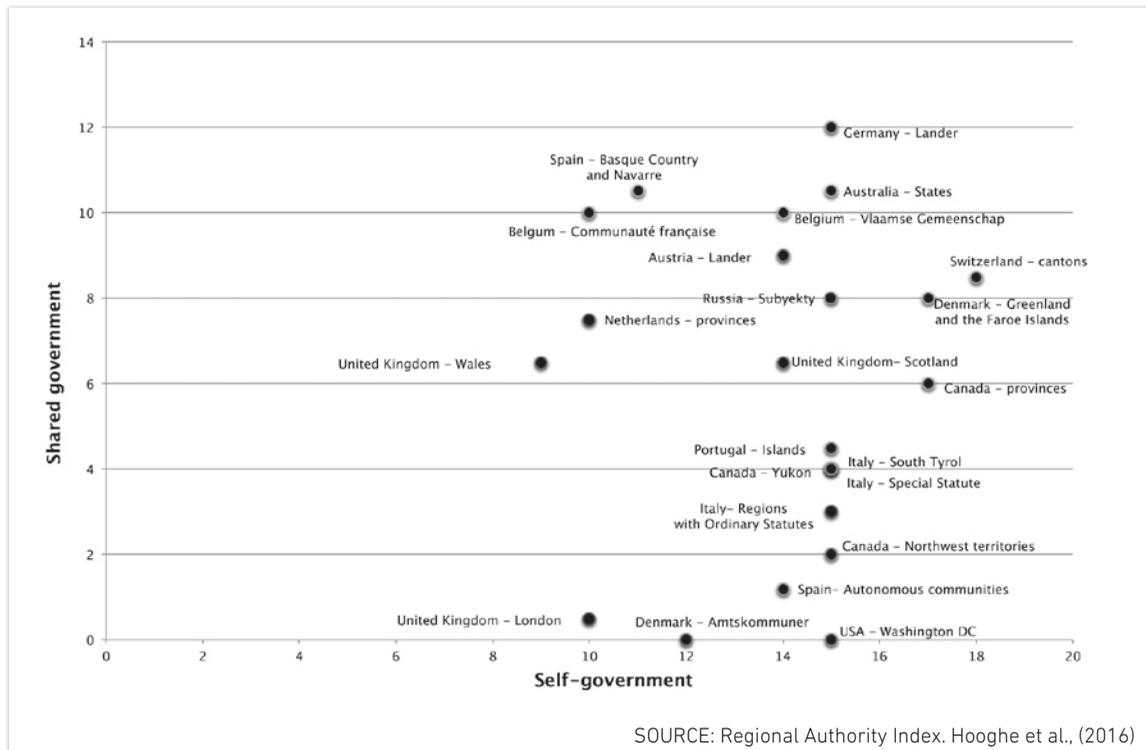
While the regional model's ambiguity has given some flexibility when it comes to regional development and design, it is also true that Spain's system of 'autonomous communities' has become a legal minefield (Rodon, 2015b). At the beginning of the 1980s and the 2000s, as well as over the last few years, there have been many appeals lodged against state and regional legislation (see Figure 3). The fact that the members of Spain's Constitutional Court are effectively chosen by the two big national parties (PSOE and Partido Popular, abbreviated to PP) and that the regions have no say (as in most federal states) has undermined the legitimacy of the court in deciding regional issues. This loss of legitimacy is particularly pronounced in the *yes* of a large chunk of Catalonia's electorate. Perhaps the clearest case is that of Judgement 31/2010 delivered by The Constitutional Court on The Statute of Catalonia, which was strongly rejected by Catalonia's institutions and many of its citizens.

STABILITY AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPINION

Regional confrontation (whether politically articulated or through the courts) and the wish of Catalan parties to increase Catalonia's self-government, has been mirrored by trends in Catalan public opinion on the issue.

In the first stage of Catalan self-government, based on the first data we have available (gathered by the Centre for Sociological Research [the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* in its original Spanish] in 1984), 38% of Catalans then wanted greater self-government. One could argue (and this political point was made) that the (slow) applications of the Statute of Autonomy, with the torturous process of devolving powers, could have led to part of the population demanding more self-government as a way of exerting pressure. Thus, when almost all the powers had been transferred, the issue would merely become one of haggling over their application with central government.

Yet the data reveal that this is not what happened. Far from being satiated by the transfers of power, the percentage of Catalans wanting greater self-government in Catalonia continued to grow. As time went by, the Catalans wishing for more self-government became a sizeable majority, reaching 68.6% in 2012.

Nevertheless, the wish for greater powers of Catalan self-government was not accompanied by a major shift in citizens' preferences for regional organisation. This is shown by the longitudinal series extracted from the surveys conducted by the Institute of Political and Social Sciences (the *Instituto de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* in its original Spanish). These surveys run from the early

Figure 3: Trends in Constitutional confrontation between regional governments and State institutions: 1981–2011

SOURCE: Rodon, 2015b
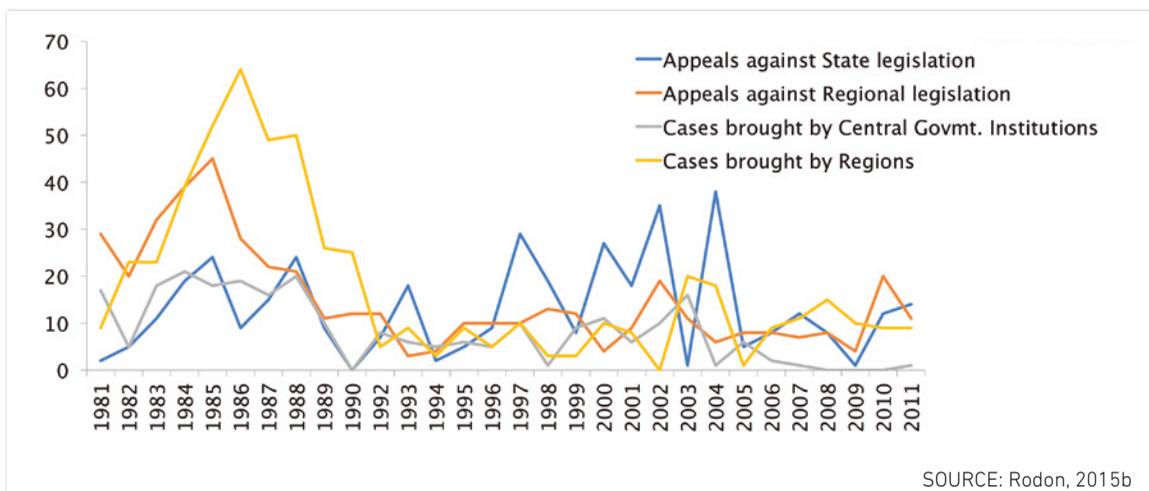
years of the restoration of democracy. As can be seen in Figure 5, the percentage of respondents 'in favour' of independence stayed steady between 1991 and 2002. Even though there was a small peak in those wanting secession between 2003 and 2004, the percentage settled down from 2005 onwards.

