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Speaking for Place or for Party? Territorial Representation and the Legislative Behavior of Deputies in the Spanish Congress

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Democratic Spain has evolved political institutions and practices that reflect both centralizing and decentralizing forces. The major political parties are highly disciplined national organizations, and deputies (MPs) in the parliament (the Cortes) answer directly to their party leaders and whips throughout the legislative process. By contrast, the evolution of the regional autonomy system (Estado de las Autonomías) has been driven by intergovernmental conflicts and ambiguous political institutions that have decentralized major areas of the administration of policy, shifting power to subnational political actors such as regional presidents, mayors, nationalist parties, and the regional offices of the statewide parties. Yet even as it is poised at the interplay between national and subnational political society, the Congreso de los Diputados (the governing lower house of the Cortes) hardly reflects these tensions. Regional issues are among the most salient in Spanish politics but among the least apparently divisive in the Congress. Mújica and Sánchez-Cuenca (2006, p. 100) find in their study of constitutional legislation during the first six legislatures that 91 percent of territorial organic laws received the support of both government and the main statewide opposition party. Spain remains a democracy in which territorial cleavages shape most of the major questions of policy and legislation that emerge in the Congress, but the centralizing tendencies of partisan discipline reinforced by parliamentary rules favoring the power brokers of the major parties, mute territorial interests in the legislative process.

The institutional weakness of the Senate, the upper house, undermines further the representation of territorial interests in the Cortes. Based on the 1978 Constitution, the Congress was meant to represent population and the Senate was, by Article 69.1, to be the representative body of the regions following the German Bundesrat or the original American Constitution of 1787. In practice it falls well short of this aspiration. It may rule on issues of intergovernmental import, but if its decisions contradict the Congress it can be overruled by that body with an absolute majority vote. The Senate is a second reader of legislation which can make technical changes to bills without the consent of the Congress, but more substantive changes require the assent of the lower house. The Congress remains the essential parliamentary body of the Cortes.

The seemingly weak representation of territorial interests in the Cortes in Spain contradicts what many observers of European political parties and legislatures predict is the growing “territorialization” of decentralized, “composite” democracies. Some scholars predict that decentralization will cause organizational power within parties and legislatures to shift from national to subnational levels, so that subnational actors (party leaders and subnational governments) will increasingly influence rules and practices as well as positions on policy choice (Panebianco, 1988; Maor, 1998; Hopkin, 2002; Harmel, 1981). In some cases, regionalization causes subnational party branches to gain autonomy from national leaders and activists (Putnam, 1993; Geser, 1999, pp. 18–19; Downs, 1998). Lancaster (1999) argues that federalism (the existence of overlapping yet autonomous jurisdictions) and multiple levels of political self-identification combine to cause party systems to adapt by creating formulas of compounded representation. Greater territorialization of representation should cause parties to reconfigure their internal rules, allowing for greater diversity of subnational interests and experiences within the organization (Tuschhoff, 1999). The importance of addressing subnational interests is also reinforced in advanced industrial democracies by the growing volatility of party electorates and the related tendency to democratize candidate selection (Pennings and Hazan, 2001).

Under such conditions, national party leaders have little choice but to listen to as well as advance the careers of their subnational co-partisans lest they lose a significant share of the vote in the next national election (Van Houten, 2003, p. 9; Geser, 1999, p. 19; Hopkin, 2002, p. 8).

Some recent work on the Spanish case suggests that territorial representation in the Congress is indeed strong. The electoral success of regionalist parties underscores the importance of the territorial cleavage in Spanish politics. Supported by voters in both historically nationalist regions (the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia) as well as non-nationalist cases (e.g., Cantabria, Valencia, Andalusia, the Canary Islands), regionalist parties have consistently captured significant shares of votes and seats in regional parliaments and even in the Congress (Pallarés, Montero, and Llera, 1997; Hamann, 1999, p. 119). Eight of
Spain’s regions have had regionalist parties gain seats in the Congress, with Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Navarra having done so consistently since 1977. Thus empowered, several of these regionalist parties have traded their support to governments for greater decentralization of policy authorities and resources (Heller, 2002; Boix, 1998). It is therefore not surprising that some scholars have found evidence that Spanish deputies’ careers are shaped by their ability and interests in representing their regions (Stolz, 2001, 2003).

On an institutional level, the Spanish polity, despite being one of the most decentralized in Western Europe, does not entirely fit these expectations. The apparent contradiction between a decentralizing state and centralized and disciplined national parties in the Congress is mediated by what is in reality a dual system of partisan representation. Parties and their MPs interact in the Congress in ways that allow for territorial concerns regarding decentralization to be addressed even as the statewide parties maintain internal discipline around a national legislative agenda. On one level, Spanish parties are “parliamentarized,” in that they are led by political elites focused on winning majorities and forming a government (van Biezen, this volume; Sánchez de Dios, 1999; Gunther, 1989). Reinforced by electoral institutions such as closed lists, 50 voting districts with an average magnitude of six, and the d’Hondt rule for translating votes into seats, the system evinces strong majoritarian tendencies despite proportional representation.2

Yet the parties, including the statewide organizations, face some incentives to integrate the preferences of subnational party offices. Although party leaders determine placement of candidates on national electoral lists, only the top few positions are filled this way. Most candidates are nominated by local party offices and placed under subnational and national notables selected by the leadership (Montero, 2005, pp. 66–7). National party leaders must approve all candidates to seats in the Congress, but they do so sensitive to the fact that these MPs must represent the party to a local constituency. The salience of these preferences in candidate selection is reflected in the growing number of MPs with some previous experience in subnational appointed or elected office that have been chosen by their parties to sit in the Congress. This regional cohort has increased from 41.1 percent in the third legislature (1986–9) to over 59 percent of all MPs in the seventh (2000–04) (Montero, 2007, p. 582). Individual deputies are conduits for their parties in listening and responding to constituent demands at the electoral district level. These practices have become commonplace as the local offices of the main parties coordinate weekly visits by most deputies and transmit concerns back to the national office. These concerns have been shown to influence the decision-making of national party leaders regarding legislation and spending based on analyses of overall spending patterns in the regions (Boix, 1998, pp. 142–5; Grau i Creus, 2000). However, no studies have uncovered the systematic mechanisms of subnational influence within the legislative process.

Scholarship on regional influences on national legislation has tended to analyze interparty ties, particularly the role of nationalist partners in minority governments (e.g., Heller, 2002). The governments that formed in the 1990s, for instance, were alliances between one of the two statewide parties and a combination of nationalist or regionalist parties (PSOE from 1993–6 and PP from 1996–2000 with CiU, PNV, and CC). Between 2004 and 2008, the PSOE maintained a slim majority due to its ties with Catalan nationalist parties. However, the pattern of decentralization does not overlap neatly with the incidence of minority government, nor have the nationalist parties in the Congress been consistent in advocating decentralization to the regions they supposedly represent, let alone to all regions (Montero, 2005, pp. 70–1). It might also be argued that the incentives the statewide parties face even during periods of absolute majority to cultivate relations with nationalist parties is more permanent since these parties consistently act as the “hinge parties” (partidos bisagra) with whom the national parties must ally to form a majority.3

Determining how the duality of centralized and decentralized dynamics in the party system in Spain influences the legislative process in the Congress requires that the unit of analysis by the MP rather than the parliamentary group (party). If some of the primary channels of subnational influence occur within parties and not just between them, then the behavior of subparty agents must be analyzed (Morgenstern, 2004). Comparing intraparty factions is one alternative, but these groupings are not consistently coherent within the Congress and not all parties are so divided (Field, 2006b, p. 91). Moreover, the turnover rate for deputies is high, most serving only one to two terms (Morán, 1989, 1996; López Nieto, 2001). That undermines the coherence of subparty groupings, leaving the individual MP herself as the best unit of analysis for determining how territorial concerns are articulated within the legislative process of the Congress.

Acquiring data on individual MP motivation is difficult. Roll-call data is virtually meaningless given the high degree of unity in votes during much of the period under study, although such interparty collaboration has been in decline since the early 1990s (see Field, 2005, and in
Surveys of deputies are few and inconsistent in design and results across time. Filtering out individual motivations from behavior that can be the result of partisan loyalty and the effects of discipline is complicated by the fact that most MPs operate within the established parties. According to the rules of the Congress, individual MPs are prohibited from acting independently. If they leave their party, they do not lose their seat by law, but must join an amalgam—"mixed group"—(Grupo Mixto) that functions only nominally as a single party.

Given that regional influences in the legislative process, if they occur at all, filter in earlier than final votes on bills, the study of individual MPs' behavior in parliamentary debates is a good indicator for uncovering how the centralizing and decentralizing dimensions of the Spanish political system are mediated in the Congress. Delgado (2006) finds that one of the only kinds of data available on MP behavior is questions asked in committee and in plenary sessions of the Congress. Although committee delegates answer to their party leadership, they also have various opportunities for integrating the interests of groups in their electoral districts into the legislative process through deliberations on specific pieces of legislation. Even opposition deputies can affect the agenda of the governing majority by introducing bills that compel the government to address an issue (Maurer, 1999, p. 33). The parties themselves retain incentives to listen to individual MPs who transmit potentially useful information back from their electoral districts. To what extent, then, do territorial interests shape what deputies say in plenary sessions, the positions they hold on standing committees and within their respective parties, and their overall pattern of legislative activity? The present study addresses these primary research questions.

The following sections will take up these questions. First, I outline how MPs are agents in the legislative process in the Congress. Then I address the question of whether there is a "subnational cohort" of politicians with regional and local experience and whether these deputies use a subnational frame to address legislative issues in plenary sessions. The following section details the operationalization of the main explanatory and dependent variables in the statistical portion of the study. The final section offers some conclusions based on the empirical analysis.

