Beyond Traditional Goals: The Puzzle of Support Parties and Their Quest for Influence

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1 Introduction

On the night of the 23rd July 2023, the Catalan nationalist party Junts per Catalunya ("Together for Catalonia", referred to as Junts below) celebrated their results following the snap election called by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez two months earlier. The excitement and elation at Junts' headquarters might seem perplexing to those unfamiliar with Spanish politics. Despite securing only seven MPs, one fewer than in the previous parliament, and experiencing a significant 25.4 percent decrease in votes, Junts found reason to rejoice. The leaders looked exuberant. Every sentence was interrupted by a round of cheers and applause from the crowd. What had Junts gained from these seemingly modest results? What was there to celebrate?

Conventional wisdom, rational choice theory and natural common sense would suggest that such a significant setback in votes and seats would lead to the resignation of the party's leadership and a revaluation of its political strategy. However, within the Spanish political system, Junts found itself in a uniquely powerful position of kingmaker. In political terms, a kingmaker is a political actor who wields substantial influence without necessarily attaining direct power, direct power understood by the political punditry to be holding executive office. Junts' leadership, and their members, knew they were necessary for the formation of a Spanish government - and to be in that position was all that mattered to them when evaluating their electoral success.

The position that Junts found itself in has in fact been a common feature of Spanish politics. Support parties in Spain, that is parties backing a national government but not joining the cabinet, have almost exclusively been regional parties. These parties have historically leveraged their pivotal role during the government formation stage to negotiate for greater regional autonomy and influence as the price for their support for the minority governing party or parties. The study of these dynamics has focused on the transfer of competences from the national to the regional level and ostensibly for good reason, since the record given in standard accounts shows that these support parties in

Spain often seem, at least at first glance, to lack any other aspirations.

Minority governments and support agreements have been common almost from the beginning of the current Spanish democratic period in 1977. Since 1993, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español, known as PSOE, and the Partido Popular, known as PP, have needed the support of minor parties sitting in the Spanish Congress (hereafter, *Congreso*) to form a government. Since the well-known 1996 "Pacte del Majestic" between the PP and Convergència i Unió (CiU), a moderate Catalan centre-right party, the negotiations leading up to the formation of Spain's central government have come under increasing public and media scrutiny. The cornerstone of the public conversation tends to centre around the 'concessions' the *formateur* will give to the regional support parties and the implications of these power transfers for the sustainability of the Spanish quasi-federal system. This logic of bargaining was famously captured by Jordi Pujol, President of Catalonia from 1980 to 2003, with the phrase "*peix al cove*" — loosely translated as "fish in the bucket" — referring to the pragmatic strategy whereby a regional leader must travel to Madrid to secure tangible benefits for its region. As Miriam Nogueras, Junts' leader in the Spanish Parliament, succinctly put it on the 23rd July 2023 as the election results unfolded: "Our goal is Catalonia, not Spanish governability." Nogueras, in her own words, reaffirmed the traditional approach her party had followed, and intended to maintain, during the upcoming government formation process.

The Spanish case highlights the increasing importance of studying bargaining dynamics in political science. In most parliamentary democracies, agreements are an inherent part of politics and party systems. But as political debate and conflict around party politics evolves and transforms, so too does the nature of these agreements. For instance, Bergman et al. (2021) find that the nature of coalitions in Western Europe has changed due to the increasing party system fragmentation, most notably because of the growing presence of far-right parties, and the longer formation periods now needed. Along the same lines, Field (2022) shows that the increasing fragmentation of party systems, as well as investiture rules, are relevant variables in the slight increase in the number of minority governments in

a comparative perspective. As they write: "Overall, one message predominates: different parties in different countries prioritise different goals, and perhaps at different times" (Field and Martin, 2022: 327).

These observations accentuate how reaching agreements is becoming increasingly more complex in evolving political systems. Political parties, operating in a new setting of shifting political debates and media environments, find themselves with incentives different to those they had during the 20th and the early 21st century. Understanding the changing nature of agreements in politics remains something of a black box in political science. Nevertheless, trying to shed more light on the full scale and scope of political goals and the changing nature of agreements between political parties, as well as the bargaining dynamics of government formation is a worthwhile endeavour and is at the heart of this research project.

It is in this context that the Spanish example can be a valuable case study for the broader literature given that minority governments and support agreements have been so common. Its quasi-federal institutional setting that translates into a multilevel political system makes it a deviant case where the nature of incentives differ from other political environments. Furthermore, its party system, with increasing fragmentation both in the number of state-wide parties as well as the number of regional actors with in-group political demands operating in the *Congreso* has modulated the incentives of support parties. This thesis aims to give a better and more complete account of those incentives.

2 The Argument in a Nutshell

The bargaining dynamics in Spanish government formation involving regional devolution in return for political support has been extensively analysed by Ajenjo (2015), Reniu (2002) and Field (2009; 2014; 2016). I will expand on the work of these authors in Section 4 but will focus here specifically on Field's work (2009; 2014; 2016), as my main argument draws on her work.

Field's main contention is that regional support parties in Spain are policy-seekers in the national arena and office-seekers in the regional arena. Policy-seeking here means ensuring the transfer of more competences to the regional level. Office-seeking means controlling the regional government. In particular, reluctance to hold national executive office stems from the potential electoral risks involved. As Nogueras' statement suggests, and Field's work shows, the *Congreso* is primarily seen by regional parties as a place to secure the best possible deals for their regions by means of empowering their regional governments and reaping the benefits in the eyes of their regional electorates.

What Field and other scholars deny by implication is that regional support parties can be office-seekers at the national level and policy-seekers at the regional level. In other words, existing scholarly accounts do not allow for the fact that support parties can have a much broader range of goals and incentives that informs support party behaviour when supporting national minority governments.

My argument is that regional support parties in Spain, contrary to Field's and other scholars working in this area, do have a much broader range of goals and incentives and the goals they actually pursue depends on their position in both the regional and national arena. Specifically, I contend that regional support parties operating in a multilevel political system pursue different goals during government formation negotiations contingent on whether they are in government, a support party or in opposition in both arenas.

My case focuses on how goals and incentives within a multilevel system change for parties

in relation to their position to their negotiating partners and their regional rivals. It shows that regional support parties can in fact be office-seeking at the national level while also having broader policy-seeking goals at the national level than simply pursuing the transfer of more competences to the regional level.

To make my argument I analyse in detail each Spanish government formation process and the importance of three variables in these bargaining situations. First, I introduce two aspects of government formation negotiations that have not been sufficiently analysed by the literature: the allocation of megaseats in the national legislature referring to leading positions and roles in committees of the *Congreso*; and the content of support agreements between support parties and *formateurs*, with a particular emphasis on 'pork barrel' provisions referring to the additional discretionary investments or expenditure from the national budget for the benefit of a region. Second, I expand our knowledge on competence transfers from the national to the regional level and more precisely when do they occur, under what circumstances and which parties are more likely to bargain for them. When we bring in these elements, we are able to illustrate in a more comprehensive way the reality of the trade-offs between office and policy goals within each level and not across levels as Field's theoretical framework asserts.

Furthermore, my argument in this thesis, again contrary to the standard literature, also emphasises the development of the quasi-federal state in Spain[1] and the pool of available competences regions control and how this operates as a crucial driving force in the dynamics of Spanish government formation. That development has meant that the scope for transferring competences is constrained by emerging constitutional boundaries, compelling regional support parties to adopt more creative strategies in their demands during government formation.

