



## WHO LEADS AND WHO LAGS BEHIND? WOMEN MPs IN THE SPANISH REGIONAL PARLIAMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Using systematic criteria, this article offers a descriptive analysis of the evolution in the percentage of women MPs in the 17 Spanish regional parliament from 1980 to 2011. The fluctuating gender composition of these parliaments is analysed in terms of thresholds, patterns of evolution, and paucity of the changes. These dimensions, understudied in the literature on descriptive representation, are essential to understanding the growing feminization of the legislature. Three different regional models of incorporation of women MPs, forerunner, mixed and laggard, are identified, which provide valuable information about a) when the different ratios of women versus men representatives are attained, b) how stable or unstable the growth in the percentage of women is, and c) whether the changes are gradual or abrupt. We show that legislative quotas have a different impact depending on the specific regional model to which they apply. Considering the steady, comparatively fast and homogenous process of feminization of all the regional chambers, their relatively gender-balanced composition seems secure, as well as the attainment of the goal of parity laws.

### KEYWORDS

Gender and politics; Spain; women MPs; regional parliaments.

## ¿QUIÉN LIDERA Y QUIÉN VA A LA ZAGA? PARLAMENTERIAS EN LOS PARLAMENTOS AUTONÓMICOS ESPAÑOLES

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### RESUMEN

Mediante la aplicación de criterios sistemáticos, este trabajo realiza una descripción analítica de la evolución en el porcentaje de mujeres parlamentarias en los 17 parlamentos regionales españoles desde 1980 hasta 2011. Se analiza su fluctuante composición por género a través de umbrales, pautas de evolución y ritmo de los cambios. Estas dimensiones, poco estudiadas por la literatura sobre representación descriptiva, son cruciales a la hora de entender la creciente feminización del legislativo regional. El análisis identifica tres modelos de incorporación de las representantes, el precursor, el mixto y el rezagado, que proporcionan una valiosa información en relación con: a) cuándo se alcanzan las distintas ratios de mujeres frente a hombres, b) si la evolución en el número de parlamentarias es estable o no, y c) si los cambios son graduales o bruscos. Se comprueba que las cuotas legislativas de género tienen distintos efectos que dependen del modelo regional sobre el que se apliquen. Considerando el constante, y comparativamente rápido y homogéneo proceso de 'feminización' de los legislativos regionales, parece que su composición por género relativamente equilibrada está asegurada, así como el cumplimiento de las leyes de paridad.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Género y política; España; mujeres parlamentarias; parlamentos autonómicos.

## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the century, 13.5% of the national MPs in the world were women. This percentage increased to 21.8% in 2013 (IPU, 2014). Nonetheless, the numbers show important variations: from the highest 42.0% in Nordic countries to the lowest 13.1% in the Pacific. The countries with most women in the legislative are Rwanda (63.8%), Andorra (50.0%), Cuba (48.9%) and Sweden (44.7%), and a few ones, such as Vanatu, have no women at all. Comparatively speaking, Spain (36.0%) ranks amongst the top countries: 21<sup>st</sup> position out of 187 and 8<sup>th</sup> within the EU. The Spanish percentage of female parliamentarians is also slightly higher than that of the European Parliament (35.2%).

An increasing number of women are entering the legislative. This rise has been shared by almost all the countries (IPU, 2014) and regions in the globe (Vengroff, Nyiri and Fugiero 2003), but it is most notable in the West (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Beckwith 2007; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Studlar and Matland 1996). Yet a gender gap still exists (Ruedin 2012; Welch 2008; Vengroff, Nyiri and Fugiero 2003; Reynolds 1999; Matland 1998). The debate about this gap has spawned enormous scholarly interest, both in Spain (Díz and Lois 2012; Verge 2011, 2006; Ruiz 2006; Sánchez Herrera 2004; Valiente, Ramiro and Morales 2003; Álvarez 2000; Biglino 2000; Linz, Gangas and Jerez 2000; Sánchez Ferriz 2000; Trujillo 2000; Uriarte 1999; Jerez 1997; Jerez and Morata 1995; García de León 1994; Astelarra 1990) and elsewhere. This has led to an increasing number of publications, particularly over the last two decades (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007), to the point that they outnumber “comparative research on any other recruitment factors” (Patzelt 1999: 257).

Following this debate, we set out to offer a ‘thick’ description of how the percentage of women MPs has evolved in the 17 Spanish regional parliaments along 1980-2011.<sup>1</sup> Descriptive representation should be attached the highest relevance because the percentage of female representatives “is the glue that binds the several dimensions of representation together” and “the keystone to the representation of women” (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005: 422-23). Thick description is also pivotal because, as King, Keohane and Verba (2000: 29, 55) have stressed, the “insightful description of complex events is not a trivial endeavour” and constitutes “an important step for explanatory studies”. We also concur that “it makes no sense to try to explain what has not been previously described with a reasonable degree of precision”. The need to address descriptive questions before indulging in explanatory hypotheses has been defended by a wealth of social scientists and methodologists, both in Spain (Santana 2013; Lago 2008) and elsewhere (Walliman 2011; Blaikie 2010; Combessie 2000). This is precisely what a great bulk of studies on gender and politics have done, by first embarking upon useful descriptive accounts of various sorts in countries such as France

(Murray 2013, 2008), Germany (Davidson-Schmich 2006), Great Britain (Cowley and Childs 2003), the United States (Arceneaux 2001), Canada (Studlar and Matland 1996) and Spain (Ortega and Trujillo 2011; Martínez and Calvo 2010; Verge 2008, 2004; Delgado and Jerez 2008), as well as in cross-country comparisons (Reynolds 1999; Matland 1998; Rule 1987).