**MPs as agents in the legislative process**

Political parties have analytical pride of place in the study of the Spanish legislative system, and for good reason. They are the agents that according to the Standing Orders of the Congress are charged with organizing all parliamentary work. The parliamentary parties exert the greatest influence on the rules of procedure, the content of the legislative docket, the process of considering government- versus opposition-initiated bills, and the composition of permanent and temporary committees (Oñate, 2000). MPs that violate party dictates can be punished according to the internal regulations of each parliamentary group (Field, 2006b). But despite all of this, politicians have sufficient opportunities to influence legislation. In plenary and committee sessions, individual MPs can ask oral or written questions and submit reports on legislation that represent the interests of groups in their electoral district. My own interviews of the general and organizational secretaries of statewide and nationalist parties in seven regions verified that MPs with the strong backing of subnational party offices exert this influence regularly (Montero, 2005).

Interventions in plenary sessions (el Pleno) provide the best bird's eye view of the legislative process and how individual deputies as well as parties stand on the content of bills. The plenary is the chief legislative body of the Congress, the final arbiter of all laws and motions, and the body that determines who sits on its primary administrative commissions, including the presidency of the chamber, the committee of parliamentarians (la Mesa) which oversees formal procedures, and all of the standing and ad hoc committees (Oñate, 2000, pp. 74–5; Sánchez de Dios, 1995). To be sure, the standing committees retain prerogatives over the drafting and authorization of legislation, most of which is initially considered and voted in committee (Paniagua Soto, 1997, p. 412). Bills are passed on for debate and a final vote in the plenary except for legislation on which the Pleno has agreed to delegate this power to the standing committee (competencia legislativa plena, see Sec. 5, Art. 148 of Title V, Ch. 3 of the Standing Orders of the Congress). This contingent authority that committees have over legislation can go the other way as the plenary can take responsibilities for drafting a law away from a standing committee. The likelihood of this happening can be predicted by the type of law under consideration. The legislative process operates through two major forms of bills: (1) parliamentary bills (proposiciones de ley) and (2) government bills (proyectos de ley). The rules of procedure give government initiatives priority, obviating the need to go through a formal proposal process in committee, so these kinds of bills dominate in the plenary. Parliamentary bills are usually the product of non-government parties, but they can also be submitted by regional parliaments, popular petitions, the Senate, and no fewer than 15 MPs. These pieces of legislation are most often composed and debated in committee than are
government-initiated bills. Being products of the opposition, parliamentary bills that survive the committee process must be addressed in the plenary. Consequently, these are the parliamentary initiatives most likely to reflect the priorities of both government and opposition. Taken as a whole, then, the legislation addressed in plenary sessions is a representative mixture of both government- and opposition-initiated proposals.

Committees can be circumvented altogether if a government-initiated bill is expedited. The executive can use emergency powers to issue decree laws that can be converted into government bills in short order. Legislation can garner an “urgent procedure” or be required to issue a single reading prior to a vote. The plenary can also delegate that a standing committee expedite a bill. Such procedures can cut the time needed to turn a bill into a law by half (Sánchez de Dios, 2006, p. 560). In her study of the Congress, Maurer (1999, p. 37, and this volume) asserts that most amendments to bills are negotiated informally among party leaders, circumventing committee debate. Therefore, despite the plenary’s preeminent role in the legislative process, committee activity represents a major part of deputies’ work. Even with expedited review and plenary votes on organic laws and decrees that do not go to standing committees, over a majority of all bills are reported in committee and more than a third of all laws are approved through committees (Sánchez de Dios, 2006, p. 571; Oñate, 2000, p. 86). This makes standing committees in the Congress a key area for interparty negotiation and compromise. Nevertheless, the more important of these actions are eventually delivered and debated in the plenary, so deputy interventions at this level reflect a broader range of legislative projects than what committees address.

One aspect of committee life that is relevant for the influence that individual MPs may enjoy in plenary debates is the position they hold within the committee structure. Depending on whether a deputy has a rank of authority within the committee or a legislative function, some deputies exert greater voice than others on matters of importance that reach the plenary. In practice the composition and responsibilities of committees are the result of the extant balance of partisan forces in the plenary. Each party has votes on committees commensurate with their share of seats in parliament (voto ponderado). But given the role of the opposition in proposing bills and exercising a measure of control over the government through oral and written questions in the plenary, the deputies of the smallest parties can attain a position of some significance in the committee system. Without a formal position, the voices of individual MPs can be easily overwhelmed by that of others since there is an average of 41 members on standing committees. Large committee memberships make those in positions of political importance particularly influential (Arce Janáriz, 1994, pp. 283–4).

The portavoces are the whips of the legislative process, and ultimately, the sources of partisan power within the assembly. They govern both the composition of the standing committees and the distribution of work within them. This includes control of the process of submitting projects of law and amendments to extant legislation (Sánchez de Dios, 2006, p. 554). In effect, no piece of legislation can be debated if it is not approved by the portavoz of the party of the bill’s author. Portavoces also limit motions for debate and oral questions, which MPs can ask by right, but the whips limit by number (Sánchez de Dios, 1999, p. 151). Party leaders and whips coordinate their actions on legislation in a rules committee known as the Junta de Portavoces. This entity is composed of the leaders and whips of each of the major parties and the president of the chamber. The portavoces are the elected representatives of their parties and only they are empowered by the standing orders of the Congress and the Constitution to negotiate with other parties. In this way, the Junta de Portavoces effectively organizes parliamentary life.

Portavoces on legislative committees play a key role in selecting an author or producing a report themselves on each bill. The reporter (ponente) presents his study and not the piece of legislation itself for debate in plenary sessions. Even if a portavoz is not a member of the Junta de Portavoces, she may have substantial influence over legislation, although party whips and leaders will have a final say.

Apart from the portavoces, the governing positions on standing committees have some influence over the docket of legislation. Like the Mesa of the plenary, each standing committee has its own body of parliamentarians composed of one president, two vice presidents, and two secretaries. The president is usually a member of the majority party but the vice presidents and the secretaries may be members of other parties, including the chief opposition party. As an entity, the leadership of the committee determines the order of the legislative docket, but all of its priorities follow closely the explicit preferences of the Mesa of the plenary. Consequently, MPs that are presidents, vice presidents, or secretaries of standing committees have a greater measure of influence than mere members (vocales), but they are not as politically powerful as portavoces.

Even with all of these constraints, individual MPs can still exert some influence in the midst of parliamentary debate. They can control the
content of their questions, and if they are referred to as individuals in the course of a parliamentary debate (turno por alusiones), they may respond without any restraint imposed by their portavoz. In plenary sessions, where the terms of the party's position on legislation are more defined than in committee debates, we can expect individual MPs to tow the party line, but they are relatively free to spin their questions and requests for information in a way that highlights an issue of importance to their electoral district or region. Queries made in plenary sessions are often used by MPs of the opposition parties to express opinions on government-initiated legislation or procedure. But they have also been used by members of governing parties to express exceptions or new information designed to influence the legislative process. As suggested above, party leaders have incentives for their backbenchers to frame issues in these terms if it will play well back in the electoral district. For example, many interventions by Catalan Socialists appeal to regional interests as a means of undercutting the arguments of the Catalan nationalists (CiU) who, until recently, governed in the region. In this way the logic of electoral campaigns filters into the routine practices of parliamentary life.

Individual MPs have some opportunities to express an interest that reflects priorities in the electoral district in which they were elected. This interest need not be contrary to the wishes of their party or the governing whips, but may play right into the electoral or legislative priorities of the parliamentary group. Deputies with positions of some authority—standing committee presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, and whips—may be uniquely placed to give these statements resonance. What remains to be demonstrated is that they have the necessary motivation to speak for place.

The subnational cohort and speaking for place

Spain's democratic institutions were forged at the same time that the state was decentralized into a system of 17 autonomous regions. Both processes occurred during the years following the transition to democracy in 1977–8. The autonomy-creating process was asymmetrical as it was initiated by and first favored the devolution of administrative responsibilities and fiscal resources to the historically nationalist regions of Catalonia, Galicia, and the Basque Country, that had their original statutes of autonomy abrogated by the dictator Francisco Franco following the Spanish civil war. The democratic Constitution of 1978 expanded this process allowing 14 other regions to join the State of the Autonomies. Manuel José Terol Becerra (1999) calls this the "Constitutional Big Bang" in which the Constituent Assembly set down general parameters for an autonomy process with no clearly defined end point. Decentralization in Spain then expanded due to the persisting weakness of the minority UCD government and nationalist and non-nationalist pressure from below (Colomer, 1998). While policy-making has remained centralized overall, major areas such as health, education, and industrial policy shifted to the Spanish regions in the years following the transition to democracy (Heywood, 1998). By 1983, all 17 regions had signed autonomy statutes guaranteeing them constitutionally protected authority over the administration of social and economic policy.

The career trajectories of the Spanish political class were fundamentally altered by the autonomy process since it expanded greatly the number of elected and appointed offices available to ambitious professional politicians (Morán, 1989). By the beginning of the eighth legislature in 2004, more than 60 percent of all MPs were politicians with subnational experience. The average number of years served in elected or appointed subnational office also increased, almost doubling between the third legislature (2.18 years) and the seventh (4.26 years). Even as service to national party offices remained a strong predictor of longevity and the acquisition of leadership positions in the Congress, most Spanish politicians dedicated themselves to serve local party offices that maintained more influence over electoral lists for the regional parliaments (Montero, 2005).