At the heart of my inquiry is the view that there is a much more complicated puzzle when it comes to support parties in Spain than being framed as policy-seekers at the national level and policy-seekers at the regional level. One of the ways to solve that puzzle is a better understanding of the behaviour of support parties in multilevel systems and under

what circumstances they agree to support a minority government. My argument focuses on where a party is in the different political arena in a multilevel system as well as the limiting nature of competence transfers in the Spanish system.

More generally, the end goal of my thesis is to build on Field's work (2014; 2016; 2022), and the current literature, so that we can better answer the following two related questions: Why do minority governments form? And why and how do support parties support minority governments?

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In building my argument, this thesis will proceed as follows. In Section 3, I will provide a brief definition of minority governments and support parties, clarifying what these concepts entail. In Section 4, I will outline the Spanish institutional framework and the distinctive features of its party system, and its support parties, which are crucial to understand the dynamics of government formation. This section will review academic interpretations regarding the prevalence of minority governments. In Section 5, I will discuss my theory by identifying the gaps in the literature concerning the preferences of support parties and the explanations given by the literature for government formation in Spain. In Section 5.2 and Section 5.3, I will present my alternative theory and hypotheses on the behaviour of support parties and explain how I intend to test them. Subsequently, in Section 6 I will justify my methodology, my case selection and the data I have used to test my theory. In Section 7 and Section 8 I will present the results of my two analyses. Finally, in Section 9 I end my thesis with the conclusions and the implications of my research project.

3 Concepts and Definitions: Minority Governments, Support Parties and Support Agreements

This thesis focuses on the behaviour, goals and incentives of support parties which allows them to support the formation of minority governments. There is then an intimate connection between support parties and minority governments. That connection normally takes the form of investiture votes and support agreements. For this reason and before we go any further it is necessary that we give a clear conceptual account of what we mean by support parties and minority governments.

Whereas minority governments have a relatively straightforward numerical requirement that has been accepted by the literature as the conventional definition, this is not the case for support parties which are more loosely defined and on which there is no academic consensus as to what constitutes and what features are intrinsic to support parties to be considered as such. As for investiture votes and support agreements there is much more academic consensus on what these entail. Conceptual clarity and scientific research in this field, it needs to be said, is not helped by the close relationship between governing and support parties, the flexibility of the agreements between them and the secrecy which can pervade internal politics.

When it comes to minority governments, for the purpose of this research project, I will use the standard definition as articulated by Strøm. Strøm, the pioneering scholar in the minority governance literature (1984,1990), defines a minority government as:

"Any cabinet that meets all appropriate constitutional requirements and that is composed of persons acting as representatives of political parties or parliamentary groups that control less than half of all seats in the national legislature, or that chamber of the legislature to which the cabinet is constitutionally responsible" (Strøm, 1990: 6).

The definition lays down two important boundaries, that have been used as the conventional criteria in determining minority governments. First, members of the cabinet need

to belong to a parliamentary party, and the party (or parties, if it is a coalition minority government) must have less than half of the seats but nevertheless control cabinet portfolios. Second, it establishes that the cabinet is responsible to a legislature, and that can be one or two chambers, depending on the constitutional arrangements of the country in question, hence the literature's exclusive focus on parliamentary democracies. Although the requirements seem relatively easy to confirm, Strøm's definition is not without conceptual controversy. As Strøm himself argued (1990), some minority governments have such a close collaboration with their partners outside the government, that he coined the term 'majority governments in disguise' for some of them. In such cases, the absence of a partner party from the cabinet is largely irrelevant, as legislation is still passed effectively, with the backing of the support parties guaranteeing stability and law-making capacity through the legislative term.

The other relevant definition for this thesis is the concept of support parties. While there the literature still lacks a conceptual clarity as to the precise nature of support parties, this thesis, as a foundation of its inquiry, will use a definition based on two fundamental criteria. First, a support party remains completely outside the cabinet, including both junior ministerial roles and secondary positions within a ministry. In other words, a support party is one that does not participate, through its selected appointments, in any executive decision-making bodies. To do so would otherwise be to cross the threshold into the realm of coalition government. This is in line with the theoretical expectations and rationale for support parties, which determine that the costs of executive office outweigh the benefits. As a consequence support parties are framed by the literature as policy-oriented political organisations (Bale & Dann, 2002; Fortunato & Adams, 2015). Second, a support party provides support to the government through various institutional mechanisms designed for that purpose. The nature of support varies significantly across institutional contexts, political cultures, and each party's specific approach to providing support.

The literature has identified two important units of analysis to investigate support parties. First, there are investiture votes (Ajenjo, 2015; Field & Martin, 2022; Rasch et al., 2015)

and second, support agreements, where as regards to the latter, a distinction is made between formal agreements and substantive agreements (Bale & Bergman, 2006; Laver & Shepsle, 1996; Strøm, 1990).

First, investiture votes are a type of support that have been extensively analysed by the literature. This refers to the investiture of a government with the votes in favour of a support party (Rasch et al., 2015). For instance, in Spain, the main window of opportunity for bargaining occurs after the general election. As minority situations are quite frequent (see Table 1 below), *formateurs* need to find support for government formation from other parliamentary parties, normally parties from the different regions (known as Autonomous Communities in the Spanish Constitution). After the government forms, these support parties are considered part of the *mayoría de investidura*, and are expected to be the parties from which the Spanish cabinet seeks support during the lawmaking process.

Second, the other unit of analysis relevant to understanding support parties are support agreements. Here the literature makes a distinction between formal agreements and substantive agreements (Strøm, 1984; 1990). Formal agreements are written contracts in which both the government party and the support party mutually agree to specific policy goals or the passage of particular bills. In return, the support party commits to provide votes on legislation favoured by the government. The binding nature and detail in policy of some of these agreements (Bäck & Hellström, 2022), as well as the continuous backing of support parties are a further instance of what Strøm (1990) meant when he described them as "majority governments in disguise".

The analysis of these support agreements has been a recent trend in the scholarly literature due to the fact that political parties have relied on them more. Bale and Bergman (2006) find a certain transition towards 'contract parliamentarism' in parties' strategies, that has been corroborated by further research (Bergman et al., 2021; Field & Martin, 2022). Thürk and Krauss (2022) demonstrate this pattern in a large-N cabinet analysis covering 30 countries. The authors find that no minority governments had formal agreements during the 1980s, whereas in the 2010s about half of them were based on a formal

agreement. The widespread use of formal support agreements has expanded the scope and avenues for research in the literature. In line with other countries, the trend Krauss and Thürk (2022) uncovered, although more irregular, seems to also be the case in Spain since 2016, as we can see in Figure 1. Although support parties have been a recurrent element in the Spanish party system since 1993, publicly disclosed support agreements seem to be more frequent during the last ten years than before. The rationale behind this is that *formateurs* in Spain, as elsewhere, make support agreements available to the public as a tool to bind support parties to policy commitments agreed during the negotiation process just as vice versa, and for similar reasons, the support party expects that the concessions it has extracted as part of the support agreement are to be implemented.