Thus, a fairly stable preference regarding the model of regional organisation was the norm. Although Catalans still wanted greater self-government, independence was still not seen as an option. This all began to change

from 2010 on. Figure 6 shows this clearly. Up until then, Catalans' first preference was for an 'autonomous community' [self-governing region]—something that could be interpreted as acceptance of the status quo (35-40% of respondents saw it in these terms). The second preference was for a 'Spanish Federal State', which attracted close to 30% of support. The third and least popular choice was for Catalonia to become 'a region of Spain', attracting support from only 10% of Catalan citizens.

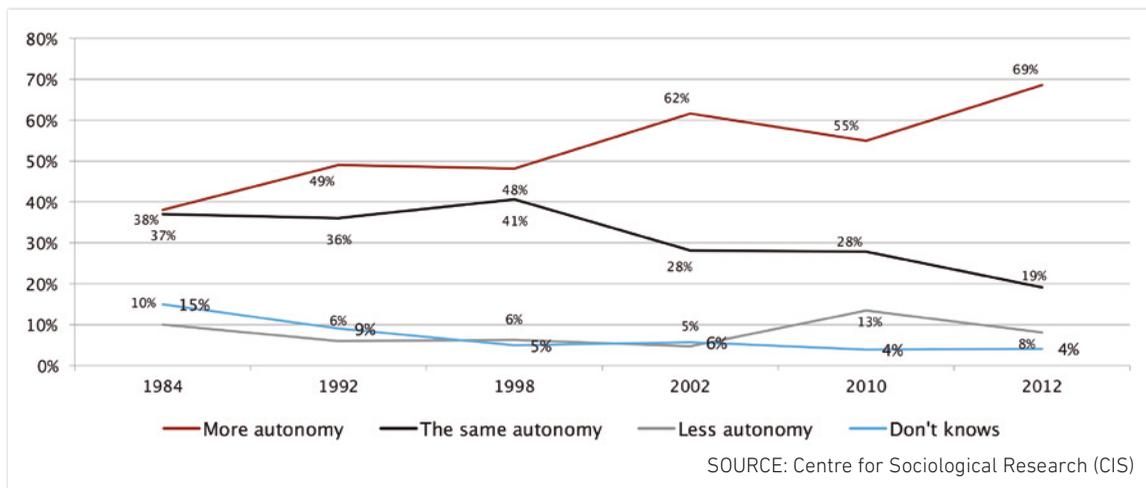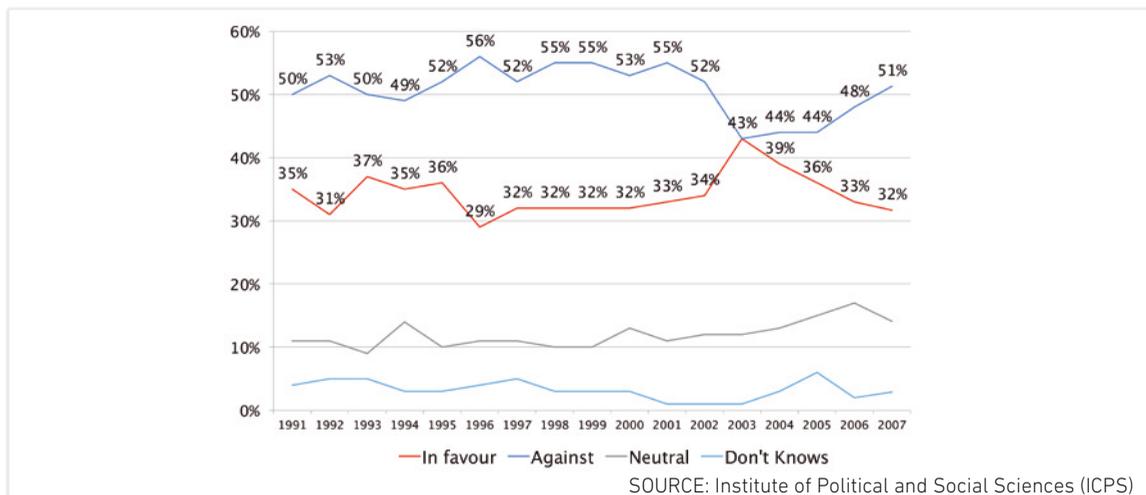**Figure 4: Trends in regional preferences in Catalonia (1984–2012)**

SOURCE: Centre for Sociological Research (CIS)

Figure 5: Trends in support for independence (1991–2007)

SOURCE: Institute of Political and Social Sciences (ICPS)

There was a sea change in preferences in the period running from 2010 to the beginning of 2013. In just two years (from 2010 to the end of 2012), the percentage of Catalans wanting independence first and foremost doubled. At the beginning of 2012, independence had become the first choice and by the end of the year, over 45% stated it as their first option. The peak came in 2014, when almost 50% of citizens made it their first choice. This growth in support came at the expense of those supporting the federal option and in particular, those choosing the status quo (the so-called autonomous communities model).

The various data at our disposal indicate a clear trend in citizens' preferences. The specialised literature has delved into these changes over the last decade and comes to the following preliminary conclusions:

• According to the survey data and election results, between 35% and 40% of Catalonia's population has a strong preference for independence and between 30% and 35% of the population is opposed to independence. Those in the middle have weaker preferences and, depending on the political context and individual factors, would choose one way or the other.

• This distinction is important when weighing up the reasons that lead a given population segment to lend its support to one option or the other. While those with a strong preference for independence appeal to questions of cultural identity, those with weak preferences use other arguments such as management capabilities or the economy. By contrast, those who oppose independence are more likely to resort to arguments based on identity whether their preference happens to be strong or weak (Muñoz and Tormos, 2015).

• The ideological position of those wanting independence is more left-wing than hitherto. Many of the arguments used by those advocating secession are based on improving living standards and policy management by institutions that are closer to citizens.

• Support for independence has grown throughout Catalonia, especially in the interior. In the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and in Tarragona, one can see local polarisation of political preferences. While the city-centres of Barcelona and Tarragona are clearly in favour of independence, the outskirts reject the idea. Between the two, there are areas where views are more nuanced and there are more 'don't-knows' (Rodon, 2015).