Yet little is known about the particularities of the process whereby women have been acceding to parliamentary positions. First, which are the countries and regions that have led the rise in women’s representation, and what do they have in common? We have identified forerunners and laggards and shown that the regions that have pioneered this upward trend share some traits. Knowledge about these traits is bound to improve our understanding of the causes behind the reduction of the gender gap in political representation. Second, is the rise stable or unstable? The answer to this question is crucial because if the identified upward trend turns out to be unstable, then the share of female representatives might be reverted and women’s gains would not be guaranteed. Third, is this rise abrupt or gradual? Awareness on the pace at which women’s representation is increasing is needed in order to find the appropriate explanatory factors for this phenomenon: it is well-known that abrupt changes are seldom provoked by social or cultural factors (Evans, Heath and Payne 1999; Matthews 2005), so if a growth in women MPs is sudden, it is likely to be connected to political variables. Finally, we discuss where the regional chambers are heading and if the changes in women’s representation might be explained by legislative quotas.

We focus on these questions because they should be explored before explanations for the growing feminization of the Spanish regional parliaments can be ventured, and do so by means of a longitudinal (31 years and 138 elections) and cross-regional (N=17) analysis. This type of endeavour has not progressed in Spain at the same pace as in other developed countries<sup>2</sup> (Valiente, Ramiro and Morales 2003). Further, in contrast to the growing number of studies on the gender composition of national chambers, there is limited research on the sub-national ones,<sup>3</sup> partly due to the lack of data at this level (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007). The absence of data is most surprising in view of the increasingly important functions carried out by meso-governments (be they regional, state, cantonal, counties or provincial) in today’s democracies (Sharpe 1993), and the on-going trend of devolution of power from the central government to the states. Different studies have also unveiled that women find regional chambers more accessible because they are characterized by less competitive seats and less costly campaigns, and impose fewer demands in terms of relocation away from the family (Lovenduski 1986).<sup>4</sup> Finally, we examine the sub-national level because it might be the springboard from which women run for higher positions state-wide (Sanbonmatsu 2002).

## THRESHOLDS IN WOMEN REPRESENTATION

Beginning in the 1990s', the international women's movement and certain global institutions started to stress the importance of thresholds for women in politics. Critical mass, gender quotas, and gender balance were concepts on the rise (Paxton, Hughes and Green 2006).

Critical mass refers to how the attainment of a given share of female representatives (threshold) has a positive effect upon substantive (the policies debated and approved) and symbolic (institutional legitimacy) representation (Bolzendahl and Brooks 2007; Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005; Thomas 1991). It also implies that "increases in women's parliamentary presence are related to women's electoral mobilization at the mass level, heightened interest in electoral politics among women, and increases in women's voting turnout" (Beckwith 2007: 28). Furthermore, a certain number of elected women can encourage the presence of additional women in the parliaments (Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Studlar and McAllister 2002; Caul 1999; Rule, 1987). In this article, we do not set out to identify the potential consequences of the critical mass: not only is the evidence regarding these effects unclear (Bratton 2005) but the specific percentage of women that might ignite policy changes is unspecified (Beckwith 2007). Instead, we defend that the time process behind the increasing presence of women in the chambers has to be analysed in greater detail by first identifying thresholds.

Many studies concur that the critical mass threshold ranges between 15 and 30% (Beckwith 2007). The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women considers that it is reached when 30% of women are in parliament. For Kanter (1977), whose seminal work has been the foundation for a great number of these studies, the threshold is however 40%. This is also the aim of parity laws, which defend that no gender should be given less than 40%, or more than 60%, of the political representation.

Based on the proportion of women to men in a large corporation, Kanter distinguished among (1) uniform groups, which incorporate only members of one group (100% vs. 0%); (2) skewed groups, in which one group clearly outnumbers the other (85% vs. 15%); (3) tilted groups, where the ratio between the two groups is less distorted (65% vs. 35%); and (4) balanced groups, when the composition nears perfect balance (60% vs. 40% or 50% vs. 50%).<sup>5</sup> In Table 1, we follow this distinction in order to classify Spanish regional chambers according to the percentage of women MPs they incorporate in every electoral cycle. Longitudinal cross-regional differences in these percentages have allowed us to identify three models of incorporation of female representatives:<sup>6</sup>

- a) Forerunners (those regions that leave the skewed group and reach the 40% threshold, or balanced group, earlier than the rest).
- b) Laggards (regions that take longer to abandon the skewed group and, with the exception of Galicia, have not reached the 40% threshold at the end of the period).
- c) Mixed (those that do not conform to either of the former patterns because they exhibit problematic transitions towards the tilted and balanced groups, or neither lead nor lag behind as compared to the other regions).

According to our criteria, three regions are forerunners, six are laggards, and eight, mixed. The averages of women for all forerunners are above the total average (24.4%). All six laggards have averages below 24.4%, and all but one (Galicia) have not attained the balanced status in the 8<sup>th</sup> term. Regions in the mixed model have global averages between the 22.5% in Navarre (higher than that of any laggard) and the 27.8% in La Rioja and the Balearic Islands (lower than that of any forerunner).

If we disaggregate the results by electoral cycles, two cases stand out: Murcia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term had no women at all and belongs to the uniform group, while women outnumbered men (52.0%) in the Basque Country in the 8<sup>th</sup> term. During the first two terms (1983 and 1987), all chambers were skewed and only three of them (Asturias, La Rioja and Madrid) increased women's presence by over 20% (hence falling into the 'tilted' category) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> term.

The 4<sup>th</sup> term initiated a trend whereby tilted chambers started outnumbering skewed ones (nine against eight). Valencia (in the 5<sup>th</sup> term) as well as Cantabria, Castile-La Mancha and Madrid (in the 6<sup>th</sup>) pioneered the passage towards balanced chambers, although the predominance of those over the tilted group took place later on: in the 7<sup>th</sup> term and continued well into the 8<sup>th</sup>. At present, balanced groups have ceased to be a minority: ten chambers out of 17 have attained, or surpassed, the 40% benchmark. According to Kanter (1977: 970, 987), "women's scarcity in skewed groups pushes them into classical positions" and makes them token women who "operate under a number of handicaps in work settings". However, when they achieve a reasonable ratio to men, women become a potential subgroup and a) cease to attract disproportionate attention (visibility), b) skip exaggerated differences with their male partners (polarization), and c) their attributes are not distorted in order to fit prejudiced views (assimilation). This means that, with minor regional deviations, women MPs were tokens during the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> terms, shifted to the minority status during the next three cycles, and became a potential subgroup in the last two.