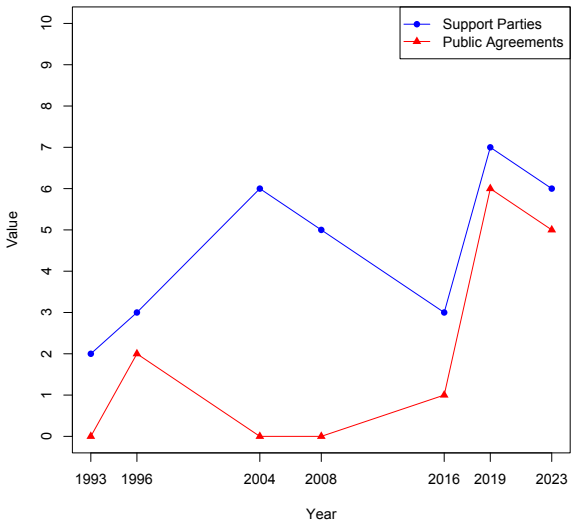


Figure 1: Support Agreements in Spain

The content and length of formal support agreements have been one of the main issues analysed by the literature. For example, longer word counts are used as a proxy for the specificity of the agreements and prove to be a key variable in understanding government formation, duration and survival (Bäck et al., 2011; Muller et al., 2011). Some initial evidence suggests that parties in coalition governments are more specific in agreeing in areas where they are more likely to diverge, hence preventing 'ministerial drift' (Klüver & Bäck, 2019). However, this finding might not hold with respect to support parties of mi-

nority governments. An argument has been made that very specific policy agreements are more likely where support parties aim to extract very particular and explicit concessions from the governing parties and use the negotiation process to differentiate themselves from the *formateur* in voters' perceptions (Fortunato, 2021). For example, Anghel and Thürk (2021) show that support agreements between ethno-regional and governing parties in Romania are focused on economic and group-specific policies, while remaining less explicit on social and foreign policies. Later research further demonstrated that minority governments relying on formal support agreements enjoy greater stability and higher survival rates compared to those without such agreements (Krauss & Thürk, 2022). These inconsistent findings reinforce the need for further research into support agreements, the parties' goals behind them and the negotiations that led to them.

The cases where parties agree to support a minority government but where the agreement is not made public are known as substantive agreements (Strøm, 1984; 1990). In this case, the mechanisms of support tend to vary and differ across political arenas and institutional contexts. It can be a one-off support in an investiture vote, agreements published throughout the legislative term between the government and the support party on certain policy areas, or ad-hoc agreements between the government and the support party. These types of agreements will not be treated in my thesis, and hence there is no need for further discussion of them.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Why and How Do Minority Governments Form in Spain?

In building my argument that the standard account in the existing literature fails to give a complete picture of what motivates support parties in Spain by restricting them as acting exclusively as office-seekers at the regional level and policy-seekers at the national level, we need at this point to present and examine in more detail the standard account advanced to explain why minority governments form in Spain.

Spain has been considered to have various distinctive features that make it something of an outlier in government formation studies (Andeweg et al., 2011). First, and as we have already said, the country is different in a comparative perspective as it has been governed throughout much of its modern democratic history by minority governments, primarily single-party minority administrations, as shown in Table 1. In this Table we can see that eight out of thirteen Spanish governments have been minority governments. The cases when no government was formed (1981-82, 2016 and 2019) were in the first case due to the failed 1981 coup d'etat, which led to a 'majority' support as parties 'rallied around the flag' until the government ended in 1982. Due to the exceptional circumstances, this government is not considered in Table 1. In the second and third cases, in 2016 and 2019, a government was not formed because of a breakdown in negotiations between the *formateur*, potential coalition partners and support parties that led eventually to the calling of new elections.

In explaining the high frequency of minority governments the literature has identified three key factors: the distinctive nature of support parties, their strategic calculations and behaviour, and the institutional and decentralized structure of the Spanish constitutional system. Each is discussed below in turn.

Table 1: Spanish Governments since 1979

Legislature	Party/Parties	President	Years	% Vote	# Seats	% Seats	Type	Support Parties
I	UCD	Suárez	1979-81	34.8	168	48.0	Minority	AP, PA, PAR, UPN
	UCD	Calvo-Sotelo	1981-82	/	/	/	Minority	CiU, PNV
II	PSOE	González I	1982-86	48.1	202	57.7	Majority	
III	PSOE	González II	1986-89	44.1	184	52.6	Majority	
IV	PSOE	González III	1989-93	39.6	175	50.0	Majority	
V	PSOE	González IV	1993-96	38.8	159	45.4	Minority	CiU, PNV
VI	PP	Aznar I	1996-2000	38.8	156	44.6	Minority	CiU, PNV, CC
VII	PP	Aznar II	2000-04	44.5	183	52.3	Majority	
VIII	PSOE	Zapatero I	2004-08	42.6	164	46.9	Minority	IU, ERC, CC, BNG, Cha
IX	PSOE	Zapatero II	2008-11	43.9	169	48.3	Minority	IU, CiU, BNG, NaBai
X	PP	Rajoy I	2011-16	44.6	185	52.8	Majority	
XI	/	/	2016	/	/	/	/	
XII	PP	Rajoy III	2016-19	33.4	134	38.2	Minority	Cs, PSOE, UPN, CC, Foro
XIII	/	/	2019	/	/	/	/	
XIV	PSOE-Podemos	Sánchez I	2019-2023	28.2	120	34.3	Minority	PNV, MP, NC, Com., BNG, TE!, ERC, EHB
XV	PSOE-Sumar	Sánchez II	2023-Current	31.68	121	34.5	Minority	ERC, Junts, EHB, PNV, BNG, CC

4.1.1 The Nature of Support Parties and Their Goals

A good starting point for understanding the predominance of minority governments in Spain is by focusing on the character and nature of its support parties, and contrasting them with what are seen as the conventional goals of political parties more generally.

We have already introduced the terms office-seeking and policy-seeking and this reflects the central and ongoing debate in the literature regarding the goals of political parties. This has divided scholars during the 20th century, between those who consider that political parties are office-seekers and those who consider that they are policy-seekers. Riker (1962) is the main proponent of the classical office-seeking school, which is one of the baseline assumptions of the literature. He views politics as a constant zero-sum game played for the fixed prize of holding office, where the main bargaining chip is the number of portfolios parties hold in government. The crux of the bargaining process is centred on how many government portfolios a political party can obtain, and ideally if it can be overcompensated in comparison with its parliamentary seat share.

The theory follows the premise that controlling a portfolio means controlling that policy area and its outputs (Laver & Shepsle, 1996). Since political scientists began analysing governments in the postwar era and as portfolio allocation is a fairly easy pattern to study and on which to collect data, they have seen a remarkable degree of proportional concordance between the number of government portfolios a political party obtains and its parliamentary seat share. This has been coined as Gamson's law (Browne & Franklin, 1973; Gamson, 1961). Nevertheless, some deviations have also been identified. For instance, Cutler et al (2016) find a *formateur* advantage in government formation bargaining. Falcó-Gimeno and Indridason (2013) show that small parties tend to get a larger share of government portfolios than their parliamentary seat share would normally predict. In short, political scientists studying cabinet formation have long tried to figure out who is in, who is not and for what reasons.

Seen in this context, it is not surprising that minority governments are viewed as a

puzzle in the literature. If the assumption is that control of a policy area is directly associated with having a cabinet portfolio and that policy can only be shaped from office it would seem to follow that if office is not secured during the inter-party bargaining of government formation, a political party is without *raison d'être*. Consequently, theoretical predictions suggesting that political parties always bargain for government portfolios face clear contradictions in the case of parties supporting the formation of a government but, for various reasons, not obtaining any portfolios in return. Because this appeared contrary to rational choice expectations, minority governments were often viewed as unstable, unpredictable, and ultimately prone to failure. As support parties did not enter the collective decision-making body (the cabinet), they could decide to end the government whenever they deemed it necessary or suitable.