If there are any MPs that will tend to articulate the interests of regional and local agents it is deputies with extensive professional and personal ties to the subnational level, and particularly the electoral district that elected them. But the extent to which territorial identification is a valid predictor of the motivations of MPs in the Congress remains unclear. Available survey data gathered by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) and analyzed by Delgado (2000) and Martínez and Méndez-Lago (2000, 2002) provide some support for a link. These studies find that MPs give a higher priority to representing the interests of their electoral district constituencies than their parties. This may be especially true in small electoral districts where the average number of MPs is low (Maurer 2000, pp. 86–7). But other survey data contradict these claims. For example, Uriarte (2000), who bases his findings on an independent poll of 212 MPs, finds that such concerns are outweighed strongly by universalistic ideas such as "serving society" and "generating social change." Such responses are vague if not entirely vacuous, or they are simply self-serving and counter-intuitive given all that is
known about partisan discipline in the Congress. This makes the available survey data of deputies insufficient and unreliable.

The study of career trajectories provides an alternative source of empirical data, and in this regard, several aspects of the career patterns of Spanish MPs favor their articulation of subnational interests in the legislative process. First, the aforementioned regular constituency service that deputies do often at the behest of national party leaders creates incentives to speak publicly on matters of importance to local bailiwicks (Sánchez de Dios, 1995, p. 97). Second, most deputies end their political careers after their stints in the Congress, with a small (11.8 percent) and declining number deciding to pursue elected office at the subnational level afterwards (Montero 2007, pp. 584–5). On the one hand, this tendency to top-off political careers in the Congress provides some degree of cover from party whips if these deputies wish to speak on issues of local importance or frame questions in a way that will play well in the electoral district. On the other hand, given their disinterest in pursuing future political offices at the local level, MPs may be disinclined to make the effort. The extent to which deputies’ designs on returning to private life after serving in the Congress interact with these opportunities is unknown, but the situation allows MPs some measure of impunity from party leaders who, after all, cannot take away a sitting member’s seat.

Alternatively, it may be that deputies with subnational experience are less likely to be very active in the legislative process, let alone to speak on behalf of regional interests. Deputies with extensive subnational experience, particularly in local government, may become especially frustrated with the vacuity of the MP’s routine role as a mouthpiece for partisan directives. This contrasts strikingly with what many deputies in the subnational cohort report in surveys as the rewarding closeness to constituents that they treasured in their former lives as mayors, municipal councilors, and MPs in regional parliaments (see López Nieto, 2000; Delgado, 2000). The present study of legislatures V–VII (1993–2004) provides some support for this view. Counting the number of interventions made by each MP per term served during the period as an indicator of the degree of legislative activity, and comparing the differences in means between those in the subnational cohort and those without subnational experience, I found a lower average activity level (16.9 interventions) for MPs in the former group than deputies in the latter cohort (18.3).

This last point may be less important if deputies with regional experience achieve positions of leadership in the legislative process. Thus empowered, they may have more incentive and opportunity to be more active and to use regional frames when they do speak. During legislatures V–VII (1993–2004) more deputies with subnational experience (186) gained leadership positions—presidents, vice presidents, and/or secretaries—on the standing committees than those without such experience (118). Brokenedown by committee leadership role, more presidents (48 vs. 35), vice presidents (98 vs. 70), and secretaries (122 vs. 79) belonged to the subnational cohort. The same was true of all standing committee whips during the same period, 55 percent of whom had subnational experience. Even on the all-powerful Junta de Portavoces a small majority of members (16 of 29) had subnational experience.

Regardless of the degree of legislative activism or leadership profile, some percentage of MPs do make references to regional or local issues or arguments when they speak in plenary sessions. These references can be thought of as a “frame” for organizing ideas. Following the use of this term by collective action theorists (e.g., Tarrow, 1998), I employ this concept to code instances of MPs referring to their own region or locality to justify or dignify an argument or position on a particular piece of legislation. Separate interventions on the same matter were coded as distinct interventions. Of the 28,872 interventions available for coding during legislatures V–VIII (1993–2008), 3,700 or 13 percent of the total used a regional or local frame. Of 752 deputies for which we have both biographical and intervention data during legislatures V–VII (1993–2004), 31 percent (231) used a regional frame at least once.

Were members of the subnational cohort more likely to use territorial frames than other MPs? Using an independent sample t-test that divided all 752 MPs in the V–VII (1993–2004) legislatures into the subnational cohort and a control group, I found that the difference in the mean number of regional frames used was statistically insignificant (t = 1.390, p = .165). However, more robust tests using multiple regression techniques are necessary to draw out the causes of MP behavior. This study organizes these tests around three research questions that stem from what we know concerning MPs as agents, their career profiles, and the tendency to employ regional frames in debates during plenary sessions of the Congress:

1. Are MPs with subnational experience more active in the legislative process than those without subnational experience?
2. Do members of the subnational cohort achieve positions of leadership on standing committees to a greater extent than those without subnational experience?
3 Do these MPs interject a regional or local frame into their interventions in plenary sessions more than deputies without subnational experience?

The study

The present study uses MPs in the fifth (1993–6), sixth (1996–2000), and seventh (2000–04) legislatures as the unit of analysis. Assessing the behavior of the agents of the legislative process requires more than a consideration of their voting patterns. The Congress’s partisan discipline, which most scholars concede was high during the period under study, makes unpacking the preferences of individual deputies based on roll-call votes impossible. Instead, I design a number of variables based on biographical data detailing each deputy’s career trajectory before their stint in the Congress, their terms in the lower house, their committee service record, and the nature of their interventions in plenary sessions to explain patterns of MP behavior. The biographical and service data were gathered from the archives of the Congress and a who’s who-type study done by Menéndez Gijón and Fontes (2002). MP interventions in plenary sessions of the Congress were available through online files organized by deputy and based on sections taken from the Diario de Sesiones and the Boletín Oficial de las Cortes (Congress of Deputies, 2008).

Using the three research questions listed above as a guide, this study regresses three dependent variables on a core explanatory model. The first dependent variable is legislative activity in plenary sessions, specifically the number of interventions for each deputy. This number is divided by the number of terms served by the deputy during legislatures V to VII. The most common type of intervention is oral and written questions (31 percent or 7024 of the total 22,735 interventions). Statements on proposiciones de ley/parliamentary bills (5703, 25 percent), proyectos de ley/government bills (5089, 22 percent), mociones urgentes/urgent motions (2437, 11 percent), interpelaciones urgentes/urgent questions (1540, 7 percent), and real decreto/royal decree laws (957, 4 percent) are the other types. The second dependent variable is the number of portavoz/Spokesperson appointments on standing committees the MP held per term. Only 20 percent of all deputies in the V–VII legislatures were portavoces on legislative committees, so this is a distinct indicator of leadership. Committee portavoces are in a privileged position in moving reports on bills through their committee and in transmitting them to the plenary. Finally, the third dependent variable measures the number of regional frames used in interventions in plenary sessions per deputy-term.

The core model used in the study specifies two measures of subnational experience prior to the MP serving in the Congress. The first is a scale variable for the years the deputy spent in an elected or appointed office. Subnational experience was determined based on whether the MP had previously served in the regional parliament, as mayor, as a city council member, as president of a region, or was appointed to head a regional chancellery (subnational ministry) or some other significant position in the subnational bureaucracy below the chancellor level. Since data for the years of experience variable is the most difficult to acquire, the number of cases fell from a total of 752 records to 646.13 The second subnational experience variable focuses on party service. It measures the number of years the MP worked for the subnational office of the party.14 This experience may have overlapped with the deputy’s service in elected or appointed subnational office. I also include service to the national party by employing a dummy for whether the MP previously held an executive position in the national party. Depending on which variable was regressed, the model includes a control for either overall legislative activity or regional framing activity per term. Another control run in all specifications was the number of terms previously served in the Congress. This factor by itself may explain patterns of activity since experience facilitates how MPs can manage the legislative process (López Nieto, 2000; López Nieto et al., 2003). Leadership may also be tied to number of terms served since parliamentary longevity and attaining leadership positions are strongly correlated (Montero 2007, p. 576, n.6). Finally, some of the models control for the party of MP. We can expect that deputies of nationalist and regionalist parties will use a regional frame more often than deputies of the PP or PSOE, so a dummy indicating membership in CiU, PNV, CC, or BNG (the major nationalist parties) was employed.

The selection of the fifth, sixth, and seventh legislatures provides the most favorable conditions for testing the model. First, these are more recent legislatures, allowing for a test of previous experience in the constituent assembly (1977–9) and legislatures I to IV, but also extensive experience in subnational office. More than 50 percent of MPs in legislatures V to VII (1993–2004) began their careers in subnational offices. Second, analyzing the fifth through seventh legislatures helps correct for any possible trade-offs between subnational experience and holding seats in the Congress. Incompatibility norms, particularly those consecrated in the Law of Incompatibility of 1985, prohibit MPs from simultaneous incumbency in regional parliaments and the Congress (but not the Senate). Pooling data for the more recent parliaments allows greater
variance in career trajectories. Third, the opportunities for MPs to speak on bills were greater in these legislatures because there were more bills under consideration on average. The overall productivity of the fifth, sixth, and seventh legislatures was far higher than that of the previous four, with a total of 1901 legislative proposals coming under consideration as compared to 401 (Paniagua Soto, 1997, p. 412).

It can be argued that the pooling of data across the later parliaments undermines assessment of whether majority or minority government types make any difference in MP behavior. Much of the scholarship on government and opposition in the Congress argues that consensus is more likely under minority governments since those in power must compromise with coalition partners and sometimes with the opposition (Field, this volume; Mujica and Sanchez-Cuenca, 2006; Sanchez de Dios 1999, p. 158). However, preliminary tests using case groupings by legislative term did not show that this fundamentally affects deputy activity, leadership, or the use of regional frames. Also, the party leading the government seems to not make much of a difference either. Consequently, the tests discussed in the next section pool data across different governments. This range of legislatures includes minority governments (V, VI) and majority ones (VII). Of the minority governments, one was formed between the PSE and the main nationalist parties (V) and one was based on an alliance between the PP and the nationalists (VI).