**Table 1.**  
*Women MPs: Thresholds and models of incorporation*

Region	Leg1 1983	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Model	Mean	Seats (min)	Seats (max)
Mean	6.0	7.3	13.1	19.5	28.2	34.5	39.7	42.1		24.4		
Castile La Mancha	2.3	8.5	19.1	21.3	38.3	48.9	48.9	49.0	Forerunner	29.9	44	49
Madrid	12.8	16.7	20.8	26.2	32.4	40.5	46.7	45.0	Forerunner	31.3	94	129
Valencia	5.6	5.6	13.5	29.2	40.4	41.6	45.5	40.4	Forerunner	28.1	89	99
Basque Country	6.7	10.7	12.0	21.3	25.3	28.0	33.3	52.0	Mixed	26.4	60	75
Andalusia	5.5	7.3	12.8	23.9	30.3	35.8	38.5	45.9	Mixed	25.0	109	109
Balearic Islands	5.6	11.9	18.6	27.1	30.5	35.6	45.8	45.8	Mixed	27.8	54	59
Cantabria	8.6	7.7	2.6	15.4	38.5	43.6	43.6	43.6	Mixed	25.6	35	39
Asturias	8.9	13.3	22.2	17.8	33.3	31.1	42.2	42.2	Mixed	26.4	45	45
Castile Leon	3.6	3.6	8.3	20.2	27.7	36.6	41.0	40.5	Mixed	22.6	82	84
La Rioja	11.4	12.1	21.2	21.2	36.4	39.4	42.4	39.4	Mixed	27.8	33	35
Navarre	4.0	8.0	14.0	24.0	28.0	30.0	36.0	36.0	Mixed	22.5	50	50
Galicia	4.2	1.4	9.3	10.7	21.3	33.3	33.3	46.7	Laggard	20.3	71	75
Catalonia	5.9	8.9	11.1	13.3	13.3	23.7	29.6	38.5	Laggard	20.8	135	135
Extremadura	4.6	3.1	13.8	16.9	26.2	32.3	41.5	38.5	Laggard	22.1	65	65
Murcia	4.7	0.0	13.3	17.8	17.8	26.7	37.8	37.8	Laggard	19.6	43	45
Aragon	6.1	1.5	7.5	11.9	28.4	32.8	32.8	35.8	Laggard	19.6	66	67
Canary Islands	1.7	1.7	6.7	10.0	30.0	36.7	46.7	35.0	Laggard	21.0	60	60
Balanced (40.1%-50%)	0	0	0	0	1	4	10	10	Forerunner	29.8	n	3
Tilted (20.1%-40%)	0	0	3	9	14	13	7	7	Mixed	25.5	n	8
Skewed (0.1%-20%)	17	16	14	8	2	0	0	0	Laggard	20.6	n	6
Uniform (0%)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	ALL	24.4	N	17

Source: Bapolau. The dates in the first row refer to the electoral cycles in the 13 regions without special status. Andalusia, Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country have the power to schedule their elections. Catalonia and the Basque Country held a 9<sup>th</sup> election in the period analysed with 43.0% and 44.0% of women, respectively. See table A1 in the Appendix for details.<sup>7</sup>

If we now compare (Table 2) the current distribution of national parliaments worldwide with Spanish regional chambers, we can see that more than half of the legislatures (53%) around the globe are skewed, whereas none of the Spanish regions is. Further, a majority of the Spanish regions (59%) belongs to the balanced group, whereas only five per cent of the world parliaments have attained this status.

### Patterns of evolution

Studies that deal with the evolution of female political representation have provided valuable information regarding the narrowing down of the gen-

der gap (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Beckwith 2007; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Studlar and Matlan, 1996). In line with this, Table 3 shows that 86 out of 119 Spanish regional parliaments (72.3%) have experienced an increase in the percentage of women representatives.

There have also been ten cases (8.4%) in which the percentage of women did not change, and another ten in which the figure actually decreased (in five cases, or half of this group, the fall took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term). Finally, 13 instances (10.9%) belong to the category 'within balance'. This embraces those cases that stay within the 40-60% interval and experience fluctuations that are not considered because they do not affect our classification of regional chambers.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2.**  
*Thresholds in national parliaments worldwide (2013) and Spanish regional parliaments (around 2011)*

Type of groups	National (World)	Regional (Spain)
Balanced groups (40%-50% vs. 50%-60%)	5% (N=9)	59% (N=10)
Tilted groups (20%-40% vs. 60-80%)	40% (N=74)	41% (N=7)
Skewed groups (0.5%-20% vs. 80%-99.5%)	53% (N=99)	0% (N=0)
Uniform groups (0%-0.5% vs. 99.5%-100%)	3% (N=5)	0% (N=0)

Source: Own elaboration. Data on www.ipu.org and Bapolau

**Table 3.**  
*Number of parliaments that increase, maintain or decrease the share of women*

Change from $t$ to $t+1$	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Total
Increase	9	16	15	15	15	11	5	86 (72.3%)
Unaltered	3	0	1	2	0	2	2	10 (8.4%)
Decrease	5	1	1	0	1	0	2	10 (8.4%)
Within balance	0	0	0	0	1	4	8	13 (10.9%)
Overall change (%)	1.3%	5.8%	6.4%	8.7%	6.3%	5.2%	2.4%	119 (100.0%)

Source: Bapolau.

However, the focus on overall trends has diverted the attention from other features affecting the patterns of female representation, such as stability over time. Research on the latter is important for two reasons: first, trends in women's political recruitment might be relevant or not depending on how stable they are; and second, stability might be associated to different models of incorporation of women into the chambers, and the combination of both is important to understand the evolution of women's representation.