Other scholars, however, challenged this view. Strøm (1990) showed that supporting minority governments from outside could be rational options when considering governing circumstances or policy influence, among other variables. It was also not credible in any logical understanding of negotiations that support parties might be willing to altruistically support a *formateur* without obtaining anything in exchange. This prompted scholars to begin looking at goals other than office-seeking as motivating forces. These could be proximity in preferences between support and governing parties, installing a *cordon sanitaire* against a vetoed potential governing party or simply the ability to gain political or policy advantages.

This broadening of the scope of political party goals drew on the principal challenge to office-seeking theories, in which scholars such as De Swaan (1973) or Axelrod (1970) introduced policy-seeking as an alternative. From this perspective a party's main objective is to shape public policy in the direction of its desired preferences. The introduction of policy preferences as motivating forces of political parties led political science to start using policy spatial maps, policy dimensionalities and issue saliency to understand how political parties operate in a party system, where they compete for issue ownership and voters (Laver & Schofield, 1990; Müller & Strøm, 1999; Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Warwick,

2006). These arguments were regarded as more plausible explanations for the formation of minority governments, and this view continues today. However, scholars also emphasised different political systems and their specific contexts as factors shaping the policy space and outlook of political party goals, leading to considerable variation in these goals and a significant factor in explaining why minority governments form (Field & Martin, 2022).

When applied to the Spanish context, both the office-seeking and policy-seeking schools of thought are invoked in the standard account, with support parties in Spain being characterised as policy-seeking at the national level and office-seeking at the regional level (Field, 2016; Field & Martin, 2022; Heller, 2002). According to this literature, the ability of support parties to balance these competing goals lies in prioritising different objectives across different political arenas on the basis of a differentiated distribution of competences in a multilevel system. This view is in part corroborated in the standard account in its conclusion that regional parties in Spain do not really seek to influence policy, in a strict sense, in their bargaining during the government formation process. As Alonso (2012) and Heller (2002) have shown, regional parties needed as support parties in national government formation are not focused on achieving favourable policy outcomes, such as for example loosening labour market regulations or implementing stricter abortion laws.

This outlook contrasts with the assumed balance between office, policy and vote-seeking goals that Strøm and Müller put forward (1999). Instead, rather than balancing goals, support parties in Spain do not pursue office at the national level but facilitate government formation, making minority governments a rational choice for them (and finding agreement with them often the only option for state-wide parties wishing to govern).

The other characteristic of support parties in Spain that has been highlighted in the literature is their ideological purity, which is viewed as the source of their position that entering into a coalition with state-wide parties in the national parliament would be perceived to be as compromising regional interests (De Winter & Türsan, 1998). Moreover, given that governments are unitary and collective bodies, and are seen by the public as such (Fortu-

nato, 2021; Fortunato & Adams, 2015; Hjermitslev et al., 2024), support parties in Spain seem to be very conscious of the costs of being perceived as 'selling out' or appearing to be too close to their partners in the eyes of their electorate (Fortunato & Adams, 2015).

4.1.2 Support Party Strategy and Behaviour

The distinctive nature of support parties in Spain is also mirrored in their strategy and behaviour compared both to state-wide parties and other support parties in other parliamentary democracies. Generally, scholars have emphasised that historically, the largest party in Spain has almost always been close to an absolute majority, and this parliamentary arithmetic reduces the incentives for support parties to form part of the government (Strøm, 1984; 1990). For instance, a recurring situation in Spanish politics highlighted by the literature has been one where the state-wide PSOE has had almost an absolute majority in terms of seats in the *Congreso* and the median MP in Parliament in the two relevant dimensions of political conflict: the left-right dimension and the centre-periphery dimension (Field, 2014; Laver & Schofield, 1990). This positioning and dimensional map has had important implications for government formation and negotiation strategies.

As a way of capturing the nature of political competition in Spain, I created Figure 2 by extracting party positioning from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2019 round. In it we can see the different dimensions of Spanish politics. Analysing past survey rounds show very similar results, indicating that dimensions and party positions have not changed substantially. Figure 2 indicates how negotiation and agreement with potential regional support parties, or coalition partners, along the left-right dimension can be problematic. This is particularly the case with right-wing parties, who, whether they are regional or state-wide parties, tend to be ideologically similar in terms of the left-right dimension, but occupy different ends of the centre-periphery cleavage. When this dimension becomes more salient it makes agreement virtually impossible between parties that are close in the left-right dimension.

Nevertheless, while it might make sense for support parties with modest national parliament representation not to join a government, because the costs of joining would outweigh the benefits, as their parliamentary strength grew, and the *formateur's* bargaining power decreased, their incentives should change and allow them to move from being support parties to be willing to join the government. In other words, support parties would be more likely to join the government as their seat share in parliament increased. However, the distinctive behaviour of support parties in Spain is that regardless of their parliamentary seat share, they have never taken up ministerial positions in national governments. This was even the case with the recent Sánchez I and II coalition governments, which involved state-wide parties. In 2018 when Podemos joined PSOE in a coalition government, a scenario that was repeated in 2023, when Sumar, a loose left-wing partnership that included Podemos, became the junior partner in a PSOE-led administration, regional support parties were still not interested in joining the government, even though their relative parliamentary strength had increased and the *formateur* was not the median party.