Figure 6: Trends in choice of regional model (2006–2014)

SOURCE: Centre for Sociological Research (CIS)
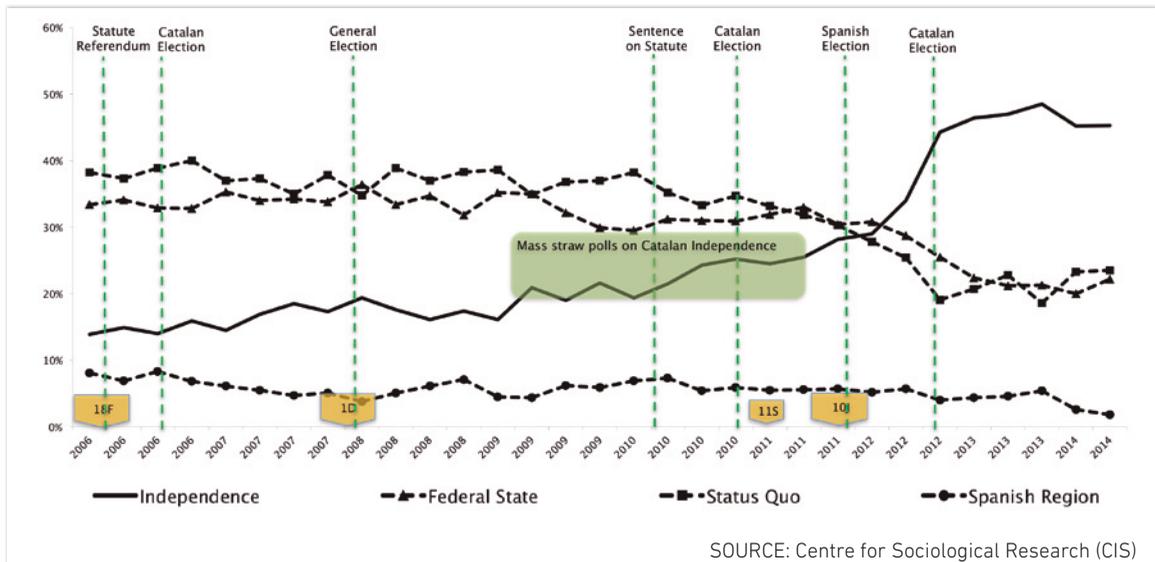
- The electorate for parties in relation to the independence issue is more homogeneous. This is especially true for the Convergència i Unió (CiU)/ Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC) on the one hand, and the Partido de los Socialistas de Cataluña (PSC, the Catalan arm of the PSOE) on the other. The exception is Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (ICV-EUiA)/ Catalunya Sí que es Pot (CSQP), which still has an electorate with diverse preferences for a regional model.

- While support for dependence has grown among voters, the proportion of 'don't knows' has stayed the same. The latter group can be split into two sub-groups: (1) A group that would vote for independence under certain circumstances (for example, if there were no prospects of changing the central government's position); (2) a group that either would not support independence or that believes in Spain's ability to become a Federal State. This group would only vote for independence if an unlikely set of events occurred (for example, repeated failure by the state and Catalan institutions to reach agreement on a referendum).

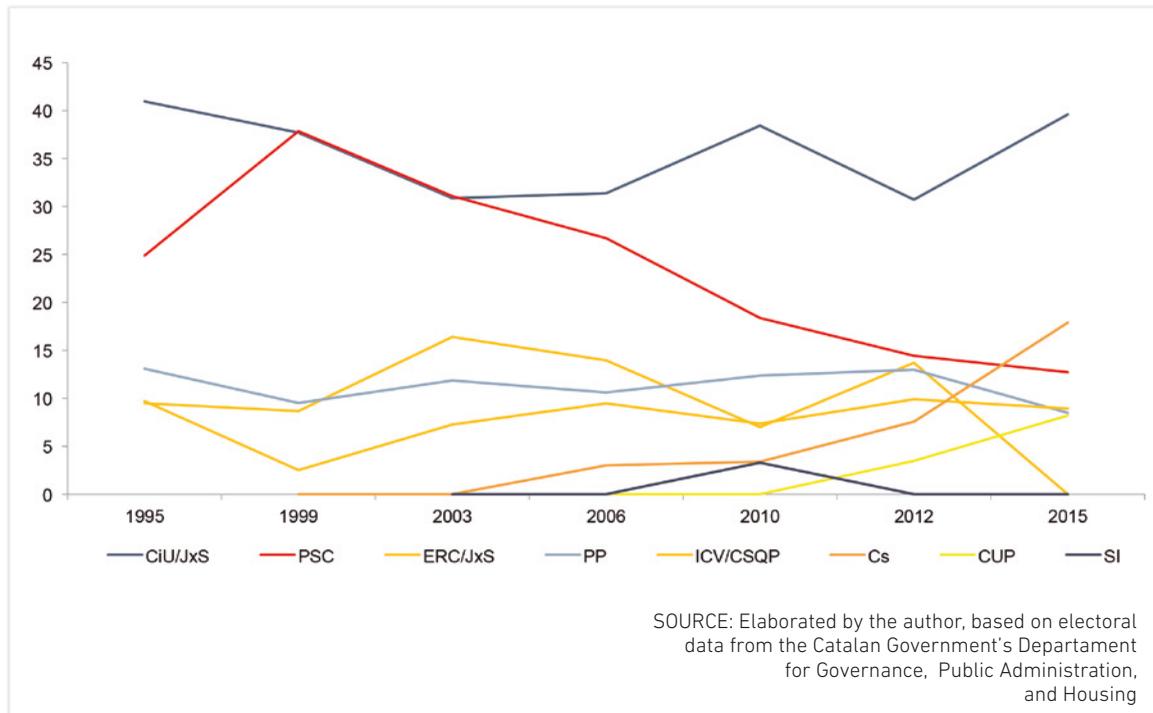## EVOLUTION OF THE CATALAN PARTY SYSTEM

Given the evolution of territorial preferences at the citizen level, we will now turn to the changing situation at the political level. The Catalan party system was very stable in the two decades following the recovery of Catalan self-government. The first legislatures (1980–1984 and 1984–988) saw the consolidation of five parliamentary groups, which stayed more or less unchanged for a long spell. These five parties can be split into two groups using the 'left' and 'right' division found in all Western democracies and the 'national' or 'territorial' aspect which splits the electorate's regional model preferences (Padró-Solanet i Colomer, 1992) The biggest party in the Catalan parliament was CiU, which dominated the political scene in the 1980s. CiU gained three consecutive absolute majorities (1984, 1988, and 1992) under the leadership of Jordi Pujol (Pallarès

and Font, 1994; Pallarès, 1994). The strong appeal of CiU's position on regional self-governance led to an interesting pattern, whereby most Catalans voted PSOE in general elections and CiU in the regional ones. In the last elections, if we consider voting figures, there are second-order effects. These include the fact that regional elections have a lower voter turn-out than national ones. In addition to dual-voting behaviour, one should also note the impact of differential abstention. This occurs when a large number of voters take part in the national elections but not in the regional ones (Montero and Font, 1991; Riba, 2008; Riera, 2009). From the 1990s onwards, the CiU hegemony began to crack—a trend that continued until 2006 (see Figure 7). Indeed, the PSC, under Pasqual Maragall, beat CiU (led by Jordi Pujol) in votes but not in seats in the 1999 election.