In order to make up for this derelict topic, we have distinguished between two patterns: *consistently increasing* up to the attainment of a balanced gender distribution; and *unstable or inconsistent*, a pattern in which both falls and rises in the percentage of women MPs can be traced.

We consider a trend to be consistently increasing if: (a) as long as the 40% threshold has not been reached, the evolution in the percentage of women MPs is not subject to fluctuations; notice that this definition is not over-demanding insofar as it only requires weakly (as opposed to strictly) increasing trends (i.e. Catalonia qualifies as stable in spite of its halt in the 5<sup>th</sup> term); (b) once the 40% threshold has been reached, the number of women MPs in the region does not fall below this mark, and thus stays within the balanced group category. When regional chambers are balanced (40% to 60%), there is little room for the percentage of women MPs to keep growing. Regions that do not fulfil these conditions are therefore unstable.

According to our criteria, nine regions fit the 'consistently increasing trend' group and eight the unstable one. Two questions spring to our minds: first, are these patterns of stability related to the models of incorporation detected in the previous section?

Table 4 suggests that there is a close connection between the patterns of time stability and the models of incorporation of women: the forerunners always follow a stable path, while the laggards tend to conform to the unstable pattern (five out of six do so). These results do not allow us to establish a causal relationship between patterns and models but they do point to several lines of research that have not yet been undertaken: (i) to what extent is the relationship between stability and leadership valid for other cases?; (ii) does the relationship detected imply that the patterns of evolution can condition the models of incorporation?, for instance, is stability necessary to be a forerunner in women's political access to the chambers?; (iii) or does the causal relationship run the other way round?

The second question is: are the regions that have been grouped together in this two-fold scheme similar or dissimilar in socioeconomic and cultural terms? Let us not forget that the literature has identified contextual factors of various sorts (such as income and education, access of women to the labour market, and religion) as conducive to augment (or decrease) women's political presence (Studlar and Matland 1996). Focusing on two of these factors, GNP and religion, we may tentatively conclude that they do

**Table 4.**  
*Models and patterns of evolution in women MPs*

	Stability		
Model	Increasing Up to Balance	Unstable trends	All
Forerunners	Castile La Mancha, Madrid, Valencia		3
Mixed	Andalusia, Balearic Islands, Castile Leon, Navarre, Basque Country	Asturias, Cantabria, La Rioja	8
Laggards	Catalonia	Aragon, Canary Islands, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia	6
All	9	8	17

Source: Bapolau.

not substantially affect the percentage of female representatives in Spain. First, income (measured as GNP) is meant to be related to women-friendly environments, but the mean GNP of the Spanish regional forerunners (22,025) is below that of the mixed group (23,608). Second, Catholicism has been found to impinge negatively upon women's political representation (Davidson-Schmich 2006; Cook 1985; Rule 1984). Although all Spanish regions are nominally Catholic and religion cannot therefore work as a discriminant factor, it has not prevented women from acceding in substantial numbers to any particular legislature over time either.

### Rhythms of change

Women are entering the legislatures at varying paces worldwide and the rhythms may be different at the national and sub-national levels. The relative paucity by which women have been elected to the Congress in the United States (Lawless and Pearson 2008: 67) can be compared to the mounting speed at which they were becoming MPs in the 1980s' and 1990s' in Canada (Studlar and Matland 1996). In the US, "the first substantial jump in women's candidacies happened in 1972, in concert with the rise of the women's movement. The biggest jump in the number of female candidates occurred in 1992's 'Year of the Woman'" (Lawless and Pearson 2008: 70). In Canada, "the 1984 election was the turning point: the number of female candidates for all three major parties nearly doubled, and the percentage of female MPs jumped from five to ten" (Studlar and Matland 1996: 53-4). If we move to the sub-national level, women's representation in the Canadian provinces along the 1975-1994 period has followed a gradual trend towards an increase of female candidates and legislators since the end of the 1980s (Studlar and Matland 1996). The percentage of women in state chambers in the US has grown approximately from six percent at the beginning of the 1960s to 22% at the turn of the century (Sanbonmatsu 2002).

When growth in women's representation is unexpected and sudden, it may respond to international forces: a United Nations funding programme in Bangladesh might have paved the way for an increase in the percentage of women from 7 to 30%. Similarly, UN training in Vietnam might have contributed to a growth of women MP's from 18 to 26%. Acts of political voluntarism can equally explain surprising gains in women's political representation, as it happened when the Peruvian parliament approved gender quotas under the pressure of president Fujimori (Paxton, Hughes and Green 2006). Another example of abrupt change is that of the British Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair: the party obtained 418 seats (out of 659) in the House of Commons in 1997 and 101 women became Labour MPs (24.2%). A total of 120 women entered the lower chamber, a record number in British politics (Cowley and Childs, 2003). Most legislatures, however, have followed an incremental pattern.

As a general rule, we expect slow and incremental changes to be more likely to sustain over time than fast and unexpected ones (unless gender quotas, which can bring about enduring changes 'out of the blue', are considered). In order to tell the former apart from the latter, we have labelled a change as abrupt when it departs by more than two standard deviations from the average change ( $\pm 2 * 5.8\% +5.0\%$  in our data); conversely, changes will be considered gradual if they lie within (-6.6% to +16.6%). Gradual changes are then divided into moderate (larger than one standard deviation, and hence outside the -0.8% and +10.8% bounds) and slow ones (comprised within this smaller interval).