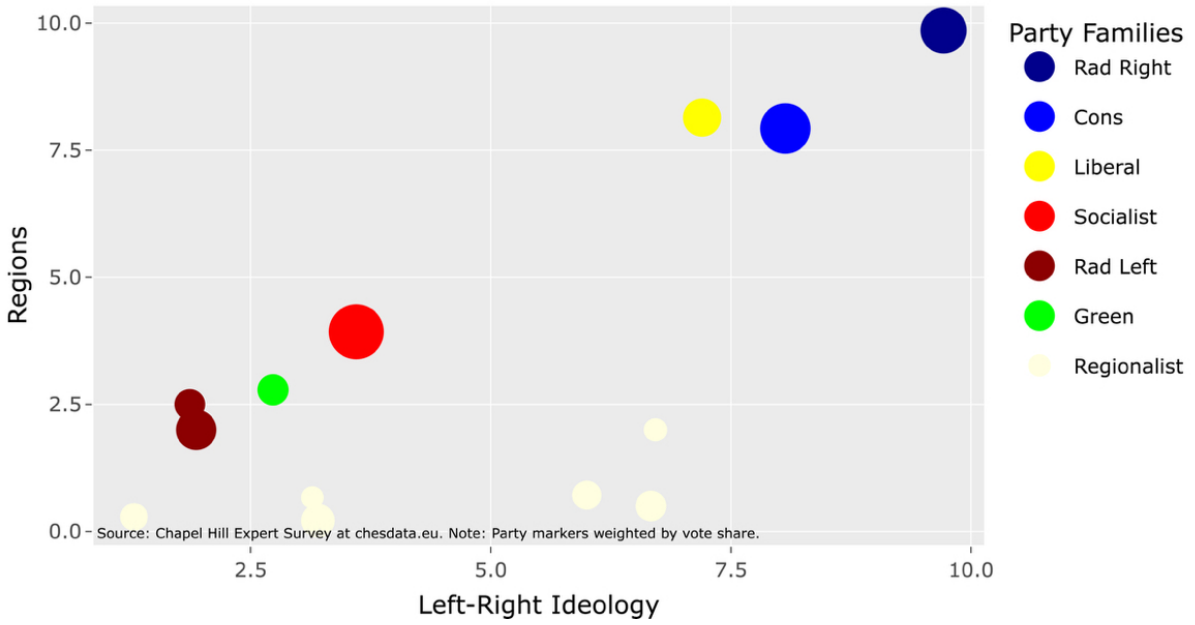


Figure 2: Regions vs Left-Right Ideology in Spain

Interestingly state-wide parties have been open to the idea of giving cabinet portfolios to regional support parties and forming a coalition. Media reports from the 1990s and 2000s[23], as well as memoirs from politicians of the time, indicate that this was an issue that was discussed at government formation negotiations. However, the historic fear among regional parties has always been that their electorate would punish them in subsequent elections if they joined a national Spanish government (Ardanza, 2011; Pujol, 2012).

The dynamic of ad-hoc concessions, principally by means of the devolution of competences in each government formation bargaining process and the high frequency of minority governments has been the mainstay of the existing literature (Table 1) (Bergman et al., 2021; Field & Martin, 2022; Meguid, 2024). In this bargaining process *formateurs* and support parties in Spain tend to find a 'sweet spot' where they are able to agree certain trade-offs in the centre-periphery dimension and the left-right dimension in order for the national government to form but without the participation of the support party (Field & Martin, 2022; Heller, 2002).

In the context of this perspective, the existing literature has nevertheless tried to model in more detail support party behaviour. Field (2014) provides a very valuable framework to further our understanding by evaluating whether regional governing circumstances change the incentives for a regional party to support a national party in a national minority government. The degrees of dependency affecting the regional party are set out in Table 2, which is taken from Field (2014). Table 2 presents a situation where there is a regional minority government. Within this simple model, Field demonstrates under what circumstances a regional party is more likely to be a support party in the national parliament.

Table 2: Typology of Regional Party Governing Status During Minority National Governments

	In Regional Cabinet	**Out of Regional Cabinet**
In National Coalition	Co-Dependent (e.g., ICV 2006)	Vulnerable (e.g., PNV 2005–2009)
Outside National Coalition	Independent (e.g., ERC 2024–present)	Independent (e.g., Junts 2022–2024)

Field (2014) finds that governing regional parties, that is regional parties that govern in their home region, if they needed a national party to guarantee their continuity in the regional government, were more likely to support a national minority government than regional parties in the opposition in their region. In other words, in a co-dependent scenario, where a regional party needs a national party and vice versa, both are willing to cooperate with each other in the support of bills in each chamber. Hence the term 'mutual back scratching' that Field coined (Field, 2014). The author also finds that support given to the national government is more likely when a state-wide party and a regional party are in a regional coalition government. It also follows from this that the logic of the 'sweet spot' is validated. The regional party wants to remain in the regional government, and the national party wants to remain in the national government. To fulfil their office goals, the leadership of both parties are able to offer each other support, whether it is in the formation of the government, or in the passage of bills in one parliament or the other (Field, 2016). That is, the national governing party tends to support the regional government's bills in the regional parliament, while the regional support party reciprocates by backing the national government's initiatives in the national parliament.

4.1.3 Spain's Institutional and Territorial Organisation

The third factor highlighted in the literature determining the behaviour of support parties and contributing to the prevalence of minority governments in Spain is the country's institutional and decentralized structure of its constitutional system. As we have seen, policy at the national level has been analysed in terms of the transfer of competences to the regional governments due to Spain's flexible quasi-federal model, where regional competences are not clearly outlined by the Constitution. In other words, regional parties have negotiated their region's powers on an ad-hoc basis at each government formation. As Heller (2002) shows, state-wide parties are willing to be more flexible as regards to the centre-periphery dimension than the left-right dimension. They therefore agree to more 'federal' outcomes than their more centralist ideology might otherwise allow in order to be able to implement policies closer to their ideal preferences on the left-right dimension, which regional parties value less. For this reason, it is important to highlight the structural circumstances under which political parties in Spain operate.

The devolution dynamics of the Spanish territorial system can be explained by Spain's bicameral parliamentary structure as well as the somewhat ambiguous territorial provisions that are included in the Constitution. In bicameral parliamentary systems, the lower chamber typically holds the authority to appoint and dismiss the cabinet. Spain follows this pattern, as the government is accountable solely to one chamber, the *Congreso*. This means that the government is formed through a vote in this chamber and can only be removed by it, exclusively by means of a constructive motion of confidence, a mechanism which strengthens the position of the Spanish Prime Minister. This institutional feature, among others, contributes to Spain's classification as a low-to-medium strength bicameral system (Lijphart, 2012).

The upper chamber, the *Senado*, was constitutionally designed as a chamber of regions, yet it plays an insignificant role in government formation nor in the devolution mechanisms of the Spanish constitutional system. As a result, regional interests have been channelled

through regional parties, who have primarily used the *Congreso* as their main platform to advance territorial and regional demands. This has, historically speaking, given certain regional parties with concentrated support in national elections a lot of power when it comes to Spanish governability, especially in the investiture process as a means of channelling their demands through the *Congreso* and not the *Senado* (Ajenjo, 2015).

This institutional structure was defined during the process of drafting the Spanish Constitution. The seven 'fathers' of the Spanish Constitution, as they are known, were allocated based on the electoral strength of their respective parties in the 1977 general election, the first democratic election in modern Spanish history. The seven were composed of three members from UCD, the post-Francoist 'liberal' right primarily composed of former regime politicians, one member from the socialist party (PSOE), one member from the communist party (PCE), one member from Alianza Popular (AP, a precursor to the PP, the current conservative Christian-democrat party) and, finally, a representative for the 'minority nationalities', in essence representing the demands and concerns of the Basque and Catalan regions, which were commonly assumed to be unified and channelled through two parties: CiU in Catalonia and PNV in the Basque Country.

On the 6th December 1978, the Spanish Constitution was ratified via a referendum with broad support, and although Catalonia and the Basque Country had lower turnouts, both regions still registered a majority in favour of the Constitution which, subsequently, entered into force. However, the Constitution was not free of uncertainty and disagreement. The principal concerns, both among the political elite and the population, especially the Basques and the Catalans, revolved around the VIII Title of the Constitution, concerning territorial organisation and how to accommodate the different regional identities in the Spanish territory, which were heavily repressed during the Franco dictatorship. As later acknowledged by the 'fathers' of the Constitution themselves, they failed to reach a consensus on this matter, deliberately leaving the territorial organisation ambiguously defined (Solé-Tura, 1999).

This state of affairs allowed for the territorial organisation of the state to remain flexi-

ble, asymmetrical, and most importantly, subject to change. The informal and unclear nature of the process left numerous questions unanswered. Essentially, regional governments could claim their constitutionally allocated powers under Article 149 of the Spanish Constitution if they wished to manage them independently, a provision which explains the subsequent asymmetry of powers devolved to regional governments. In other words, if the regional governments did not want to claim these competences, the central state retained responsibility for those policy areas within the region. Initially, certain regions, the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia, known as the 'historical communities', were the first to request the gradual transfer of all powers listed under Article 149.