The early 2000s saw big changes on the political scene with the succession of a new leader in the CiU. The new man was Artur Mas, previously a Minister in Jordi Pujol's government and the future President of Catalonia. There was broad political agreement on the need to reform Catalonia's Statute of Self-Government and regional funding—aims that were reflected in the 2003 manifestos of all parties except the PP. In the CiU's case, the change in leadership was accompanied by greater co-ordination between the two parties making up the CiU alliance—CDC and Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, which signed a federation agreement in 2001.[1]

The process of reforming Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy began in the seventh legislature (2003–2006). The last elections, dubbed 'plebiscitary' were held on the September 27, 2015 and marked a decade of great changes in the Catalan party system. These changes were particularly striking regarding the political parties' configuration and demands on the independence issue (Guinjoan and Rodon, 2016).

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1 The political pact between the two parties would last until June 2015. Its demise marked the end of 37 years of jointly running for election and governing from local to regional levels (Lo Cascio, 2008).

Figure 7: Electoral Results in the Catalan Parliamentary Elections (1995–2015)

SOURCE: Elaborated by the author, based on electoral data from the Catalan Government's Departament for Governance, Public Administration, and Housing

A decade of transformation: electoral weakness and fragmentation

The transformation of Catalan party politics over the last decade has followed a dynamic that has some things in common with what has happened in other Western democracies. On the one hand, there was dwindling electoral support for parties that had hitherto been in a dominant position (in this case, the PSC and CiU) and the springing up of new parties (Ciutadans [C's], Candidatura d'Unitat Popular [CUP], Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència [SCI], Podemos [*Podem* in Cataluna], Comuns, and the refounding of the CDC). On the other, and as a corollary of the first, there was a notable rise in political fragmentation and polarisation (Hernández and Kriesi, 2015), a trend that can be seen throughout Western democracies (Thomassen and Ham, 2014).

The CiU and the PSC gradually lost their leading role as voters were lured away by smaller parties that had gradually consolidated their position over the years.[2] This did not mean that the dwindling parties became weaker as a result: Barberá, et al. (2009), found that, paradoxically, this loss of voters was offset by greater internal strength.[3]

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2 We have already mentioned that CiU lost its pivotal role and then embarked on organisational restructuring—a process that is still underway at the time of writing. The 2010 election results and the electoral coalition with 'Junts pel Sí' [hereinafter 'JxS'] in 2015 were fairly good but did not give CiU an absolute majority. However the instability of the party system has had a big impact on the PSC. This party attained its peak support in 1999 (with 37.85% of the vote and 52 Members of Parliament) and in two tripartite coalition governments led by Maragall (2003–2006) and Montilla (2006–2010). The emergence of new parties and tensions between the PSC and PSOE (the Catalan and Spanish socialist parties, respectively) slashed the PSC's share of the vote to just 12.72% , leaving the party with 16 seats. These dramatic losses would be offset by gains in the general and local elections.

3 In this respect, they reveal the importance of funding political parties through public sources rather than through members' subscriptions. (Barberá, et al., 2009)

From 2006 onwards, the Catalan political scene showed novel features as new parties sprang up. In 2006, the C's entered Parliament based on its; (1) opposition to Catalan independence; (2) denunciation of Catalonia's language immersion policy; (3) positioning as a protest party. This served as a warning to Catalonia's established parties. In 2010, SCI also entered the Catalan parliament, and in 2012, so did the CUP, having shown its strength in the municipal elections; it consolidated its position in the 2015 regional elections.
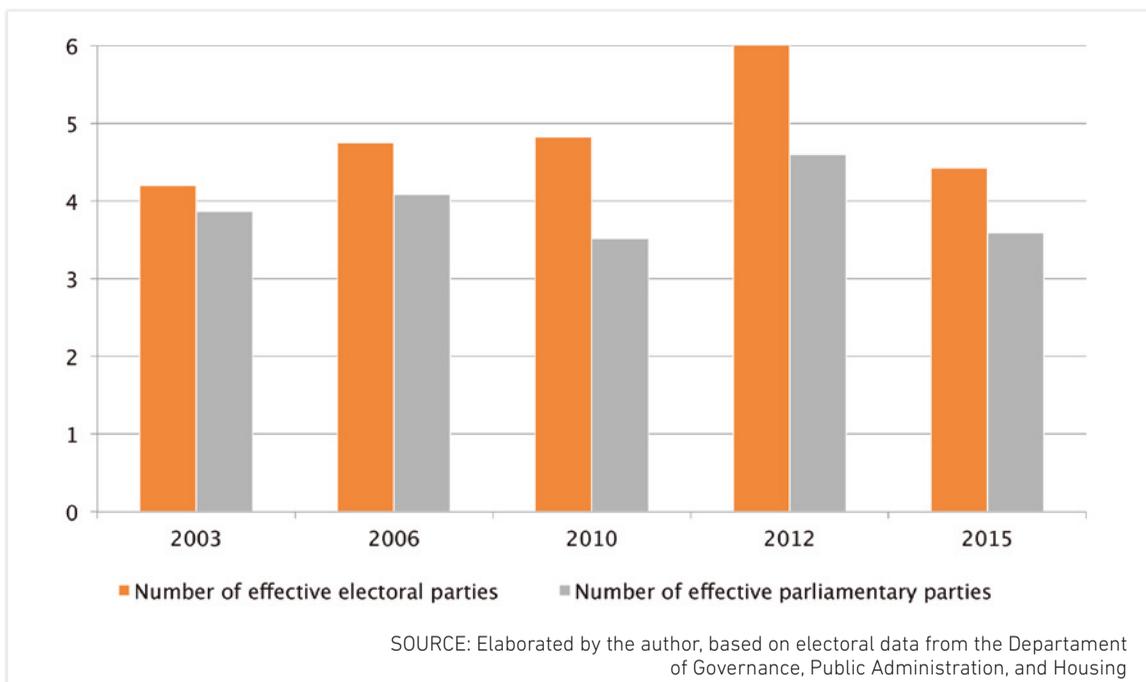
Thus the Catalan party system had gone through a double transformation characterised by (1) greater fragmentation and (2) greater polarisation. An indicator of political fragmentation is the effective number of parties taking part in each election. This number rose from 4.20 in 2003 to 6.06 in 2012, even though there was a drop in 2015 because of the election campaign coalition between Junts per Sí (JxS) in which they joined forces with the CDC. While proportional representation systems tend to lead to more fragmented political systems, this indicator tends to mirror political complexity (ideological clefts). It is also an indicator of potential instability, given that the presence of more parties can make it harder to form governments.[4] In the Catalan case, this trend is clearly linked to the independence movement. However, it is also related to one of the biggest economic crises Catalonia has ever experienced.