Initial tests on the core model showed heteroskedasticity to be a problem in most cases. Though not severe, based on visual inspection of the residuals and the results of the Breusch-Pagan test, I opted for a correction. Heteroskedasticity can introduce bias in error terms, leading to potentially inaccurate estimates of statistical significance. The use of robust standard errors corrects for this bias, producing p-values that are more accurate. Consequently, all of the models discussed below use robust standard errors.

**Results**

The results of the three Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions are reported on Tables 4.1-4.3. The first test estimated legislative activism per term for each deputy with the core model. Notably, regional experience is inversely correlated with activism, suggesting that members of the subnational cohort are less inclined to speak in plenary sessions. Service to the local party office is negatively associated with activism. This means that subnational partisans do not transfer their political experience or position into more activity in the Congress. However, the correlation is significant only at the 90 percent confidence level. Legislative activism is predicted by membership in a nationalist or regionalist party and previously serving in an executive position within the national party office. National partisan leaders and nationalist/regionalist MPs speak more in plenary sessions than those who are members of the subnational cohort. Regional framing was associated with the dependent variable, and as the model on Table 4.3 confirms, both of these variables correlate positively and consistently. Overall, the first model explains over half of the variance of all legislative activism.

**Table 4.1** Predictors of Legislative Activism

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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>RSEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional experience (Years)</td>
<td>-0.387</td>
<td>0.191*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to local party (Years)</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>0.109*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to national party (Dummy)</td>
<td>5.322</td>
<td>1.775**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist membership (Dummy)</td>
<td>29.148</td>
<td>5.408***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous legislative experience (Terms)</td>
<td>-0.914</td>
<td>0.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional activism</td>
<td>3.846</td>
<td>0.416***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>9.272</td>
<td>1.514***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: R² = .555, N = 646
Primary numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in the adjacent column. All tests are two-tailed: * sig. at .05; ** sig. at .01; *** sig. at .001.  
* Significant at the .1 level.

**Table 4.2** Predictors of Standing Committee Portavoce Assignments per Term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>RSEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional experience (Years)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to local party (Years)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to national party (Dummy)</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist membership (Dummy)</td>
<td>0.423</td>
<td>0.131**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous legislative experience (Terms)</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional activism</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative activism</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.002***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: R² = .393, N = 646
Primary numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in the adjacent column. All tests are two-tailed: * sig. at .05; ** sig. at .01; *** sig. at .001.  
* Significant at the .1 level.
Table 4.3 Predictors of Regional Activism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>RSEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional experience (Years)</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.046*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to local party (Years)</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.021*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to national party (Dummy)</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>0.331*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist membership (Dummy)</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
<td>1.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous legislative experience (Terms)</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative activism</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.019***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.807</td>
<td>0.415*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( R^2 = .496, N=646 \)
Primary numbers are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in the adjacent column. All tests are two-tailed: * sig. at .05; ** sig. at .01; *** sig. at .001.
* Significant at the .1 level.

The second model predicts the number of portavoz assignments each deputy received on legislative standing committees per term. The chief finding is that MPs of the nationalist and regionalist parties tend to capture these positions. Membership in the subnational cohort fails to predict committee leadership. Overall legislative activism is important as the more active legislators, logically, tend to be assigned as portavoces. But, notably, regional framing is inversely associated with leadership, although the coefficient is not statistically significant. Interestingly, service to national party offices is negatively (though not significantly) associated with being a portavoz, which suggests that these jobs may go to individuals who are not necessarily leaders within the top echelons of the party, but are able to have responsibility delegated to them. Given the insignificance of this factor, further testing would be necessary to establish this finding. More than a third of the variance of the dependent variable is explained by the core model.

The third model estimates the tendency to engage in regional framing, explaining about half of the variance in this dependent variable. Although model 4.1 showed that MPs with subnational experience are less likely to speak in the plenary, model 4.3 confirms that these deputies are more likely to use regional frames when they do. That is true for deputies whose experience is measured in years previously served in subnational politics and MPs who have worked for the local offices of their parties. This is the only model that provides evidence for subnational experience affecting MP behavior in the expected manner. Service to the national party office and overall legislative activism predict regional framing, confirming the results of model 4.1 of a consistent correlation between activism and framing. Unlike in the first two models, the tendency of MPs of nationalist and regionalist parties to use regional frames is not significant. This is a somewhat surprising finding given the results of the previous two tests and also the logical baseline expectation that nationalists would naturally use regional frames. Previous legislative experience was insignificant in all three models and the sign ran in the wrong direction, disconfirming that veteran MPs are more likely to be more active, use regional frames, or take leadership positions, at least in legislatures V to VII (1993–2004).

Conclusion

Are members of parliament with subnational experience more active in the legislative process? Are they inclined to take a leadership role in the production of legislation? The findings in this study suggest that “no” is the answer to both questions. They confirm the results of surveys of MPs that underscore their overall discouragement with the legislative process in the Congress. The faculty of backbenchers keeps most MPs passive in plenary sessions and disinclines them to assume positions of leadership on standing committees. The members of the subnational cohort do not tend to be the most active deputies nor do they become legislative leaders, hence they are unlikely to be good representatives for subnational interests. This finding is commensurate with that of other authors in this volume (e.g., Ortbal, Hamann) who find evidence of weak representation in the Congress and the party system of some key groups and political actors. It is clear that the Spanish legislative process is commendable for its disciplined parties, strong committee system, and periodic consensus, but it does not represent effectively major cleavages in Spanish politics.

It may be the case that territorial representation exists in the legislative process but that it is only weakly institutionalized. MPs may not be representing subnational interests but following the wishes of their partisan leaders when they employ regional frames in parliamentary discourse. The results of model 4.3 show that deputies who are experienced partisans are more likely to use regional frames than even deputies who belong to nationalist or regionalist parties. This suggests that regional frames in parliamentary debates are not the tactics of representatives of subnational interests but are part of the statewide parties’ strategy of appealing to local constituencies. Regional framing in plenary debates are part of a top-down politics rather than a bottom-up one.
This result fundamentally contradicts what several surveys of MPs have posited as a prevailing “non-partisan conception of representation” (Martínez and Méndez-Lago, 2002, p. 71) among Spanish MPs. Always a deficiency of survey techniques, what respondents say is not always commensurate with their actions. This appears true in the case of Spanish deputies who may report that representing the interests of their electoral districts and regions are among the highest priorities, and more important than serving their parties, but it is service to their parties and the MP’s overall activism in the legislative process that predict whether they speak in the plenary on issues of import to their home constituency. Of course, demonstrated service to the local party matters too, but the results seem to emphasize the partisan dimension of that commitment and not the subnational experiential one since it is the partisan variables that are most consistent across the models. This suggests that when MPs use regional frames in their legislative interventions, their motivation is not primarily to satisfy a local constituency but to follow what party leaders have deemed the most appropriate rhetorical strategy. Even the statewide parties in Spain have a dual imperative mandate to speak to issues of subnational concern in ways that resonate with their constituencies. MPs seem to implement that mandate in their parliamentary discourse, not under pressure from constituents but under the direction of their party leadership.

The findings for nationalist/regionalist party membership are notable in that the results confirm that these partidos bisagra use their MPs in the legislative process to secure their organizational interests as potential or actual players in coalition governments. Their deputies are more active in plenary sessions than the membership of the subnational cohort in general, and they tend to secure the crucial legislative roles of portavoces of the standing committees more often than not. This is consistent with other studies that have shown that the regionalist parties increased their ability to modify government legislation during the 1990s when they became coalition partners (Maurer, 1999, p. 34; Heller, 2002). “Hinge parties” need many “hinge MPs” with access to the key decision points in which legislation is crafted and delivered to the plenary. Moreover, the ideological orientation of nationalist/regionalist parties is center-center-right and their legislative strategy tends to cooperation rather than competition (Sánchez de Dios, 2006, p. 574). These factors facilitate the placement of these MPs in positions of influence on standing committees.

Notably, MPs of the regionalist parties act as power brokers but it is not clear that framing their interests in territorial terms composes an important part of their behavior. The non-finding for regionalist parties in the third regression may itself be indicative of the weakness of regional frames, but the nature of the result does not allow for definitive judgments on the matter. Further work on this question may test the commonly accepted idea that regional interests insert themselves into the legislative process primarily through the nationalist/regionalist parties. Research into informal politics may reveal that regionalist interests infuse the legislative process but are poorly detectable with the formal political indicators used here. Still, our assumptions concerning regionalist deputies and their preferences may simply be wrong. In previous work, I found that, although deputies of regionalist parties tend to have more experience in subnational government prior to serving in the Congress than the MPs of the PP or the PSOE, they serve less time (Montero, 2005). Survey research reported by Martínez and Méndez-Lago demonstrates that regionalist MPs are also less likely to think of themselves as representatives for their regions and they are less likely to engage in constituency service duties for their parties at the district level than MPs of the statewide parties (2000, pp. 236–7, 261). Whether due to longevity in the Congress or some aspect of self-identification, regionalist deputies are not primarily responsible for regional framing in plenary sessions.

Contrary to the work of those who expect the decentralization of the administration of the state to inject territorial interests into the partisan and legislative structures of democracies, this study builds on recent findings demonstrating a disconnect between political society and intergovernmental politics in Spain. Like van Biezen (this volume), I find that Spanish political institutions have developed somewhat differently from others in Western Europe. The larger question for further comparative analysis stemming from this is whether the sequencing of the formation of political institutions at the national level has an effect on how representative functions operate later. The Spanish case is one in which parliamentary and partisan institutions were forged before the State of the Autonomies was enacted, and particularly before the model of autonomy was widened from the original, mostly nationalist, regions to include all 17 regions of Spain. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1992) have famously argued that this guaranteed that decentralization following initial “founding elections” would not endanger democracy. Having consolidated national legislative procedures and given national parties and even regionalist organizations incentives to forge governing alliances, the decentralization of the Spanish state could not cause the country to fly apart like the Soviet Union or dissolve into an uneasy
multinational confederation like Yugoslavia. Yet this same sequencing also did not prevent the State of the Autonomies from evolving through a process of iterated intergovernmental conflicts and inter-regional rivalries into what Moreno (1994) has called an "imperfect federalism." It may be that the Spanish party system and the Congress neither shaped that process nor were shaped by it to the degree some scholars have believed. The Spanish case may suggest that representation of place occurs in an arena far broader than that of formal representative institutions. In this sense, the Spanish experience is one to mine for further clues concerning the importance of distributive conflict in intergovernmental relations as an extension of territorial representation and politics.