Though the ability to devolve competences comes from the flexible nature of the Spanish quasi-federal model, the competences that regional governments can seek are not unlimited, as Article 149 has a finite number of them. For this reason, the constitutional law scholarly literature has advanced the view that the Spanish Constitution might be losing its flexibility since the competences that Autonomous Communities (Spanish regions) can ask to be responsible for have already been transferred. We could, therefore, be reaching, or have reached, a 'constitutional maximum' in Spain's flexible quasi-federal model (Aja, 2003; Colino, 2013).

The idea of a 'constitutional maximum' is reinforced by the fact that other regions have sought the same powers as the 'historical communities' (Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia), resulting in a very similar distribution of competences among all seventeen Spanish regions, though with some exceptions. These exceptions are usually competences that the 'historical communities', represented by political parties in the *Congreso*, have been able to negotiate during government formation processes as a condition for their support and the literature has analysed these bargaining dynamics (Alonso, 2012; Field, 2016; Heller, 2002; Reniu, 2011).

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In conclusion, the standard account as set out in this literature review is that support

parties in Spain, due to their distinctive nature, strategy and behaviour, as well as the structural and constitutional framework in which they operate, pursue different goals across political arenas and act exclusively as policy-seekers at the national level and office-seekers at the regional level (Field, 2016). In contrast to the goals of conventional political parties, they behave differently contingent on what level in the federal hierarchy they find themselves, rather than balancing their policy and office-seeking goals across the different arenas of the multilevel system. This thesis will argue that the commonly accepted paradigm in the standard account is too simplistic a view and requires further refinement. It will be shown that support parties in Spain in fact vary in their objectives both among themselves and over time. The case for this will be made in the following sections.

5 Theory

5.1 Shortcomings in the literature

The first shortcoming of the existing literature is that it has worked on the assumption that the support party governs in its region, and that therefore, the rewards it derives from supporting the national government by means of the transfer of competences can then be politically and electorally capitalised back in its home region (Field, 2016). In other words, the standard account assumes that the regional government and the support party in the national parliament have the same goals because they are under the aegis of the same umbrella organisation, the regional party. This was historically the case when the main support parties were PNV and CiU, and both parties were governing with comfortable majorities in their regional parliaments. But, the record shows that there have been support parties that are in opposition in the regional parliament. It is then necessary to question how might the bargaining dynamics change when the support party is not in the regional government. It is also the case that in Spain, new parties, mostly issue entrepreneurs and niche parties at the national level (Rodon & Hierro, 2016; Vries & Hobolt, 2020), or rival parties within the ranks of the regional party system, both in Catalonia and the Basque Country, have been appearing since the beginning of the 21st century, or have achieved the parliamentary presence they had before the Franco dictatorship (De Winter & Türsan, 1998; Gray, 2020). In substantive terms, this means that the scenario of a regional party governing in the regional government and acting as a support party in the national parliament is less and less likely, as an absolute majority of one party in the regional parliament becomes a less common outcome. Thus, as the fragmentation of party systems, both regionally and nationally, has become a more established feature of the Spanish political system, it is easier for us to study these dynamics.

The second shortcoming is that the prevailing theoretical paradigm tends to portray regional parties at the national level as primarily policy-seeking actors when they function

as support parties and such policy-seeking is deemed exclusively as securing competence transfers that empower their regional governments. While this view has some intuitive appeal, it risks offering a reductive account of regional party behaviour. Political parties are inherently multidimensional organizations with a range of strategic objectives. While competence transfers remain an important dimension of their bargaining strategies, they do not fully explain the scope of these parties' goals when engaging with national governing parties.

The third shortcoming of the existing literature is that it has not sufficiently taken on board the notion of a 'constitutional maximum' and whether the bargaining dynamics involving regional support parties have or are potentially bound to change, as the constitutional boundaries regarding the transfer of competences are reached. The traditional logic, whereby regional parties negotiate the transfer of additional competences in exchange for parliamentary support, may face limitations as the space for new transfers narrows. Thus, a deeper engagement with the concept of a 'constitutional maximum' is needed to assess whether the traditional patterns of territorial bargaining are sustainable, or whether they are changing as the scope for further decentralisation diminishes.

5.2 An Alternative Theory

Because my argument hinges on the fact that a determining factor in explaining support party behaviour is dependent on their status in the regional parliament, and getting away from the prevailing view that a support party is presupposed to be in government at the regional level, an alternative theory needs to begin with a more comprehensive theoretical account of these varying statuses. To do this I use Figure 3 where we can see the different parliamentary statuses regional parties can have in a multilevel political system. I differentiate six different 'situations' numbered from (1) to (6). A regional party has three options or parliamentary statuses in the regional arena: government, support party or opposition. The regional party has of course a similar set of options in the national parliament. I eliminate the option of being in the government in the national parliament

as this is not a realistic scenario for two reasons. First, regional parties run only in their region's provinces (the Spanish electoral system equivalent to constituencies), making it mathematically impossible to achieve a majority or even close to one. For example, if CiU won all the seats in Catalonia for the *Congreso*, CiU would obtain 48 seats in a parliament of 350 MPs. Second, even if the mathematical hurdle was passed, regional parties would not have any interest in being in the national government, for the reasons set out in Section 4. Furthermore, as the way I present Figure 3 could lead to confusion, it has to be stressed that this is not a two-move game. In other words, it is not a game where one decision is made after the other. There are six different final scenarios, and the regional party position can change as national or regional elections occur.

For additional clarification, and applying real-world examples to these varying statuses, I created Table 3 which gives an example of a political party for each scenario. Related to the conceptual clarification and debate described in Section 3, Table 3 could present certain borderline situations in terms of when a support party could be considered as such. However, for the simplicity of the theory and this inquiry, these details will not be included, and a support party is strictly a party that has guaranteed the formation of the government in the investiture process.