If we look at the ideological axes (see Figure 8 and Figure 9), one can see that the main change in the system of Catalan parties is the proliferation of areas of competition. Medina put it thus: "The ERC and CiU compete for the nationalist vote; ERC, ICV, and CUP are rivals for left-wing Catalan voters; PSC and ICV battle for the support of moderate Socialists; the Socialists can lose voters on various fronts (CiU, ERC, ICV, [and] C's); and PP, CiU, and C's try to win over the most moderate voters." (Medina, 2014, p.7).

4 Sudden changes in the fragmentation index may indicate the party system is going through periods of instability and that the clefts splitting the electorate are becoming deeper.

Figure 8: Effective number of electoral and parliamentary parties (2003–2015)

SOURCE: Elaborated by the author, based on electoral data from the Departament of Governance, Public Administration, and Housing

This dynamic is still clearly present in the legislature that followed the elections held on September 27, 2015. While the JxS coalition, formed by the independent candidates CDC and ERC, allowed these two parties to put their electoral competition on ice, it does not mean they have stopped competing for political space. This was made clear when they stood separately in the general elections of the 20th of December 20, 2015 and June 26, 2016. Moreover, consolidation of the CUP, which played a key role in forming a majority pro-independence bloc, has heightened tensions in the secessionist camp. The refounding of the CDC after the CiU split from the UDC, fanned controversy and internal currents within the same political space. At the same time, the (re)configuration of the political space occupied by CSQP added complexity. This is especially true following the emergence of Podemos, and the forging of municipal alliances, especially in Barcelona under the leadership of Ada Colau. Last, the gap between the parties opposing independence has narrowed. Growing support for C's has placed the orange-badged party ahead of both PP and PSC. The leader of C's—Inés Arrimadas—has become the leader of the parliamentary opposition.

Figure 9: Catalan party system (2003)
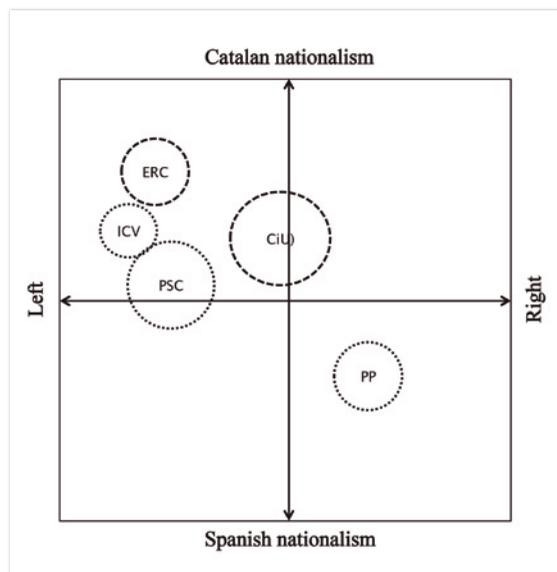
SOURCE: Elaborated by the author, based on ideology self-assessment data (CEO)

Figure 10: Catalan party system (2015)
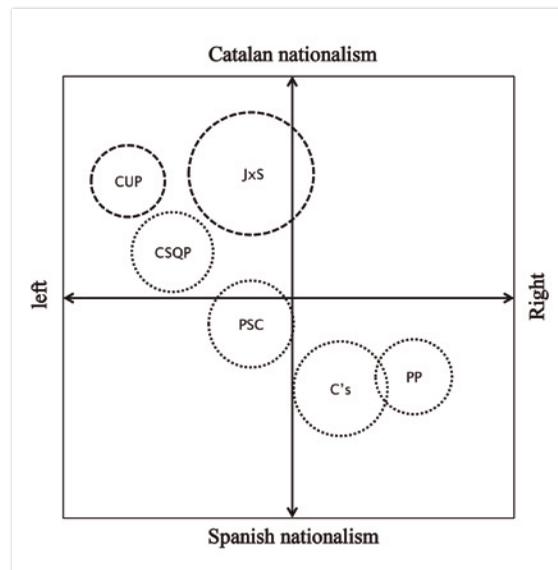
SOURCE: Elaborated by the author, based on ideological self-identification data (CEO)

The emergence of 'the right to decide' and the independence movement: big manifesto changes

The transformation of the Catalan party system has not been limited to changes in candidacies and which party occupies which part of the parliamentary spectrum. It has also been reflected in manifesto positions on self-government. The process of reforming Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy and the growth of the independence movement described in the first section have also changed the programmes of Catalan parties. These programmes are much more complex than before. Regional, pro-independence parties have changed the content and form of their political proposals in every election since 2003. These parties have shifted from proposing reform of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy to embracing unilateral independence. Their demands are exceptional even within the context of European secessionist parties. This is the fruit of constant clashes with central government and huge grass-roots mobilisation (Guinjoan, et al., 2013). We will now analyse this evolution, first regarding the formation of a pro-independence bloc and then in connection with federalist parties.

The formation of a heterogeneous pro-independence bloc

• The CiU: the party that had played a pre-eminent role in Catalan politics for many years, had put forward the gradual recovery of self-government as the best option. The federated party had always defended Catalonia's status as a nation but did not question the territorial unity of Spain—at least in the short term. The aim was to achieve greater regional self-government. However, from the tenth Party Congress onwards (held in 1996), pro-independence ideas began to gain ground and it was decided not to renounce self-determination because of the political leverage this gave.[5] This aim was linked to the party's moderating role in Spanish politics and which dovetailed with the traditional Catalan aspiration of modernising and democratising Spain.[6] The CiU had supported the Spanish government when the governing PSOE was in a minority (1993–1995) and supported the PP (1996–2000), adopting precisely the same strategy (Guibernau, 2010).[7]

• The CDC: from CiU to JxS: In 2003, CiU proposed drawing up a new Catalan Statute of Autonomy —something that had not been achieved to date even though the PSC's leader (Maragall) had mooted the idea in the previous elections. This CiU proposal marked a break with the Pujol era. The election results led to the CiU being in opposition for two legislatures. CiU now demanded an ambitious Statute of Autonomy not only in terms of taxation and funding but also with regard to powers and recognition. The CiU later went on to play a key role in getting the Statute through the Bill stage and passed by Spain's parliament at the beginning of 2006. Yet the biggest change regarding regional demands came with the manifestos presented for the 2010 and 2012 regional elections, which beefed up the pro-independence positions taken by the party.

Various waves of municipal non-official referendums and mass demonstrations on July 10, 2010, under the slogan "We are a nation. It is for us to decide", and on September 11, 2012, with the slogan "Catalonia, A New European State", together with a clear change in public preferences (analysed in the first part of this paper), was accompanied by the incorporation of demands for independence. While the CiU's 2010 manifesto aimed to get it back into government and defend public services, it already incorporated Catalonia's right to self-determination. It did so step by step: "We aspire to financial sovereignty that not only serves the interests of Catalans and economic progress but also gives us more political sovereignty and strengthens Catalonia's self-government" (CiU, 2010, p. 82).