Applying the former classification, four abrupt increases (in the Canary Islands, Cantabria and Castile La Mancha in the 5<sup>th</sup> term, and in the Basque Country in the 8<sup>th</sup>), and two abrupt decreases (in the 8<sup>th</sup> term in the Canary Islands and the 9<sup>th</sup> in the Basque Country) have been identified. Thirteen moderate increases (mostly in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> terms, with four cases each) and an equal number of moderate decreases (concentrated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> terms, with

**Table 5.**  
*Rhythms of change in women MPs*

Rhythms	Change	Cases	Frequency
Abrupt increases (> +2 std)	(> 16.6%)	4	3.3%
Abrupt decreases (< -2 std)	(< -6.6%)	2	1.7%
Moderate increases (+1 std, +2 std)	(10.8%, 16.6%)	13	10.7%
Moderate decreases (-2 std, -1 std)	(-6.6%, -0.8%)	13	10.7%
Slow increases (0, +1 std)	(0.0%, 10.8%)	73	60.3%
Slow decreases (-1 std, 0)	(-0.8%, 0.0%)	1	0.8%
No changes	(0%, 0%)	15	12.4%
Total changes		121	100.0%

Source: Bapolau.

five cases each) have also been detected: two out of these five cases affect forerunner regions (Valencia and Madrid) which had nonetheless surpassed the 40% threshold in the 7<sup>th</sup> election and did not fall below this benchmark in the subsequent election. Finally, 74 changes (61.1%) are slow (all of them being increases but one) and the remaining 15 ones (12.4%) show no change at all.<sup>9</sup> Laggard regions, previously characterized by time instability in the process whereby their women MPs have been acceding to the regional chambers, have experienced relevant decreases (and no gains in certain cycles) as well. Table 6 helps to appreciate how the largest increases are concentrated in the 5<sup>th</sup> term, while the largest decreases have taken place at the beginning or at the end of the period under study.

All in all, 42.1% women (mean) are now sitting (8<sup>th</sup> term) in the regional chambers and this has been attained in only 31 years. This result is even more remarkable if put in a comparative perspective: in 1894, the first woman was elected to a state legislature (Colorado) in the United States, and Canada had its first female representative in a provincial chamber (Alberta) in 1917, and yet the mean percentage of sub-national women MPs in these countries is at present 24.5 and 23.4, respectively. In Germany, some Länder held their first regional elections in 1946, 34 years before the first electoral contest at the regional level in Spain, and yet they are still lagging nearly 10 points behind in female representatives (33.0%; own elaboration based on CAWP, PoC, and the web pages of the 16 Länder).

### Legislative quotas and regional women MPs

Does the relatively fast feminization of the Spanish regional chambers have to do with legislative gender quotas? In the Spanish regional context, they do not appear to have caused a dramatic change. So far, four regions have introduced quotas in the electoral legislation: the Balearic Islands (Law 6/2002) and Castile-La Mancha (Law 11/2002) have pioneered the move, and the Basque Country (Law 4/2005) and Andalusia (Law 5/2005) have followed suit. The first two regions, which approved 50% of positions for each gender, could not apply their laws in the 2003

regional elections because the PP state government lodged an appeal on grounds of unconstitutionality. The Basque law reserves a minimum of 50% of the party lists for women and allows exclusively-feminine candidacies. In Andalusia, the parity law has adopted the shape of zipper lists (Verge, 2008). Once in power, in 2004, the PSOE withdrew the appeal and the affected pieces of legislation were restored. However, the application of this legislation in the 8<sup>th</sup> electoral term has overlapped in time with the putting into practice of the state 2007 equality law. Only one region could use its own regional law before the state law was enacted: the Basque country in 2005. The Basque law went hand in hand with a jump in women's representation from 33.3% (2001) to 52.0% (2005) but, in the last elections held (2009), the percentage decreased to 44.0%. In Andalusia, where the regional zipper-law and the state parity law were applied in the 8<sup>th</sup> term, the percentage moved up from 38.5% (2004) to 45.9% in 2008. The percentage of women MPs remained unchanged between 2007 and 2011 in the Balearic Islands (45.8%), and almost so in Castile-La Mancha (48.9 and 49.0%). Out of the four abrupt increases that have been detected for all regions, only one is related to gender quotas: the 33.3% to 52.0% increase in the Basque chamber.

Let us now turn to the state 2007 Law on Equality between Women and Men of the Socialist government of Zapatero (2004-11), heralded as a milestone in the path towards gender equality. This law mandates that in small districts (around 38%), where less than five candidates are elected, the presence of women and men on party lists should approach a perfect balance, whereas in those whose magnitude equals or is above five candidates, 40%-60% should be the rule. The law was first applied in the 2007 regional elections for the 13 regions which share a common regime, in 2008 in Andalusia, in 2009 in both the Basque Country and Galicia, and one year later in Catalonia.

Table 7 shows that the forerunner regions have been barely affected by the 2007 law. Their growth rate in women MPs after the law is the lowest (3.3%) and their growth differential is actually negative. The law has more important consequences for the laggard (8.0% growth rate) and the mixed groups (7.6%), both of which have positive growth differentials.

**Table 6.**  
*Outstanding changes in the share of women representatives*

Largest increases			Largest decreases		
Region	Term	Change	Region	Term	Change
Canary Islands	5	23.1%	Canary Islands	8	-11.7%
Cantabria	5	20.0%	Basque Country	9	-8.0%
Basque Country	8	18.7%	Cantabria	3	-5.1%
Castile La Mancha	5	17.0%	Valencia	8	-5.1%
Aragon	5	16.4%	Murcia	2	-4.7%

Source: Bapolau.

**Table 7.**  
*Impact of the 2007 parity law*

	Level (Before)	Growth (Before)	Growth (After)	Growth Differential (After -Before)
Forerunners	43.7	6.6	3.3	-3.3
Mixed	36.0	3.7	7.6	3.8
Laggards	33.4	5.8	8.0	2.2
All	36.4	5.0	7.0	2.0

Source: Own database.

We can conclude that the consequences of legislative quotas are contingent on earlier developments: they do not seem to have contributed much to speeding up previously-initiated processes of women's incorporation into the legislatures but, when regions lag behind the rest, legislation does encourage them to push up the percentage of women MPs.