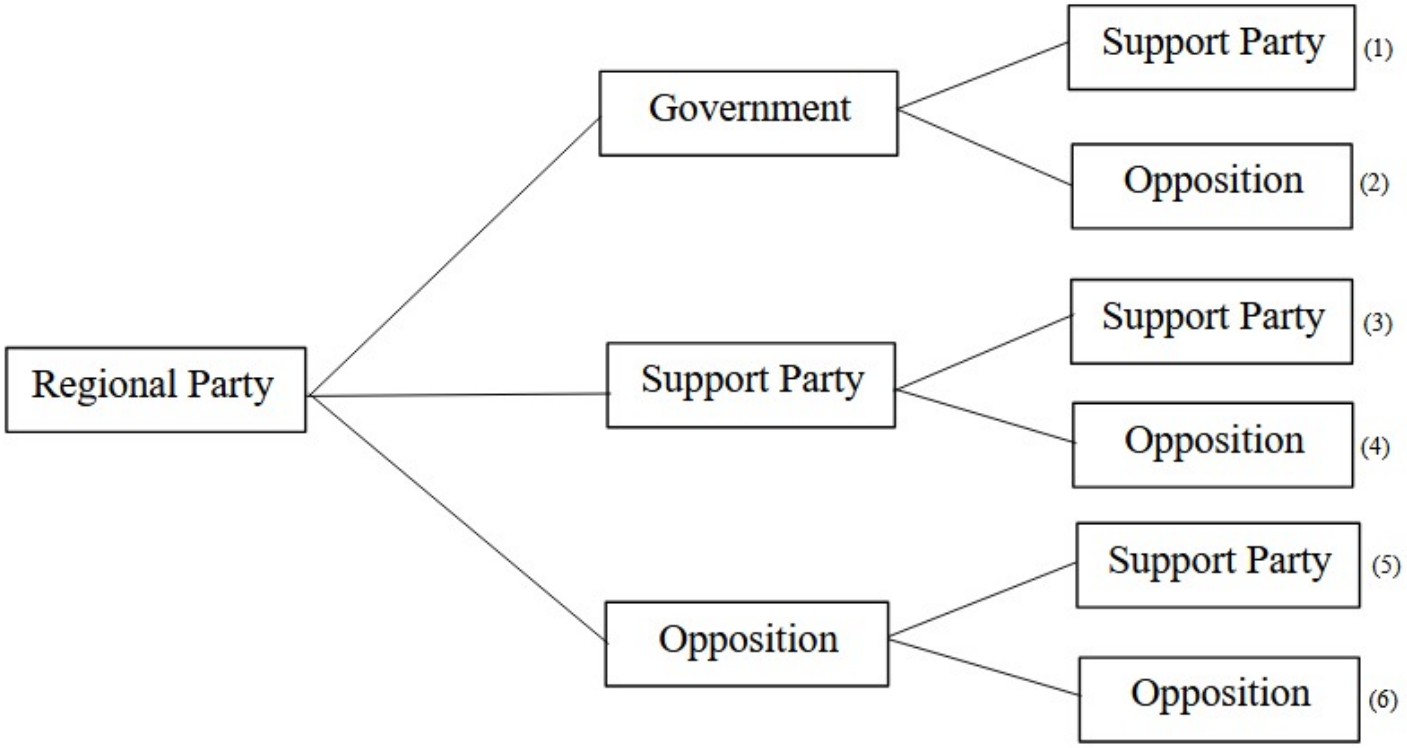


Figure 3: Parliamentary Status Across Multilevel Systems

Table 3: Parliamentary Status: National and Regional Levels

	Regional Parliament		
National Government	**Government**	**Support Party**	**Opposition**
Government	PSC/PSOE (2024)	Sumar/Podem (2024)	PSC/PSOE (2020–2024)
Support Party	ERC (2018–2023); CiU (1993–2000); PNV (1993–1996)	ERC (2023)	Junts (2024); Bildu (2024)
Opposition	Junts (2018–2021)	CUP (2021–2024)	Vox (2018–2024); PP (2018–2024)

By using Table 3 and Figure 3, I aim to show that the focus of the existing literature in understanding the incentives of parties has been directed only to those that are in the regional government and a support party in the national parliament (the government column and support party row in Table 3).

This inquiry aims to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on the differences between the government-support scenario and the opposition-support scenario. These are scenarios (1) and (5) in Figure 3. In scenario 5, the incentives do not seem as straightforward. A regional party that is not in government in the regional arena does not have a guarantee that the transfer of competences will be to its benefit. It might actually be detrimental to them as a transfer of competences might benefit its regional rivals in power in the regional government. Thus, empowering the regional government, and consequently the executive powers and political capital of its regional rivals might be a less appealing bargaining strategy. Understanding if parties who do not control the regional government have different bargaining objectives from those who do control the regional government is one of the goals of my thesis.

Recognising this limitation in Field's framework, we can complement Field's findings by putting forward an alternative theoretical framework to understand support parties on the basis of such parties having three possible statuses in each arena: government, support or opposition.

Given this more comprehensive account of the varying statuses of support parties in their regions the second element of my theory is that support parties have a rational case to expand their demands beyond the transfer of competences. Instead of limiting their negotiations to empowering the region's powers, they push for broader or other benefits that the *formateur* can offer. Rather than agreeing on competence transfers for parliamentary support, or as Heller (2002) put it "trading policy for authority (658)", regional parties find themselves in negotiations in which each party must account for its own strategic positioning in both the national and regional arenas. By moving beyond the competence transfer paradigm, and delving into how their incentives might change in

a multilevel political system, my alternative theory seeks to offer a more comprehensive account of what motivates regional parties in the national political arena, and how these motivations shape their goals by analysing other bargaining chips that have been relevant in government formation negotiations. Specifically, I focus on two other bargaining chips that support parties negotiate. These are megaseats in the national parliament and 'pork barrel' investments included in support agreements.

The third element of my alternative theory concerns the dynamics of decentralisation within the Spanish constitutional framework. As constitutional decentralisation has progressed over time, primarily driven by the demands of support parties and subsequent empowerment transfers from the national government, it is logical to expect that the strategic objectives of support parties will need to adapt and evolve in response to this limiting constitutional reality. The more competences that are transferred, the less room remains for additional decentralisation, thus reducing the value of Article 149 as a bargaining tool in government formation negotiations between support parties and the central government not least because any remaining competences that could be transferred are also potentially the least electorally appealing competences given that the politically attractive ones revolving around policy areas such as health, budget, taxation or lawmaking powers, have already been transferred (Aja, 2003).

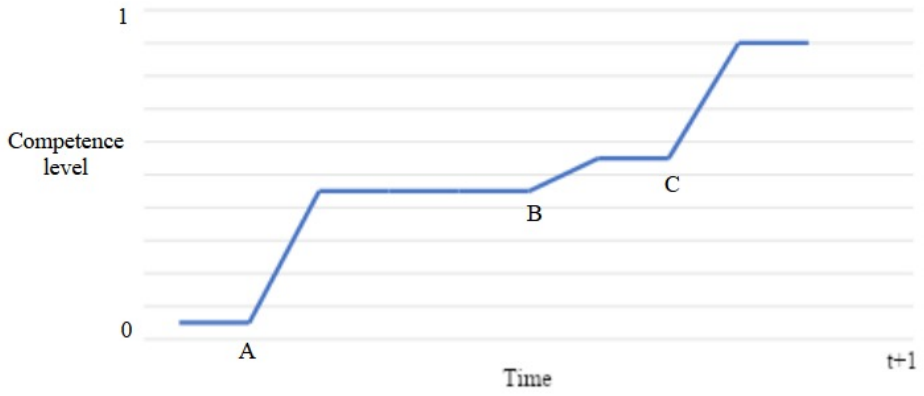


Figure 4: Regional Powers Over Time

To understand better the dynamic framed by the 'constitutional maximum' idea I put forward Figure 4. This Figure shows that at any given moment (time t), a party's priorities and negotiating position will be influenced by the competences that remain untransferred. However, at a later point in time (t+1), after further devolution has taken place, that same party may find that this logic may not follow as it cannot continue to demand further competences to be transferred. To understand this dynamic, let us say Party X is a regional party. Independently of whether it is in government or opposition at the regional level, and if we understand Party X's only policy goal to be the transfer of competences, Party X will have different goals at time t compared to time t+1. This is simply because the pool of competences available for regional governments in Article 149 is shrinking. As for the y axis in Figure 4, 0 represents a hypothetical scenario with a complete centralisation of competences at the national level and 1 represents a hypothetical scenario with complete decentralisation of competences at the regional level. As we get closer to t+1, and the competence level of regions is increased at each national government formation (represented in the model by the letters A, B and C). The model suggests that regional parties cannot seek more competences as the maximum level of 1 is being approached. This makes it much more compelling for Party X to redefine its political goals and seek alternative forms of influence or compensation in order to keep granting its support, whether it is in the government formation instance or in the passage of bills during the legislative term.