The failure of this negotiation strategy with Spain's President Rajoy, and the growing mobilisation of Catalan society led to the CiU prioritising pro-independence initiatives that were not limited to fiscal aspects. One should recall that before the 2012 elections, Parliament had passed Resolution 742/IX which covered the demand to exercise the right to self-determination. The Resolution was passed by the CiU, ERC, ICV-EUiA, and JxS (Resolution 742/IX). The 2012 programme presented by CiU is important, as Lo Cascio (2016) noted, because it set the narrative for the 2012–2015 legislature and above all, the strategy that led up to the public consultation of November 9, 2014. This document contained the following:

> Catalonia has the right to decide its future. The moment has come to exercise this right. After thirty years, it is time to choose and for Catalonia to make its own path in a natural fashion. This path—a national transition—will allow us to make our own decisions and choose between the options we have. It means living better (CiU, 2012, p. 12).

The CiU (which had espoused regional autonomy for over thirty years) now defended a manifesto that put an end to its moderating role in Spanish politics:

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5 See CDC (1996).

6 What Jordi Pujol called the *Espriu-Vicens Vives Project*. See Ribera (August 22, 2010).

7 For a detailed history of the CDC, see Culla (2000).

"We want to build a broad social majority so that Catalonia can have its own State within the European framework, allowing us to take our rightful place among the nations of the world" (CiU, 2012, p. 12). Moreover, the party fully committed itself to consulting Catalonia's citizens on independence:

> The Catalan Government will consult the Catalan people so that they can freely and democratically decide their collective future. The consultation will be held in accordance with the Law and will have full democratic legitimacy (CiU, 2012, p.13).

The shift towards pro-independence positions between 2010 and 2012 was relatively fast for a party that had hitherto taken a very gradual approach to realising Catalonia's national aspirations. Yet as the legislature unfolded, it became clear that it would be impossible to hold an official referendum under Spanish Law and thus public consultation would end up being no more than a Catalonia-wide straw poll. Against this background, tensions mounted within the pro-independence coalition (the CDC) regarding the 'route map', which envisaged holding plebiscitary elections (on a common platform with the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya [ERC], Assemblea Nacional Catalana [ANC], and Associació de Municipis per la Independència [AMI]). The Unió party (the 'U' in 'CiU') decided to put an end to its long-standing pact with Convèrgencia (the 'C'in 'CiU'). At the same time, pressure on the ERC to create a joint platform for the plebiscitary election led to the creation of JxS.[8]

The cross-cutting candidacy fostered by the CDC [formerly the Convèrgencia part of CiU, renamed the CDC] and ERC and the participation of Demòcrates de Catalunya, Moviment d'Esquerres, and candidates from Civil Society associations (ANC and Òminum) re-forged their alliance with a programme that went beyond the demands stemming from the right to self-determination formulated in 2012 by the CDC.

8 For an analysis of CiU's political programme, see Barrio (2014).

The new document, with some variations, followed the route map agreed on the March 30, 2015 among the political players behind JxS. This 'route map', which is currently being carried out by the Catalan government presided over by Carles Puigdemont, sets out a programme and marks the steps on the path to secession.

The institutions of a new State, and Catalonia as a European nation. In this case, 'The Right to Decide' was considered exercised through the elections and the document legitimised a unilateral approach:

> To sum up, since July 2010 to December 2014, the Spanish State's response to the mass mobilisation of Catalonia's Civil Society and Catalan Government proposals has been a repeated 'No'. It has been 'No' to: (1) Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy; (2) the fiscal pact; (3) Catalonia's declaration of sovereignty; (4) discussion of a referendum in the Spanish Parliament; (5) the public consultation held on the 9th of November. All of this has culminated in criminal charges being laid against three members of Catalonia's Government. This wholly negative attitude on the Spanish State's part and refusal to discuss matters leaves plebiscitary elections of the Catalan Parliament as the only option. Here, the parties must give the elections a plebiscitary character and turn them into the public consultation that the Spanish State has blocked at every turn (JxS, 2015: 29).

• The ERC: From the tripartite pact to JxS. As we have said, the ERC also took part in this joint candidacy. The evolution of the republican electoral programme was also relevant during this period. That said, if one analyses the ERC's track record, the party opposed the 1978 Spanish Constitution because it did not enshrine the right to self-determination. Here, one should note that the ERC defined itself as an independent party at its 17th Congress, which was held in 1991, (ERC, 1991). Thus, the evolution of the party's political programme has more to do with tactics at any given moment than with deep-seated changes in ideology.

The party programmes of 2003 and 2006 focused on improving self-government through Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy. The ERC advocated voting 'no' in the referendum on the amended Statute because the party stuck to the text that had originally been passed by the Catalan Parliament in December 2005. In contrast, in 2006 the ERC committed itself to implementing the new Statute:

> Esquerra is committed to full and rigorous application of the Statute of Autonomy. ERC's long democratic tradition and institutional soundness means we will both respect the referendum decision and strive to put it into effect. The ERC will act to ensure the provisions of the new Statute are implemented (ERC, 2006, p. 5).

In this text, the party set out its political project as one that was "progressive and based on self-go-vernment" and made commitments to striving for a pluri-national and pluri-lingual State. 'The Right to Decide' was mentioned in the same paragraph and vaguely linked to the idea of transforming the Spa-nish State. This moderation was much less apparent in the 2010 political programme and even less so in 2012. In the 2010 elections, the ERC put forward a direct defence of an "Independent Catalan State" and committed itself to using the Public Consultati-on Act to hold a referendum on independence. This programme was clearly much more pro-independence than the one put forward by CiU but it is also true that it made ending the economic crisis a priority. It also stressed the ERC's social policy achievements in two tripartite governments. In this respect, the 2012 manifesto was a watershed (ERC, 2010).

Like in the CiU's case, the ERC 2012 manifesto marked a watershed. The text set the aim of building an "Independent State". Moreover, the party elected a new leader—Oriol Junqueras—under whose leadership the ERC doubled its parliamentary seats compared with the 2010 election. The cross-cutting points proposed by the ANC (a non-party, grass-roots association): sovereignty, referendum, and citizens' participation in the constitution to cap off the new State (ERC, 2012,

p. 6), were incorporated in the ERC's 2012 political programme. Moreover, the programme also made reference to Resolution 742/IX approved by the Catalan Parliament. The programme set out a 'route map' to hold a referendum in 2014—a point shared with CiU—but it went further in proposing the drafting of a Catalan Constitution and the end of the path to independence.