Some recent studies on the impact of electoral quotas have cast doubts on their efficacy for achieving total gender parity. For example, Martínez and Calvo (2010) found that the PSOE and the PP have applied the 2007 law differently in the elections to Congress and that partisan reasons are therefore relevant when accounting for the insufficient effects of the law. At the municipal level in Catalonia, Verge (2008) concurred that parties have interpreted the law in a discriminatory way for women. Both studies acknowledge that the 2007 law has reduced the gender gap but have simultaneously advocated the introduction of zipper lists and clear mandates regarding the position of the candidates on the party lists in order to attain full parity. Similarly, Ortega and Trujillo (2011) revealed that party quotas and the diffusion of gender recruitment practices across parties are more likely to have had an impact upon the increasing feminization of the national Congress and the Senate than compulsory legislation. Even though these studies focus on the party and our research has the regional chamber as the unit of analysis, we have reached a somehow different conclusion. It is true that the early introduction of party quotas by the left (the PSOE did so in 1988 and the IU a year later) might have reduced the party leaders' reluctance to incorporate more women into their lists. Different authors have suggested that strategic reasons can explain this: when women cease to be perceived as liabilities and parties that do not field enough women run the risk of being outflanked by their competitors, traditionally-minded political leaders might start promoting women (Sainsbury 2010; Davidson-Schmich 2006). In our case too, the fact that Castile-La Mancha has exhibited a high percentage of women MPs (49%) in 2003, 2007 and 2011 seems to be connected with the zipper lists used by the Socialists rather than with the quota laws. However, the identification of three regional models of incorporation of women MPs has allowed us to obtain a more nuanced conclusion: parity laws have different effects depending on the region to which they

are applied. By leading the process in this incorporation, forerunners are little affected by the law, but all the other chambers have seen their percentages in women MPs grow at the same time as the 2007 piece of legislation was enacted. Would this result have taken place if the law had not been in place? Probably not. Further, the law prevents backsliding in the future because it will not allow the share of women to decline below the critical 40% threshold.<sup>10</sup>

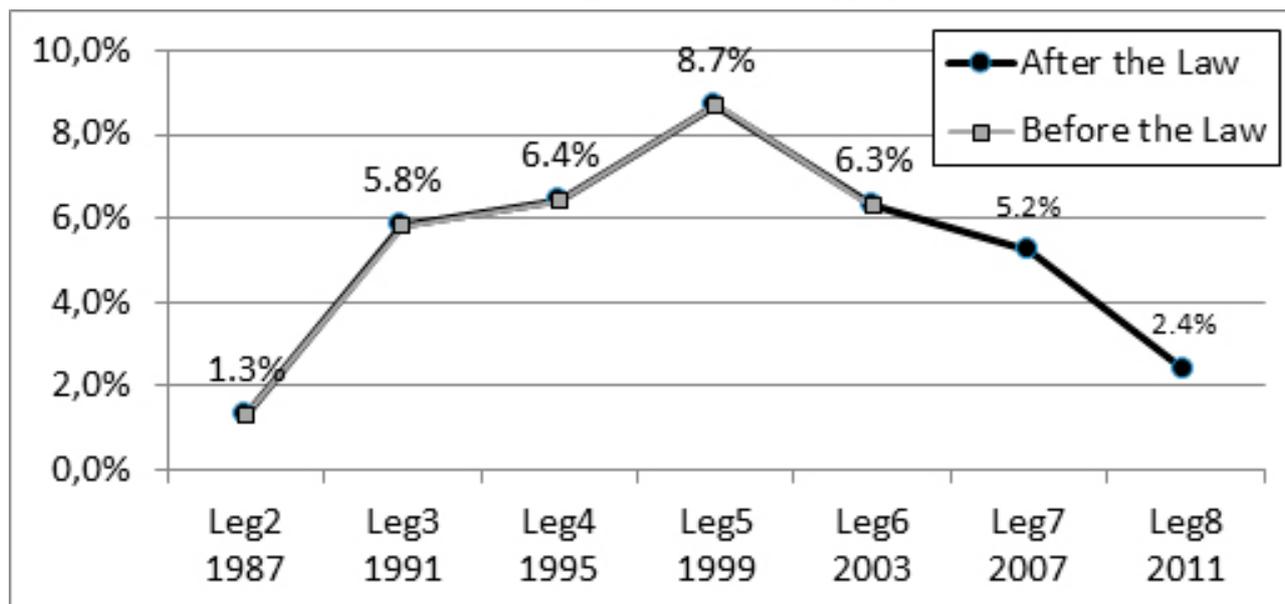
### Where are the regional chambers heading for?

Gender-balanced parliaments are attained when the percentage of MPs for each gender lies between 40 and 60%. In the last electoral term covered (year 2011, for 13 out of the 17 regions), all Spanish regional parliaments are either close to, or have reached, the 40% balanced benchmark. Only seven chambers have failed to do so, but even the region with the lowest percentage of female representatives (the Canary Islands) falls short by less than five percent. Among those (10/17) which have balanced parliaments, five have touched the 45% benchmark and Castile-La Mancha is on the verge of mathematical equality (49%). These figures suggest that there is little room left for further systematic increases in women representation in the Spanish regional parliaments –as a matter of fact, the 2007 Law places a cap of 60%. If this is so, the *growth rates* in the percentage of women MPs should be expected to fall.

Figure 1 shows that this is indeed the case. While the growth in the relative presence of women was initially very timid (1.3% in the 2<sup>nd</sup> term), it increased at a mounting pace, reaching a peak of almost two digits (8.7%) in the 5<sup>th</sup> term (precisely the one in which three out of the four abrupt increases have been identified). Although the average proportion of women has kept on growing since then, it has done so at a decreasing rate (down to 6.3% in the 6<sup>th</sup> term, 5.2% in the 7<sup>th</sup>, and reaching a bare 2.4% in the 8<sup>th</sup> term).