Notes

1. Organic laws concerning the State of the Autonomies are meant to determine the distribution of policy responsibilities, authorities, and resources. These have historically been the most contentious issues in the evolution of the regional autonomy system.

2. In d’Hondt systems, seat allocation tends toward proportionality only in districts with seven or more representatives. See Rae (1971, pp. 116–17).

3. Maurer (1999, p. 39) finds empirical evidence of this in the calculations of PSOE leaders during the 1989–93 term when the party held half of the seats in the Congress but cultivated agreements on legislation with CIU and PNV in anticipation of leading a minority government in the future.

4. The two notable exceptions are organic laws that reform rights, constitutional rules, and regional statutes and decree laws that are initiated under the emergency powers of the government. Both of these types of legislation must be approved in the plenary. Organic laws make up an appreciable amount of total legislation, accounting for 15 percent or more of all bills (Mújica and Sánchez-Cuenca, 2006, p. 91). The Congress has 14 permanent legislative committees: Constitutional; Foreign Relations; Justice and Interior; Defense; Education and Culture; Economy, Commerce, and Public Revenue; Budget; Agriculture, Ranch Economy, and Fishing; Industry, Energy, and Tourism; Infrastructure; Environment; Social and Labor Market Policy; Health and Consumer Affairs; and Public Administration.

5. Exceptional procedures exist to allow a group of MPs to overrule the portano.

6. These individuals may also act as the president or general secretary of the party as has been the case for the PSOE or they may be an elected executive second or third in line from the president of the party. This is the case for PP, IU, CIU, and PNV.

7. This protection is less valuable for deputies who wish to extend their political careers. Party leaders can punish deputy defection by removing the offending MP from the electoral list for the next cycle.

8. An "intervention" for the purpose of this study involves oral questions (which may also be submitted in writing) and other statements on proyectos de ley, proposiciones de ley, interpellaciones urgentes, mociones urgentes, and real decretos during plenary sessions of the Congress.

9. The difference, however, is small and statistically insignificant (t = −.604, p = .546).

10. I exclude the third dimension of framing—mobilization—since that is more often done by whips rather than individual MPs. See Tarrow (1998, pp. 21–2) on the distinctions drawn here.

11. For the V–VII (1993–2004) legislatures, for which there are more complete data, the figure is 11.4 percent. I thank Chris Kettenmann who did the coding project during the summers of 2005 and 2006 and the winter of 2007.

12. The number of deputies in the study uses MPs as the level of analysis. Since each MP can serve in more than one term, each record contains data for more than one legislature. For legislatures V–VII, the number of records (deputies) in the study constitutes 96 percent of all deputies who sat during these legislatures and 47 percent of all deputies who served in the Congress during the democratic period (again, using deputy as the level of analysis). This includes MPs who took a baja as well as those who replaced them. The aggregate numbers of deputies who served per legislature are 407 in the fifth legislature, 408 in the sixth, and 380 in the seventh.

13. These numbers still represent a large percentage of all deputies who served during the fifth, sixth, and seventh legislatures. Excluding cases with missing data, the total number of records represents about 85 percent of all deputies who served full or partial terms during legislatures V–VII and 40 percent of all MPs who served from the beginning of the democratic period.

14. Alternative measures such as a dummy for local party service and executive position in local party were discarded due to problems with tolerance values.
5
The Power of Committees in the Spanish Congress of Deputies

Lynn M. Maurer

Traditional theory based on long-standing democracies holds that legislative committee systems are more influential in public policy when the committees are permanent; possess member expertise, low turnover, ample resources, and weak party discipline (Loewenberg and Patterson, 1979, p. 125; Mezey, 1979, p. 43; Olson and Norton, 1996, pp. 6, 11; Strøm, 1990b, p. 43). While there is still little research on legislative committee systems in new democracies, the existing studies of the newer democracies in Eastern Europe point to two trends: a significant difference between formal powers and practice, as well as variation in the strength of committees from one legislative session to the next (Ilonszki, 1995; Jackiewicz and Krok-Paszkowska, 1997; Zajc, 1997).

This chapter contributes to the literature on parliamentary committee strength by examining the permanent committee system of the Spanish Congress of Deputies over eight legislative sessions from 1979 to 2006. Four waves of elite interviews with congressional deputies, ministers, and congressional legal counsel allow us to test propositions from the literature on longer-standing and nascent democracies. A total of 65 open-ended interviews were carried out in 1991, 1996, 1998, and 2006 with members of all major parliamentary groups. The study reveals that the committees were most powerful in the first post-constituent legislative session (1979–82) when most of the conditions put forth by traditional theory did not exist. In these early years of Spanish democracy, the mark-up ability of the committees was due to disunity in the executive party, the existence of a minority government in a parliament where parties were mirrored proportionately in committees, and the desirability of consensus among elites in order to stabilize democracy.

As these conditions disappeared and institutionalization took hold, committees became rather weak in their policy-making ability. However, informal negotiations among party group and committee leaders mean that substantive amendments are often accepted in the committee phase. Moreover, in some cases the committees have full legislative authority over bills, which are sent directly to the Senate without returning to the plenary session (Standing Orders of Congress, Sections 148 & 149). Interview respondents perceive that this legislative capacity was used more over the last two legislative sessions (2000–08) to the benefit of the Government and their coalition partners rather than of the opposition parties. Important changes over time in policy-making influence of the committees following the first post-constituent legislative session are largely due to the minority or majority status of the Government. Additional findings regarding the Spanish committee system include the importance of transactional amendments, an increase in technical amendments, and a now entrenched informal norm of negotiating amendments outside of and before the committee meetings among parliamentary group leaders.

In sum, I find that in addition to classic theoretical expectations—that small, specialized committees with fixed jurisdictions, resources, and staff produce powerful committees—democracies with party systems and institutions in flux can also produce powerful committees. As institutionalization increased over time in the Spanish case, the policy-making influence of the committees declined. Furthermore, the Spanish case confirms the importance of examining informal practices to determine the strength of parliamentary committees in the legislative process.

Committee theory based on long-standing and new democracies

According to traditional theory based on long-standing democracies, specialized and independent committees allow for independent action on the part of the legislators to affect policy. Therefore, parliamentary influence in policy-making is enhanced by a powerful committee system. The committee phase tends to favor the input of opposition parties since the government party is less likely to make concessions in the highly visible plenary sessions. The opposition stands a greater chance of having their substantive amendments adopted, or of negotiating joint amendments, with the government party in committee (Griffith, 1974, p. 33; Strøm, 1990b, p. 43). In recent times, committee systems have become more complex as parliaments respond to rapidly increasing workloads and complex issues. Just as executives deal with a wide range
of intricate issues through bureaucratic division of labor, parliaments must also decentralize decision-making in order to effectively manage the workload. Many models of policy-making have been offered to explain governmental decision-making. The rational-comprehensive policy-making model, in which all possible outcomes are known and weighed against each other, only functions, in practice, for small-scale problems with few variables. Legislatures, in varying degrees, come closer to imitating the branch or organizational policy-making model used to describe bureaucracies. In such an organization, decision-making is fragmented and the division of labor provides the opportunity for multiple actors to develop expertise in the role that is assigned to them. Instead of attempting the task of thoroughly researching all possible outcomes, actors deal with a known repertoire of relevant alternatives. As such, the need for information is reduced without exerting tension on the capacity of the organization. Policies are developed from a manageable number of alternatives that vary only slightly from one another. Within this model and within democracies in general, policies change incrementally based on experience with past policies and as such are constantly made and remade (Allison, 1971, pp. 80–91; Lindblom, 1959, pp. 80–1; Wildavsky, 1975, pp. 6–7).

This is an attractive model to apply to legislatures since committee systems provide the potential for decentralized decision-making. In addition, within this model, actors need only to agree on policy and not on the values or objectives leading them to agree on the policy, nor on the ends that the policy will entail (Lindblom, 1959, p. 83). Ideologically different members or party groups may, through bargaining, agree on a specific policy, but their objectives and perceived ends will necessarily differ, perhaps drastically. In fact, these differences will lead parties to act as watchdogs of one another and to force other actors to consider certain policy options that might have otherwise been overlooked.

The nature of legislatures restricts them from perfectly imitating bureaucracies because legislators elected to represent constituencies do not easily fall into the rank order pattern found in bureaucracies (Loewenberg and Patterson, 1979, p. 117). However, the division of labor is now inherent to the policy process in legislatures. As García-Escudero Márquez (2003, p. 145) explains:

Assemblies, like all collective organs, have experimented with the necessity to divide itself up into minor organs, in order to obtain rationalization of its work and a certain specialization; the more urgent it is, the more we advance in the complexities of modern legislation. Divisions are a result of this impulse and committees have become widespread. In the legislative work of the committees, as a consequence of the convenience of preparatory work, smaller individual and collective organs arise, that fall under the category of reporters or subcommittees.

Thus, in spite of the varying degrees of influence exercised by committees and subcommittees, they exist in legislatures to manage the legislative workload.