• The CUP: last, the pro-independence bloc ended up having to accept working with the CUP. One cannot say that the bloc changed its programme in this period, given that it had never before formed a common electoral platform. Both in the 2012 and the 2015 elections, it maintained a pro-independence position bordering on rupture, social transformation, civil disobedience and working on a new constituent assembly (CUP, 2012, pp. 9-11). In this respect, the 'route map' put forward for the elections of September 27, 2015 differed greatly from that agreed between the CDC and ERC. The CUP advocated a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) but undertook to work with the pro-independence majority to draw up the way-points on the 'route map', including a constituent assembly and sundering links with Spain (and, in the CUP's case, from the EU too) (CUP, 2015, p. 10).

The Right to Decide from a Federalist perspective. Analysis of political programmes up to the creation of a majority pro-independence bloc in the Catalan Parliament (after the 2015 elections) also needs to cover shifts in the parties traditionally advocating Federalist solutions. The 'Federalist' parties are PSC and ICV-EUiA (which, since the last election, form part of the CSQP parliamentary group, together with Podem and Equo). We have already seen that the Federalist option was one of the biggest casualties of the rising pro-independence tide—at least in terms of parliamentary seats. Both PSC and ICV have gone through major internal upheavals and, in the PSC's case, with splits and 'purges' of leading pro-Catalan members. For ICV, the creation of Podem in January 2014 (to stand in the EU parliamentary elections in the same year) saw the party lose support at both the local and the national level, forcing ICV to forge alliances

(forming part of 'En Comú' in the Barcelona City Council, and in the CSQP in the Catalan Parliament).

The main difference between advocates of Federalism has been their position on 'The Right to Decide' and independence. Both the PSC and ICV have defended a Federal model for Spain (albeit with nuances). In the case of the PSC, 'The Right to Decide' was absent from their programmes; the party touched upon the subject in different ways during the 2012 and 2015 elections.

• The PSC: 'The Right to Decide' or constitutional reforms? With civil society mobilising for 'The Right to Decide', the PSC presented a programme in which it undertook "to foster the reforms needed so that Catalan citizens can exercise their 'Right to Decide' through a referendum held in accordance with the Law." (PSC, 2012). Successive votes in the Catalan Parliament and the Spanish Congress put these commitments to the test and created major rifts in the party.

Given the controversy sparked by "legal, agreed" public consultation, the 2015 programme only referred to constitutional reform: "We advocate a reform of The Spanish Constitution and we consider that said reform should be voted on in a referendum, allowing citizens to express their support or rejection through the ballot box." (PSC, 2015, p. 27). The broad policy lines of Federalism were discussed following the Granada Declaration of 2013, which continued the regional self-government ['Autonomous Community'] model. The Declaration did not take into account the asymmetric proposals made by the PSC (Sanjaume-Calvet, 2015) and ruled out any kind of referendum or defining Catalonia as a nation.

• The ICV: 'The Right to Decide' and the CSQP. The ICV-EUiA's candidacy (which formed part of the CSQP's manifesto in 2015) showed much greater continuity than PSC's in relation to 'The Right to Decide'. The party's electoral programme referred to the concept, which it considered more feasible through the 'Federal' route:

> The construction of the EU means that it no longer makes sense to plan State powers in the same way as in the last century. Even so, one cannot deny

that States still have a lot of power in Europe. That is why one cannot dismiss self-determination as a thing of the past (ICV, 2006, p. 287).

Accordingly, the 2010 and 2012 electoral programmes did not contain any big changes. The 2010 Eco-Socialist manifesto focused more on self-determination, foreshadowing the three options set out in the public consultation held on November 9, 2014:

> 'The Right to Decide', should the State refuse to negotiate on the constitutional reform advocated by Catalan institutions, will involve holding public consultation to decide Catalonia's future. Here, citizens could choose from among three options: sticking with the status quo; a State within a Federal Spain; or independence (ICV, 2010, p. 221).

The manifesto for the 2012 programme reiterated this proposal and threw in the idea of a national accord on 'The Right to Decide' through a Public Consultation Act. Here, one should recall that during this period the party's Members of Parliament voted for the parliamentary resolutions of 2012, which requested the Catalan government to hold a referendum, and the declaration of Catalonia as a sovereign nation in January 2013. In 2015, with the entry of Podem, The CSQP explicitly rejected the plebiscitary nature of the elections called by pro-independence groups and instead, placed Catalonia's aspirations within the state framework:

> The opening of a constitutional process is Catalonia's contribution to breaking with the political regime established throughout Spain in 1978. It is based on the desire to work with other peoples in fostering constitutional processes capable of mutually influencing and strengthening one another, each based on a given cultural and national identity. Embarking on a constitutional process does not pre-judge Catalonia's future relationship with the Spanish State. A Catalan Republic is compatible with an Independent State, a Federal or a Confederate State—the decision rests with the freely-expressed will of the people (CSQP, 2015, p. 210).

In the same programme, the party again advocated a referendum on Catalonia's constitutional future and reaching broad agreement on a constitutional process (CSQP, 2015, p. 211).

Corollary: parliamentary consolidation of the independence movement

To sum up, the analysis of the manifestos presented by Catalan political parties and alliances for the Catalan parliamentary elections over the last decade reveal a clear radicalisation. The 2012 elections marked a watershed in this process. If we compare this trend with the one described in the previous section, it is clear that citizens' preferences have changed in step (and in some cases, even preceded) this radicalisation, explaining the shifting positions taken by political parties. While the 2012 elections consolidated a parliamentary majority in favour of 'The Right to Decide', the 2015 elections did the same, but this time round, with a pro-independence majority.

That said, the results of the elections of September 27 (see Figure 9) showed that this majority was not only secessionist (as one could infer from the 'plebiscitary' nature of the elections) but also favoured (yet again) 'The Right to Decide' and the constitutional process (Orriols and Rodon, 2016). The JxS coalition, even though presenting a pro-independence programme, included the possibility of a referendum agreed with the Spanish State:

> We wish to keep open the option of negotiating a binding referendum on Catalan independence with the Spanish State. This offer must be compatible with the time horizon for declaring independence and the holding of constituent elections (JxS, 2015, p. 35).

Nevertheless, here one should add two major considerations.

First, (1) the Spanish central government's point-blank refusal to consider the various proposals made by Catalan parties and institutions on the holding of a referendum or public consultation during the 2012-2015 legislature; (2) the deadlock following the public consultation of November 9, 2014, which led the pro-independence parties to agree on an alternative road map based on holding a full-blown referendum. Second, the prospect of the Spanish general elections in 2015 (yet another general election was held in June 2016) shaped expectations on the prospects of political change in Spain. In ICV's case, there was the need to dovetail its position on 'The Right to Decide' with that proposed by Podem in order to draw up a common manifesto as part of an electoral alliance. On the other hand, the PSC's most pro-Catalan wing split from the party during the legislature. As a result, the party's 2015 manifesto was both less ambitious and vaguer than its 2012 one on 'The Right to Decide'. Thus, 2012 marked a watershed in the creation of a broad, majority agreement on the need for a referendum or public consultation to channel demands for 'The Right to Decide'. So while the pro-independence forces radicalised their demands in the face of State intransigence, the 'Federalist' forces watered down their demands to 'constitutional reform' or a Spain-wide constitutional process.