Figure 1 also provides some further clues as regards the effects of legislative quotas on the 17 regional chambers. The global growth rates in women MPs after the enactment of the 2007 law was 5.2% in 2007 and 2.4% in 2011. These rates are lower than the ones found before the law came into existence, which means that compulsory gender quotas have not had a full impact

**Figure 1.**  
Growth rates in the percentage of women MPs (aggregate evolution)



Source: Own database.

because they have been applied when most chambers were on the brink of reaching a gender-balanced status. The law has simply rubberstamped a process that had been initiated previously in certain chambers, although it has contributed to pushing up the percentage of women MPs in laggard and mixed regions. The relevant effect of the law upon these two groups is in line with the importance attributed by different studies to legislative quotas (Martínez and Calvo 2010; Verge 2008; Mateo 2005; Paxton 1997). However, the paradox of the 2007 parity law is that it could limit the potential growth in the number of female representatives beyond the 60% threshold in certain chambers.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has set out to offer a thick analytical description of how the percentage of women MPs has evolved in the 17 Spanish regional parliaments from their first election in 1980 up to 2011. A picture of increasing and intense feminization has come to the fore because all the chambers started out with skewed chambers (under the 20% threshold) and, after eight elections (nine in the Basque Country and Catalonia), a majority of 10 have reached the balanced status (40-60%) and one is less than one point below (39.4%). All in all, women's average presence in Spain is now 42.1% which, if compared to their presence in long-established sub-national legislatures in the United States (24.5% in 2012), Canada (23.4% in 2010-13), and Germany (33.0% in 2009-13), is the highest one and epitomizes a significant proportion of female representatives.

Over a relatively short time-span (31 years), Spanish women MPs have become a potential subgroup at the regional level. Therefore, the rise in female representatives has occurred at a steady, if not fast, pace. In this

swift process, three regions have been identified as forerunners, six as laggards, and the rest have fallen in between. All regions leading this upward trend have done so by following a stable time pattern, whereas all laggards (except Catalonia) have experienced instability in their evolution. Comparatively speaking, the latter group has also been more affected by abrupt changes and, most notably, by relevant decreases in the proportion of women MPs at specific points in time. However, the existence of the Socialist-led legislative quota will prevent potential drops in the future among this group. The association between models of incorporation of female representatives and time trends is an interesting finding that can be replicated in other legislatures worldwide. We have tentatively checked if contextual socio-economic and cultural variables are relevant in accounting for the different regional models in Spain. Yet neither the GNP nor religion has been shown to be correlated with cross-regional differences in women's access to the legislatures.

When compared to other sub-national chambers elsewhere, our case does not show a substantial variation in the number of women MPs across regions: they range from the lowest 35.0% in the Canary Island to the highest 49.0% in Castile-La Mancha in the last electoral term. This differential (14%) is not as relevant as the one found in the United States (28.5%), from 12.5% in Louisiana to 41% in Colorado, or Canada (25.5%), from 10.5% in the Northwest Territories to 36% in British Columbia. Even more acute is the difference (33.7%) between the percentage of women (9.1%) sent by Nova Scotia to the Canadian federal chamber and that of Manitoba (42.8%). Therefore, the Spanish case departs from others in which the evolution in the number of women MPs disguises crucial disparities amongst regions and between different territorial levels of government.

We have equally ascertained that the 2007 Spanish Law on Equality was enacted when women's presence in regional parliaments was still increasing but their *growth rate* was already in decline. Thus, it would be tempting to conclude that the law had no relevant impact or that it merely rubberstamped an ongoing social trend. However, this view only suits the forerunners, but not the laggard and mixed regions. The classification of the regions according to their leadership in the incorporation of female representatives brings to the fore important effects of the law that might have been blurred

by the temporal coincidence between the enactment of this piece of legislation and the overall fall in the growth rates of women MPs. Thus, our three-fold characterization of the regions as forerunners, mixed and laggards is not only useful for identifying the specificities of the process whereby women have been acceding to the parliaments, but it also serves to reconcile the seemingly controversial findings regarding the effects of legislative quotas. At present, the aim of the parity laws is within reach and the relatively balanced gender composition of the Spanish regional chambers seems secured.

## NOTES

1. The empirical evidence comes from a data base (Bapolau) which has been built along nine years and collected information on the 5,353 regional deputies that have occupied any of the 9,664 seats in 1980-2011. Bapolau has received financial support from the Spanish Ministry for Science and Technology; projects BSO2003-02596, CSO2008-02525 and CSO2012-32564. Bapolau is a registered database with the number SE244-14. See Coller, Santana and Jaime (2014) for more information on Bapolau.
2. Some examples of research on MPs at the regional level are: Santana, Coller and Aguilar 2014; Coller, Sarcia and Santana 2011; Ortega and Trujillo 2011; Verge 2011; Martínez and Calvo 2010; Rodríguez 2010; Verge 2009; Coller 2008; Delgado and Jerez 2008; Feliu 2005; Morata 2004; Linz, Jerez and Corzo 2003; Valiente, Ramiro and Morales 2003; Roig 2002; Linz, Gangas and Jerez 2000; Calvet 1999; Sevilla 1997; Jerez and Morata 1995; Morán 1989; Pitarch and Subirats 1982.
3. Another area that has been little studied is "the distinctive opportunity structure offered by a federal system that permits politicians to shuttle back and forth between state and national legislatures, and between executive and legislative posts at both levels" (Patzelt 1999: 260).
4. In Spain, the comparison of the share of women MPs in the national Congress (36%) and the regional parliaments (42%) confirms this. A comparative study including 536 meso legislative bodies in 29 countries found that the mean percentage of women in those bodies (21.5%) was higher than the figure for national ones (20.8%) (Vengroff, Nyri and Fugiero 2003).
5. In order to avoid gaps between the percentages assigned to each group, Kanter places them in a graph where the numbers go from 0% to 0-20%, 20-40% and 40-60% (1977: 967).
6. For a different classification of regional chambers up to 2005, see Coller, Ferreira do Vale and Meissner (2008).
7. The means for each term are calculated by dividing the number of all women by the number of all MPs. By doing so, we avoid attaching the same weight to chambers with different sizes, such as La Rioja and Madrid in the 8<sup>th</sup> term (33 and 129 seats, respectively). Hence, these means do not coincide with the un-weighted simple means of the 17 regions. Regional means are calculated likewise and do not necessarily coincide with the simple means for each region if the size of the chamber has changed: Madrid is also a good example (N=94 in the 1<sup>st</sup> term and 129 in the 8<sup>th</sup>). The figures for the 9<sup>th</sup> term in Catalonia and the Basque Country have been taken into account in the computation of means.
8. Indeed, four of them are ups, another four are downs, and five do not change. The 9<sup>th</sup> term in Catalonia and the Basque Country (a rise and a movement within the balanced category, respectively) have not been considered in the overall computations.
9. See table A3 for details.
10. We are thankful to an anonymous referee for this point.