Studies of committee systems in established democracies identify several features that affect the strength or independence of legislative committees. Committees have been found to exert more influence on policy when they have fixed jurisdictions corresponding to ministerial divisions, membership is characterized by low turnover and high expertise, and the committees possess resources, such as staff. A large number of small standing committees may also add to expertise and decision-making power, whereas ad hoc committees wield less expertise and therefore, less mark-up ability (Benda, 1997; Damgaard, 1995; Loewenberg and Patterson, 1979; Jenny and Müller, 1995; Mattson and Strøm, 1995; Olson and Norton, 1996; Strøm, 1997, 1990b). For example, in Britain, traditional legislative “standing committees” are not permanent with fixed jurisdictions, but instead are formed for each individual bill; as such, members of the committees have not been able to develop an expertise or to substantially alter legislation. “Select committees” formed in the 1970s have allowed for some specialization, but their powers are of scrutiny and not over legislation. Formal powers are necessary for influential committees (such as the ability to initiate, block, or mark up legislation), but not alone sufficient to render them powerful.

Probably the most important factor determining the strength of committees in parliamentary systems is the degree of party discipline. Members of committees that function in the cross-party mode have more independent ability to affect legislation, whereas disciplined parties represented in proportion to the chamber at large will hamper that ability (Andeweg and Nijzink, 1995; King, 1976). Varying degrees of party unity are found in parliamentary systems, as well as within their committees. For example, in Sweden, Damgaard (1995, p. 114) found that voting dispersion has become more frequent and acceptable in committees, and that the committees have thus become more independent and specialized. On the other hand, Ilonszki (1995, p. 197) found that in the new Hungarian parliament, party discipline overpowered potential committee
strength: “Despite the functional separation and organizational complexity of the committees, their role was subordinate to that of factions, following from the logic of transition and the establishment of parliament.” Although party unity tends to be high in parliamentary systems, policy-making influence may still be exercised through the committee system, and must be examined on a case-to-case basis.

In new democracies, committee systems form within less institutionalized chambers and are open to a range of fluctuating external and internal factors. In examining committee systems in the new East Central European parliaments, Zajc (1997, p. 492) notes “the appearance of the first modern committee systems in most of these countries occurred together with the institutionalization of new democratic parliaments deeply engaged with sweeping constitutional reforms.” Recently, waves of studies on the committee systems in these new parliaments have applied standard indicators of committee strength. A 1997 group of studies carried out by scholars of the Research Committee of Legislative Specialists point to these fluctuations (Longley and Ágh, 1997); the researchers commonly remarked that formal powers differ greatly from practice (Ilonszki, 1995; Jackiewicz and Kroko-Paszowska, 1997; Zajc, 1997). Of Poland, Ilonszki (1997, p. 482) points out: “A mere focus on ‘official’ procedures and rights of committees is misleading in the case of the new democracies, because ‘ideally outlined’ concepts are different from specific practices.” These studies reveal not only differences among parliaments and their committee systems, but also show changes within the same country from one legislative session to the next in the strength of the committee systems due to the variation and stabilization of the party system, parliamentary organization and practice, and the democratic system at large.

The changing power of committees in Spain

This study builds on prior research that examined the policy-making influence of the Spanish Congress. Parliamentary influence was defined as the legislature’s ability to affect public policy substantially, where parliamentary groups—either of the opposition or the governing party—can affect policy independently of the executive (Maurer, forthcoming, 1999, 1995). Likewise, in this study, committee influence is defined as the ability of opposition parties, coalition parties, or the executive’s parliamentary group to affect policy substantially in committee independently of the executive. In the prior study, committee strength was a variable that rendered unexpected results according to the theoretical literature: i.e., committees were strong in the first legislative session (1979–82) in Spain although the traditional conditions favoring committee strength were non-existent (standing committees, member expertise, ample staff and resources), except for weak party discipline. Even in the fifth and sixth legislative sessions (1993–2000), when parliamentary influence was found to be higher than during other sessions, the ability of the committees to affect public policy was not reported to be as great as in the first legislative session (1979–82). These findings merit further examination of the committee system in the Spanish Congress.5

Methodology

Elite open-ended interviews were used to gather data on committee influence. The same questionnaire was used for each respondent and responses were systematically analyzed. The interviews conducted in the first three waves (1991, 1996, 1998) focused broadly on the influence of the Spanish Congress and lasted an average of one hour; the interviews conducted in 1996, which focused solely on the committee system, lasted about 20–30 minutes. This method was chosen to gather information on informal practices in the Congress that are not captured in formal documents. Open-ended interviews also allow the respondents to shed light on legislation and practices considered of importance to them and to their parliamentary group, and as such, responses that differ from parliamentary group to parliamentary group, as well as from leader to backbencher, can be analyzed accordingly.

The respondents were asked a series of questions on the amendment process and a series of questions on resources and other conditions of the committee system. They were asked if, in their experience, committees are able to substantially amend important bills; if they answered positively, they were asked to give examples. The interviews contained questions on the manner in which the members arrived at the amendments (for example, discussed in the committee, informally before the committee, etc.). They were asked to describe the frequency of transactional amendments; if they believed that some committees were more powerful than others; and if the degree of influence wielded by the committees varied from one legislative session to another. They were asked to describe the degree of expertise and turnover of the members, the committee assignments, staff, and the effectiveness of closed sub-committee sessions. As the interviews consisted of open-ended questions,
and not surveys, respondents usually offered information in addition to that specifically requested. Interviews were analyzed comparing parliamentary group (party), year of interview, and parliamentary session. Committee influence and the conditions affecting its variation are measured by the responses of those interviewed.

**Influence of the committee system**

Powerful committees with the ability to substantially alter or even block legislation can contribute to the overall policy-making influence of a legislature. Since the policy-making influence of the Congress was high in 1979–82 and 1993–2000 (Maurer, forthcoming), we might expect that the committee system was strong, and that modifications to legislation occurred in committee sessions. However, committees were reported to be influential only in the first legislative session (1979–82); since then, they have been less influential, though not inconsequential. Coalition partners, or potential partners, of the governing party have found the committee stage to be fruitful in negotiating amendments with the executive's parliamentary group; these parties are able to exert more influence in policy-making than major opposition parties.

Although the committee system was designed with permanent committees with fixed jurisdictions, during the first legislature (1979–82) they were still young and subject to inexperienced membership and high turnover. Staff and resources were seen as a luxury and were quite limited. It is to be expected that a new committee system would not enjoy the advantages that may come with institutionalization; however, there is also no reason to expect that congressional committees in a new democracy would be powerful in policy-making, other than a possible tendency for young party systems to display weak party discipline.

Committee markup ability in 1979–82 was due to other circumstances: first, the existence of a minority government in a parliament where parties were mirrored proportionately in committees; second, disunity in the executive party (Unión de Centro Democrático [UCD]); and third, the desirability of consensus among elites in order to stabilize democracy (see Field, this volume). While the first condition has reoccurred (minority government), the last two conditions (high disunity in the executive party and the search for consensus) were unique to the transition and consolidation period. As such, Spanish parliamentary committees weakened as consensus declined and high party discipline became the norm.

An informal norm of negotiating outside of parliamentary committees developed in the Congress, which moved the debate outside the committees. This trend began during the UCD governments when major constitutional decisions were made through elite settlement behind closed doors (Gunther, 1992). Respondents from the Socialist era (1982–96) reported that this practice continued as the Socialist majority declined. Negotiations often took place between committee spokespersons and parliamentary group leaders before the committee meetings. This allowed the Government to negotiate concessions for votes with the smaller regionalist parties, instead of conceding to the major opposition party the Popular Party, whose policies tended to differ radically from those of the PSOE. During 1993–2000, and again in the legislative session that began in 2004 with a Socialist minority government, amendments (both pure and transactional) were often adopted in committee sessions.

However, it is debatable if this should be considered high committee influence, since the debate and negotiations surrounding the amendments are reported to take place outside of the formal committee sessions. The norm of informal negotiations before the committee meetings has been strong throughout the life of the democratic parliament. Negotiated amendments are presented as transactional amendments, usually by the governing party's parliamentary group. It is thus difficult to establish the origin of the amendment without consulting with the parliamentarians or possibly news accounts for more visible laws. According to one respondent that had served in five legislative sessions, “substantial amendments are formalized in the committee or the plenary session but the negotiations are not visible. They are decided on by negotiation external to the process” (Interview #06–6).

A 2006 respondent explained:

There are times in which the subcommittee members gather for a meeting and the deputy from the majority group announces that they have already reached an agreement with another group over the modifications that are to be made to the bill. I believe that it is through this type of modification that the government bill is influenced by the committee. At other times, the negotiations take place in the subcommittee (Interview #06–4).

The respondent maintained that the manner in which amendments are negotiated is not regulated, so it is acceptable parliamentary practice to negotiate the amendments outside of the committee and later adopt them in the committee session. According to the respondents, the willingness of the majority party to form a broader majority on
certain bills is crucial to the ability of the smaller opposition parties to have substantial amendments accepted. According to the respondents, the largest opposition party tends to present alternative texts (enmiendas a la totalidad), although they also present amendments (enmiendas parciales).

Second, 2006 respondents claim that more substantive amendments are accepted in the committee phase now rather than being postponed to the final plenary debate; they attribute this to the greater number of technical amendments that are not desirable for discussion in the plenary session. When asked in which phase most substantive amendments are accepted, another respondent replied:

Normally amendments are sought throughout the process—in sub-committee, committee, and sometimes in the plenary session. But usually an agreement is sought in the committee phase—if the groups are willing. Sometimes, they wait till the last moment in the plenary session to create some political drama. I say that they “dramatize” because it is as if they are putting on a bit of theater (Interview #06–6).9

Thus, more controversial political topics are often left for plenary session debate while technical amendments are made in committee, substantive or not.

Explanations of the varying influence of the Spanish committees

In this section, I explore several explanations for the varying influence of the Spanish committees.