EXPLAINING THE ELECTORAL CHANGES IN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

A conclusive analysis of what caused these changes goes beyond the scope of this paper. That said, it is worth noting some of the questions that researchers and historians need to answer.

First of all, there is the question of to what extent public opinion foreshadowed changes in the parties and how this shift in preferences affected the discourse of political leaders. An analysis of manifestos and survey data point to the wave of support for 'The Right to Decide' coming before changes in party political programmes—especially in the CiU. Yet to confirm this hypothesis, one would need to not only analyse electoral documents but also the public discourse of party leaders. A more detailed study would also need to be undertaken on each party's voters. The relationship is probably a two-way one (and thus to some extent endogenous).

Second, the fragmentation and polarisation of parties is a trend that goes beyond Catalonia. This makes us think that these trends have an explanation that goes beyond the purely regional frame and may have played an important role.

The economic crisis is a factor that needs to be borne in mind when delving into the reasons for the political changes in Catalonia. Here, one should note that this factor has been cited as a major driver of change in other political systems over the last few years (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). While Catalan preferences on the regional government model began changing before the onset of the economic crisis and its fall-out, one cannot rule the crisis out as an important factor in this shift. Various hypotheses can be made in this respect. On the one hand, the crisis' impact on individuals' behaviour and opinions might have led to frustration being channelled into the issue of regional conflict with central government. On the
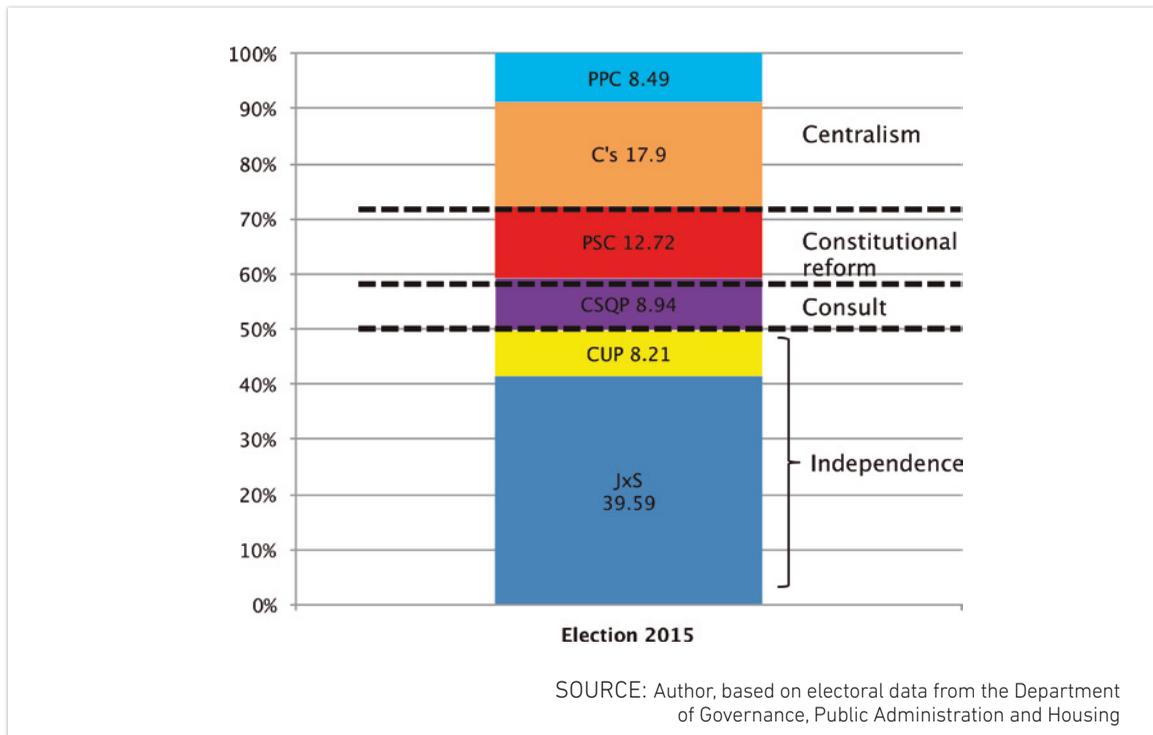
other, one can also point to the way the economic crisis has helped the State pursue its recentralisation agenda. Here, the Spanish government has been able to seize upon ECB dictated austerity and bail-out terms to weaken regions' powers and regional funding (Viver, 2011).[9]

A COMPLEX SCENARIO: UNILATERALISM, MAJORITIES, AND 'ROAD MAPS'

At the beginning of 2017, Spain's political situation did not seem to favour either constitutional reforms or agreement on other solutions. The re-election of a conservative Spanish government meant Madrid's policies remained the same, exemplified by judicial persecution of advocates of the 'route map' drawn up by the Catalan government and JxS.

9 See also Muñoz, J. and Tormos, R (2015)

Figure 11. Results of the Catalan elections of the 27th of September 2015: candidacies and independence suport

SOURCE: Author, based on electoral data from the Department
of Governance, Public Administration and Housing

In this context, the Catalan debate is linked to interpretation of the Catalan elections held on the September 27, 2015 and the pro-independence majority it delivered. The pro-independence forces—JxS and CUP—considered their joint parliamentary majority justified them following the 'route map' (set out in the Statement of November 9, 2015). Yet various circumstances meant that certain pro-independence sectors—for instance, the ANC again raised the issue of holding a referendum to give effect to 'The Right to Decide'. These circumstances were: the fact that the Catalan government was a minority one; the difficulty of making the elections plebiscitary (Orriols and Rodon, 2016); and the fact that pro-independence votes did not reach 50% of all those cast (which, as we mentioned, was the threshold defined as 'plebiscitary' by JxS). As we saw in the previous paragraph, the referendum proposal was not initially part of the 'route map' that is now being followed by the Catalan government. Yet it was argued that such a referendum would legitimise a subsequent Declaration of Independence and the application of transitional laws to constitute a new Catalan State.

Be that as it may, the radical shift in Catalan politics over the last decade is a fact. It not only mirrors changed preferences for regional government/secession but is also reflected in a more fragmented, polarised system of political parties. The pro-independence movement, which used to be a fringe phenomenon in parliamentary terms, now occupies centre stage in Catalan politics, together with 'The Right to Decide'.

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