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## APPENDIX

Table A1. Electoral cycles

DATES	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
<b>Shared Regime</b>	08/05/1983	10/06/1987	26/05/1991	28/05/1995	13/06/1999	25/05/2003	20/05/2007	22/05/2011	
<b>Andalusia</b>	23/05/1982	22/06/1986	23/06/1990	12/06/1994	03/03/1996	12/03/2000	14/03/2004	09/03/2008	
<b>Catalonia</b>	20/03/1980	29/04/1984	29/05/1988	15/03/1992	19/11/1995	17/10/1999	16/11/2003	01/11/2006	28/11/2010
<b>Galicia</b>	20/10/1981	24/11/1985	17/12/1989	17/10/1993	19/10/1997	21/10/2001	19/06/2005	01/03/2009	
<b>Basque Country</b>	09/03/1980	26/02/1984	30/11/1986	28/10/1990	23/10/1994	25/10/1998	13/05/2001	17/03/2005	01/03/2009

Table A2. Patterns of evolution in women MPs

Region	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Pattern
Andalusia	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Aragon	-	+	+	+	+	=	+	Unstable trend
Asturias	+	+	-	+	-	+	WB	Unstable trend
Balearic Islands	+	+	+	+	+	+	WB	Stable up to balance
Canary Islands	=	+	+	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Cantabria	-	-	+	+	+	WB	WB	Unstable trend
Castile La Mancha	+	+	+	+	+	WB	WB	Stable up to balance
Castile Leon	=	+	+	+	+	+	WB	Stable up to balance
Catalonia	+	+	+	=	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Extremadura	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Galicia	-	+	+	+	+	=	+	Unstable trend
La Rioja	+	+	=	+	+	+	-	Unstable trend
Madrid	+	+	+	+	+	WB	WB	Stable up to balance
Murcia	-	+	+	=	+	+	=	Unstable trend
Navarre	+	+	+	+	+	+	=	Stable up to balance
Basque Country	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Stable up to balance
Valencia	=	+	+	+	WB	WB	WB	Stable up to balance

Source: Bapolau. Increase, '+'; decrease, '-'; no change, '='; changes within the balanced group, 'WB'.

Table A3. Slow, moderate and abrupt changes in women MPs

Region	Leg2 1987	Leg3 1991	Leg4 1995	Leg5 1999	Leg6 2003	Leg7 2007	Leg8 2011	Global (average)
Andalusia	1.8%	5.5%	11.0%	6.4%	5.5%	2.8%	7.3%	5.8%
Aragon	-4.6%	6.0%	4.5%	16.4%	4.5%	0.0%	3.0%	4.3%
Asturias	4.4%	8.9%	-4.4%	15.6%	-2.2%	11.1%	0.0%	4.8%
Balearic Islands	6.3%	6.8%	8.5%	3.4%	5.1%	10.2%	0.0%	5.7%
Basque Country	4.0%	1.3%	9.3%	4.0%	2.7%	5.3%	18.7%	4.7%
Canary Islands	0.0%	5.0%	3.3%	20.0%	6.7%	10.0%	-11.7%	4.8%
Cantabria	-0.9%	-5.1%	12.8%	23.1%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%
Castile La Mancha	6.2%	10.6%	2.1%	17.0%	10.6%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%
Castile Leon	0.0%	4.8%	11.9%	7.5%	8.9%	4.4%	-0.5%	5.3%
Catalonia	3.0%	2.2%	2.2%	0.0%	10.4%	5.9%	8.9%	4.6%
Extremadura	-1.5%	10.8%	3.1%	9.2%	6.2%	9.2%	-3.1%	4.8%
Galicia	-2.8%	7.9%	1.3%	10.7%	12.0%	0.0%	13.3%	6.1%
La Rioja	0.7%	9.1%	0.0%	15.2%	3.0%	3.0%	-3.0%	4.0%
Madrid	3.9%	4.1%	5.4%	6.1%	8.2%	6.1%	-1.7%	4.6%
Murcia	-4.7%	13.3%	4.4%	0.0%	8.9%	11.1%	0.0%	4.7%
Navarre	4.0%	6.0%	10.0%	4.0%	2.0%	6.0%	0.0%	4.6%
Valencia	0.0%	7.9%	15.7%	11.2%	1.1%	3.9%	-5.1%	5.0%
Mean	1.2%	6.2%	6.0%	10.0%	5.8%	5.2%	1.5%	5.0%
Standard deviation	3.3%	4.1%	5.2%	6.7%	3.7%	3.9%	6.9%	5.5%

To calculate the average changes in the percentage of women for each region, we have taken the simple arithmetic means of the changes in that region along the period. This procedure seems more straightforward than the alternative, which would have entailed computing the average change as:  $1 - ((\text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM T} - \text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM 1}) / \text{PERCENTAGE IN TERM 1}) \text{EXP}(1/(T-1))$ . It is also preferable to geometric means, given the presence of null and negative values. For a coherent interpretation, average changes in the percentage of women for each term have been also calculated as simple means of changes across all the regions in that term.

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