Full legislative jurisdiction

The weaker influence of the Spanish committees after the first legislative session (1979–82) cannot be explained by weak formal powers. The decline in influence is particularly surprising considering that new regulations adopted in 1982 allowed committees to have full jurisdiction and final say over certain areas of legislation (Subirats, 1986, p. 331). The interview respondents presented several reasons for the decline in committee influence in spite of the ability to act with full jurisdiction.10 One deputy who had served both in the UCD and the Popular Coalition (CP) reported in 1991 that deputies increasingly wanted to defend important political amendments in the public eye of the plenary sessions rather than in less visible committees:

Committees have definitely lost more and more importance; the sub-committees as well. As the public has lost interest in the parliament, parliamentarians have ensured that all major arguments are made in the plenary session, where there is something to be gained. I believe that the importance of committees has declined (Interview #91–9).11

Respondents from 1996 reported that committees were most influential in the adoption of technical amendments and that in fact, laws had become increasingly technical. Full jurisdiction allows for the bulk of the technical work to be carried out in the committee rather than in the plenary session. Perhaps most importantly, as more competitive party politics developed and high party discipline was established, committees lost policy-making influence.

Expertise and turnover

As specialized committees are seen to be strong committees, one possible explanation for the early importance of committees might be that there was high expertise in the 1979–82 session and that the influx of new legislators in 1982 represented non-specialists. However, this was not the case. The vast majority of committee members tended not to be experts during any of the sessions in question and, if anything, expertise increased over time. Responding to a series of questions designed to measure the degree of specialization, respondents agreed that, in spite of an overall lack of expertise, there was an attempt to place people on committees of which they had some understanding of the subject matter. A 1991 respondent asserted that on any given committee only about two to five members were experts.12 These tended to include the committee chair and the party spokespersons on the committees, thus creating a hierarchical structure of elite expertise. Yet most respondents reported that expertise rose after 1989, due to increasing committee service. By 1996 and 1998, respondents reported expertise only among the longest serving of the committee members:

Parliamentary veterans have acquired much experience and knowledge, in the heart of the subject matters, as well as in parliamentary forms and procedures, but the newest members of parliament have more difficulty. Although deputies are usually members of two
committees, their knowledge generally focuses only on one subject matter (Interview #98–50).\textsuperscript{13}

Respondents in the 2006 interviews noted that although most committee members lack expertise, those who are able to serve on the same committee over several sessions develop a certain knowledge regarding the issues dealt with in the committee. The Committee on Social Issues was named as having higher expertise among the membership as many members had previously worked in social services (Interview #06–1).\textsuperscript{14}

Members of the smaller parliamentary groups serve on so many committees that the sheer workload deters the development of expertise.

Turnover in committee membership in the Congress is high, thus impeding further the development of expertise, and turnover has increased since the beginning of the third legislative session in 1986. Taking an average of the turnover rate in six key permanent committees (Constitutional, Justice, Defense, Economy, Education, and Agriculture), the average turnover rate (percent of new members) in the eighth (2004), seventh (2000), and sixth (1996) legislative sessions was 78 percent. This is a higher turnover rate than in fifth (68 percent), fourth (70 percent) and third (70 percent) legislative sessions. In the second legislative session (1982–6), 84 percent of members were new to the committees, and in the first legislative session (1979–82), 67 percent of the members had not served on the committee in the Constituent session (1977–9).\textsuperscript{15}

Although the turnover rate fluctuated, it has increased since the third legislative session in 1986 and has remained on average fairly constant at a high 78 percent since the beginning of the sixth legislative session in 1996. This would mean about eight or nine of the committee members (out of a typical membership of 39 or 40) remain on the committees from session to session. This is somewhat higher than the three to five members that respondents perceived as experts. Although a high turnover rate is not identical to the notion of low expertise, it certainly impedes the development of expertise.\textsuperscript{16}

Some turnover was actually due to the fact that deputies desired membership on committees in which they have expertise, and pursued their desire to serve on the committees that represent their occupational backgrounds, namely as educators and lawyers. Therefore, three committees were reported to have a higher proportion of expert membership, as well as more requests than members: the Justice and Interior Committee, the Education and Culture Committee, and the Committee on Social and Employment Policy. On the other hand, the Defense Committee was cited as one of the least desirable committees because few Spanish parliamentarians are knowledgeable in defense matters. Only a few experts served on the committee; the rest of the members tended to be fulfilling a party obligation.

In a 1998 interview, a Popular Party parliamentary group leader made this same argument:

A committee on public television can be made up of people who are not specialists in communication; but committees as specific as Industry, Agriculture, and Economy are committees that demand expertise. There are committees that are more political, and as such, the deputy that belongs to the committee can possess a general multidisciplinary knowledge. But in committees as specialized as Industry, Agriculture, and Economy, they have to be people who specialize in the subject matter (Interview #98–49).\textsuperscript{17}

Expertise could be more easily developed by those members that served on few committees, but this depended on party size. During major legislative sessions, most deputies from the majority executive party serve on only one committee. Members of the largest opposition party, serve on one to two committees. However, members of the smaller groups are obligated to serve on many committees, in order to have their parliamentary group represented on all committees. This poses a special strain on smaller groups, since they are expected to have knowledge of several areas and to develop expertise as much as possible. As the sole representative of their parliamentary group on the committee, they could not rely on other members' expertise as could representatives of the larger parties.

In the earliest sessions, there appeared to be more than one reason for the lack of expertise and the high membership turnover on the committees. One Socialist deputy in a 1991 interview pointed to the newness of the democracy and the resulting inexperience of the politicians:

In reality, it is a result of the lack of consolidation—a consequence of a short time period. Generally, we see specialization in other legislatures, such as the U.S. Senate, but here we have very little parliamentary experience. Yet lately, we have more and more experts—especially the spokespersons (Interview #91–33).\textsuperscript{18}

Although respondents who have served on the same committees over various sessions claim to be developing some knowledge of the issues, they acknowledge that turnover is still high in general and
that committee members are not experts. The slight increase in expertise reported has not led to increased committee influence on public policy.

**Staff and resources**

In spite of the fact that deputies were able to develop some knowledge in their committee area, the development of real expertise was also impeded by a lack of staff and resources. Throughout the first four legislative sessions, members did not have individual offices in Madrid, unless they were committee or parliamentary group spokespersons, and thereby lacked access to phones, fax machines, computers, etc. Deputies had to rely on parliamentary group staff (one staff member available for every one to three committees) instead of personal staff. Many deputies stated that they depended upon staff available in other government offices, for example in regional government offices or mayoral offices. One committee spokesperson from an opposition party even reported paying an administrative assistant out of her/his parliamentary salary. In terms of drafting bills, deputies with a law background could use their own expertise, although parliamentary group staff was available to draft bills.

The deputies have their own offices in a building attached to the Congress since the early 1990s; however, staff is reported to have only increased slightly. Respondents agree that the number of staff members depends on the parliamentary group. The staff members provided by the Congress are the congressional attorneys (letrados); one respondent reports that there are about 60 congressional attorneys at any given time. They provide technical, legal help when asked but they do not work directly for individual parliamentary groups. In sum, variations in committee strength cannot be attributed to level of expertise, or the availability of resources which have increased slightly over time. However, the high rate of committee membership turnover may help to account for the lack in committee influence.

**Party unity, executive size, and proportionality**

Both party unity and size of executive support were powerful co-variants with committee strength. Membership on committees is proportional to overall seats in the chamber; therefore a majority party with strong voting discipline, such as the Socialist party from 1982–93 and the Popular Party from 2000–04, has a majority throughout the committee structure. High party discipline will automatically diminish the strength of individual committee members. A major contributor to the strength of committees in 1979–82 was the low party unity in the UCD, leading to negotiations and substantial amendments in the committee phase. During that session, factionalization in the UCD gave rise to negotiations between blocs of the UCD and opposition parties, while there was disagreement with other UCD members. A former UCD member of the social democratic sector gave the example of a pact being formed over a particular clause in the Law on University Autonomy:

> The committees had power because of the ideological battles [among] the different groups [of the UCD], for example, on the concession of the university as a public service. So that it would be successful in the committee, the Social Democrats [of the UCD] reached an agreement with the Socialist Party. It was successful because there were negotiations between 2 groups that were not from the same party (Interview #91–10).19

In contrast, decision-making in the committees during the majority governments of the PSOE (1982–93) was reported to be majoritarian, with the Socialists taking advantage of their numbers and strong party unity. During the parliamentary coalitions of 1993–2000 and 2004–08, committee amendments were reached by party leaders, in negotiation between the party spokespersons on the committee.

While committee positions are allocated in a proportional manner to the parliamentary groups, the number of committee positions allocated to the smaller groups in the eighth legislative session (2004–08) was done in such a fashion that the committee vote can produce a different result than a vote in the plenary session. Paired with the ability of committees to have full legislative authority over certain bills, this makes committees more powerful in law-making. However, this is a tool used by the Government and the parliamentary groups voting with them. It provides an advantage to the smallest parliamentary groups (with three to five deputies) while it disadvantages the larger small parliamentary groups, especially the CiU (with ten deputies). All of these smaller groups are given one representative on each committee, which typically have 39 members. Equal representation of all of the smaller parliamentary groups on the committees results in a slight overrepresentation of the smallest groups compared to the plenary representation (see Table 5.1). The PSOE, with 18 representatives on a committee, needs just two more votes for a majority (which could come from any two parliamentary groups), whereas in the plenary session they need 12 (for which they
would have to gain the approval of only certain groups). As one CIU deputy explained the situation:

In the current legislative session, the committee composition is very unfair because it turns out that there can be a majority in the committee which is different than the majority in the plenary session. This is very unfair because for example, our parliamentary group has 10 deputies. And it has only one member on each committee—one. Coalición Canaria has 3 deputies (total), but they also have one on the committees. As such, the vote of Coalición Canaria carries as much weight as our vote, when in fact we have three times as many deputies. Coalición Canaria and with Izquierda Unida. Izquierda Unida has five in the plenary session and Coalición Canaria has three in the plenary session; five plus three equal eight. However, in the plenary session the Socialist Party always needs twelve for the majority—not eight—twelve. But in the committee, it is much easier for them to obtain support. There are laws that can be approved in the committee that never pass through the plenary session and would not be approved there because the PSOE would need 12 votes (Interview #06–5).

This is an uncomfortable position for the CIU since in the past, as parliamentary coalition partners (1993–2000), they enjoyed more power on the committees, as well as two to three representatives.

In sum, when the governing party holds a majority and enjoys high party discipline, the ability of the committees to make substantive amendments independent of the executive is low. This condition has existed in nearly half of the legislative sessions under examination. When the government holds a minority of the seats and enjoys strong party discipline, the coalition partners have some ability to influence policy at all stages, particularly through negotiations in and before the committee session. Committees exercised most influence under minority governments with weak party discipline, which is a situation unlikely to be repeated in Spain.

Subcommittees (ponencias)

Subcommittees were reportedly more powerful during the UCD era (1979–82) than in later sessions as they served as centers for negotiations. These sessions were closed to the press and the closed-door policy helped make it safe for bargaining and concessions. However, the opposite was true for subsequent sessions. During the Socialist governments, groups whose proposed amendments were bound to be defeated in subcommittee, or any other phase for that matter, saved their amendments for presentation in committee, or in the plenary session, in hope of gaining some press coverage. In this way, even though the will of the majority prevailed, the opposition could receive some leverage through publicity.

However, from 1989 to 2000 the regional parties, PNV and CIU, seemed less concerned that they gain direct credit for their amendments and more concerned with actually altering the legislation. Thus, both groups tended to take advantage of informal negotiations with the Socialist leaders, and later with the Popular Party leaders, in which transactional amendments were agreed upon and later proposed by the government party. In the eighth legislative session (2004–08), the ERC enjoyed this position. All opposition groups have attempted to maximize their impact on policy in whatever way proved most effective to them.

Although secrecy in subcommittee meetings has important implications for representation and accountability, it is effective in formulating policy and encouraging cooperation among parties. Strom maintains that "even if public meetings do not actually diffuse information, the mere fact that committees meet in private can give their members an advantage ... Public meetings, on the other hand, turn committee meetings into potential advertising fora for committee members ... Open meetings are less likely to foster interparty compromise" (Strom, 1997, p. 62). In this regard, Spain experiences some of the same representational deficits as other longer-standing democracies.
Conclusion

In the early years of the democracy, the committee system in the Spanish Congress did not fit the expectations laid out by traditional theory. Although the committees were powerful in policy-making in the first legislative session (1979–82), it was not for the expected reasons, i.e., specialized committees with expert members and a high level of staff and resources. As the committee system institutionalized, traditional theory better explains the weakness of the Spanish committees; Spanish committees today, which are standing committees with largely fixed jurisdictions and important formal powers, have low expertise, high turnover, and modest resources. Their influence varies across legislative periods, but they have not experienced high influence in the policy-making process since the onset of democracy.

Most transactional amendments are negotiated by informal norms outside of committee or negotiated in the subcommittee (but later accepted in committee). Committees are important arenas for the adoption of technical amendments, and have become more important due to the fact that the plenary vote can be bypassed on some legislation. Bills passed directly out of committee, particularly in the eighth legislative session (2004–08), in which parliamentary group proportions differed between committees and the plenary session, may contain different amendments than if the bill had been voted on in the plenary session. This allocation of committee seats lent more power to the committee phase particularly due to the minority government status.

Arter (2002, p. 108) points out that new democracies can produce powerful committees, in the initial phases of the democracy but not necessarily later because party unity tends to be low at first. In this way, the nascent Spanish committee system fit the pattern discovered in new democracies. However, the Spanish case included not only low party unity (especially among the governing UCD), but also other important factors such as a willingness to reach broad consensus (not just majority votes), a minority government, and a desire to avoid the failed democracy of the past. Thus, in terms of classic theoretical expectations, namely that small, specialized committees with fixed jurisdictions, resources, and staff produce powerful committees, we should add that party systems and institutions in flux can also lead to powerful committees. The Spanish case indicates that institutionalization of the party system and strong party discipline weakened committees.

Notes

1. Thanks to SIUE College of Arts and Sciences, Graduate School, and the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain’s Ministry of Culture and U.S. Universities.
2. These interviews include: IU/PCE (4), CIU (8), PNV (5), PSOE (17), UCD (13), PP (11), CDS (2), CC (1), and four interviews of congressional attorneys. Among those interviewed were two framers of the Constitution, three parliamentary group leaders, six members of the chamber’s bureau (neset), one deputy who switched parties from UCD to PSOE (included in the UCD count, but not in the PSOE), three deputies who switched parties from UCD to PP (included in the UCD count, but not in the PP), six former ministers, three future ministers, and many backbenchers. Some members were re-interviewed in subsequent years, so that the total number (65) equals the total number of interviews, not individuals.
3. Following Strom (1998), Arter (2002, p. 111) classifies formal powers as “capacity inputs” and party discipline/loyalty as a “withinput” in studying the Scottish committee system.
4. The first three waves of interviews focused on the broad influence of the Spanish parliament over six legislative sessions and contained a section on the committee system. The 2006 interviews focused exclusively on the committee system.
5. Parliamentary influence was measured by four indicators: level of parliamentary activity, ability to reject and substitute legislation, ability to affect the agenda, and ability to modify executive legislation. These measures were derived from the theoretical literature on the degree of parliamentary influence on public policy (Polsby, 1975; Mezey, 1979; Norton, 1990; Blondel, et al., 1990). The study measured the policy-making power of a parliament along a continuum ranging from “arena like” legislatures with “weak policy-making power” to strong, policy-making chambers. Parliamentary influence on public policy was high in the first legislative session (1979–82) and in the fifth (1993–6) and sixth (1996–2000) legislative sessions. The independent factors that affected parliamentary influence were: the majority or minority status of the executive, the degree of party unity, committee strength, the conditions surrounding the transition to democracy, formal rules (electoral law and Standing Orders of Congress), involvement in supranational organizations, and the asymmetric federal nature of the Spanish state (Maurer, forthcoming, 1999, 1995).
6. The Standing Orders of the Congress set up 11 legislative standing committees: i) Constitutional, ii) Foreign Affairs, iii) Justice and Home Affairs, iv) Defense, v) Education and Culture, vi) Economy, Commerce and Finance, vii) Budget, viii) Agriculture, Stockbreeding and Fisheries, ix) Industry, Public Works and Services, x) Social and Employment Policy, xi) Public Administration’s Status; 3 non-legislative standing committees: i) Rules, ii) Members’ Status, iii) Petitions; and ad hoc committees ‘for a specific task.’ (Chapter III: Division 2, Sections 46–50 & Division 3, Sections 51–3). Also, additional standing committees may be established for the duration of one parliamentary term (so that committees vary somewhat from session to session), Section 50, 1.
10. Section 148 Standing Orders of Congress states: ‘1. The decision of Congress delegating full legislative authority to committees shall be presumed for all bills that may constitutionally be delegated, but such delegation shall not extend to the debate and voting on the whole text or the taking into consideration thereof, without prejudice to the provisions of the following section. 2. The procedure applicable to consideration of these bills shall be the ordinary legislative procedure, excluding the formality of the final deliberation and voting on the floor of the House.’ Section 149 states that the Congress may reserve the final vote for itself.
12. With approximately 40 members per committee, this represented approximately 5 to 13 percent. The U.S. Congress is considered to have the highest number of experts on its powerful committees; most parliamentary systems have moderate policy-making power with less expertise on the committees. Since Spain has permanent (standing) committees, the committees have the potential to develop more expertise than those parliaments with a large number of ad hoc committees.
15. I figured turnover rate by calculating members on each committee who were not on the committee at the start of the previous session as a percentage of total members on the newly constituted committee.
16. There are several ways to measure turnover. The comparison here (committee membership at the start of the legislative sessions) does not take into account membership turnover within the sessions, nor members who may return to a committee on which they served after a session or more. Another possibility is to measure turnover within each legislative session. Capo Gómez (1990, pp. 118–23) found that 68 percent of members remained on their committees throughout the first legislative session, 53 percent in the second session (1982–6), and 52 percent in the third session (1986–9), which indicates a very high rate of turnover. Morán also found that turnover was very high between the early legislative sessions; in the second legislative session (1982–6), for example, between 54 percent and 73 percent of the committee membership was new (Morán 1989, p. 79). Our numbers differ due to distinct indicators; however, all results demonstrate high turnover.
20. Confidential interview, 26 October 2006.
21. As committee sessions are not closed to the press, the practice of negotiations became common knowledge under the parliamentary coalitions of 1993–2000. For example, the press reported in October 1999 an instance in the Committee on the Economy, Commerce, and Finance, in which the CIU had proposed various amendments to the government proposed law on the Defense of Jurisdictions. These amendments, that would have protected the jurisdictions of Tribunal of Defense of Jurisdictions and the Committee on Telecommunications Marketing, would have passed with the support of other opposition groups. Right before the vote, the CIU committee spokesperson, Ignasi Guardans, was pulled aside by the parliamentary group leader, Josep López de Lerma and asked to withdraw the amendments. López de Lerma had supposedly reached an agreement with the executive Popular Party to have the amendments withdrawn. One Socialist deputy classified the incident as “humiliating” (El País, 27 October 1999). Thus, during the fifth and sixth sessions (1993–2000), amendments were accepted in committee sessions, but these are based on previous agreements reached by party leaders.