5.3 Hypotheses

The standard account on Spanish government formation, as we have seen, has been clear and straightforward on why support parties provide their votes to the *formateur* in order to form a government. However, because it has focused primarily on the transfer of competences, the standard account has failed to notice other goals support parties have been pursuing during government formation negotiations.

Using Spain as a case study my thesis aims to make three contributions to the study of minority government formation and multilevel systems. First, to show that during the process of government formation support parties in the national parliament have had other goals than the transfer of competences. Second, it is to see how these goals vary depending on the status of the regional party in the regional parliament: in government or in opposition. Third, it is to demonstrate that the scope for transferring competences is constrained by constitutional boundaries, which in turn compels support parties to adopt more creative strategies in their demands during government formation negotiations.

Turning now to my hypotheses my case is that, in contrast to the standard account, support parties are also to some extent office-seekers at the national level. To demonstrate this, I use megaseats at the national parliament as a proxy variable to analyse the other goals support parties pursue. I simply contend that, regardless of regional parliamentary status, when regional parties are support parties, they are more likely to obtain megaseats. I argue that this happens because the *formateur* uses the allocation of megaseats, taken to be leading roles in parliamentary committees, as a bargaining chip during government formation negotiations. These positions allow the *formateur* to reward support parties, potentially decreasing concessions in the areas of competence transfers, which tend to be highly controversial within the Spanish political system and population as a whole. For their part, it seems rational that regional support parties are willing to accept such megaseats, as these roles offer influence over the media and legislative agenda, as well as an informational advantage, thereby helping them to achieve office-seeking goals without

the costs or exposure of full cabinet participation. Furthermore, as Field 2016 shows, *formateurs* and their support parties tend to be closer and vote together more often, hence a collaborative nature might follow in regard to the distribution of megaseats.

H1: *Being a support party increases the likelihood of obtaining a megaseat.*

Second, building on H1 and in line with my argument that the goals of support parties vary depending on their position in the regional parliament I contend that when a support party holds executive office in a regional parliament and is simultaneously needed by the *formateur* to form a government at the national level, it will focus its demands on the transfer of competences from the national to the regional level, as this is a regional's party primary goal. This strategic focus reflects the dual advantage such transfers provide: first, they can be easily used as political and electoral capital, enhancing the party's standing as a defender of regional interests; and second, since the party already controls the regional executive, it controls the power to implement and benefit from the devolved competences. In this way, the party can convert institutional gains into political and electoral capital as a means for re-election.

However, my claim is that support parties pursue other types of goals if they are not in the regional government. For instance, if a support party in the national arena is in the opposition in the regional arena and needed for government formation by a state-wide party in the national arena, the support party will focus its demands on different goals. This is because, lacking executive control at the regional level, the support party would have limited capacity to directly benefit from devolved competences, reducing the political capital of obtaining them. In this case, I proxy these other goals through two variables. First, by analysing the allocation of megaseats, I claim that a support party will be more likely to obtain a megaseat when it is in the opposition in the regional parliament, as it has less incentives to negotiate the transfer of competences as part of a government formation process. Second, by analysing other pork-barrel investments that support parties and *formateurs* have agreed in support agreements. I contend that both of these goals are more likely when the support party is in the opposition at the regional level. Again this

contrasts with the standard account given by the literature.

H2: *Support parties that are in regional government will prioritise the transfer of competences over other goals.*

H3: *Support parties that are in opposition in the regional parliament will prioritise other goals over the transfer of competences.*

Furthermore, and using the constitutional decentralization boundaries framework, I expect support parties to demand less competence transfers when high levels of decentralization have been reached, and thus to prioritise other goals as this happens. In other words, as competence transfers are no longer available in the government formation bargaining, support parties are more likely to obtain other goals during these negotiations. Thus, I expect less competence transfers to be agreed now, leaving room for other goals.

H4: *Support parties are less likely to demand competence transfers when the region has already reached high levels of decentralization and fewer competences remain to be transferred.*

H5: *Support parties are more likely to demand other goals than the transfer of competences when high levels of decentralization have already been reached.*

To test my hypotheses my thesis will focus on using megaseats and pork barrel provisions in support agreements as proxy variables to explain other goals support parties have pursued during government formation negotiations. Because government formation negotiations are secret, there are obvious limitations in using megaseats and content of support agreements as the units of analysis, as these might not capture the entire picture of the bargaining process. However, these have not been analysed before and can therefore be seen as a step in the right direction in giving us a more comprehensive account of the demands of support parties in the formation of minority governments.

6 Research Strategy

In this section, I set out the research design for my thesis, which aims to test my five hypotheses.

First, to justify my case selection, the variation in minority governments in comparative perspective has led scholars to use case studies as a research method. Case studies are considered research projects that can refine causal chains and enhance the field's qualitative understanding through more polished and extensive inquiry (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007). In that sense, the study of minority governments is a literature that is more predisposed to small-n research due to how singularities and contextual differences can have strong explanatory power in determining the frequency of minority governments (Bäck & Dumont, 2007). Small-n projects are crucial to assess whether theoretical accounts and their assumptions align with empirical evidence to further conceptual clarity (Collier & Mahoney, 1996; Mahoney, 2000).

Spain offers a valuable comparative case for advancing our understanding of minority governments and of government formation. As pointed out by some scholars, it is a deviant case which requires further in-depth analysis (Andeweg et al., 2011). The pioneer in minority government studies, (Strøm, 1984; 1990) focused on studying minority governments in countries such as Sweden, Norway or Denmark. These are countries known for having some of the world's strongest parliaments relative to their executives, as well as particularly unitary states and where politics is largely structured by a single left-right ideological cleavage. Given the strength of their parliaments and parliamentary committees, and the unidimensional political competition structure, it is often a strategic choice for political parties to maximise their policy influence via the legislature rather than by securing a place in the cabinet. However, Spain's singularity lies in the fact that it presents a more complex setting, with two equally important political dimensions. Its national political arena is shaped by both left-right and centre-periphery cleavages. Its support parties have historically been regional parties that have their own seat share in the *Congreso*. This

means support parties are not entirely seduced by the possibility of influencing policy in the left-right cleavage, but rather focus on the centre-periphery dimension. Furthermore, Spain is a highly decentralized country made up of seventeen powerful regions, some of which have their distinct party systems. This adds layers of complexity to the political landscape and underscores the need for a deeper understanding of why support parties choose to facilitate minority governments in such a context.

This being the case, the main focus of this thesis is to understand the goals sought by support parties in Spain. These goals can generally be clustered into two categories. First, the transfer of competences from the national to the regional level, which has been a traditional demand of regional parties in Spain. However, the quantity or dynamics of competence transfers have never been systematically analysed in the Spanish context. In this thesis, this will be measured by doing a content analysis of the support agreements that *formateurs* and their support parties have made public. Second, the pursuit of alternative goals when such transfers are no longer a rational or available option, either because the potential benefits might strengthen political rivals at the regional level, or because the value of transferring competences as a bargaining tool has declined due to the limits of the Spanish constitutional framework. These alternative goals will be proxied in my thesis by using the allocation of megaseats in the *Congreso* and pork-barrel commitments in support agreements.

7 Analysis 1

7.1 Megaseats as Bargaining Chips during Government Formation

The Spanish Parliament, the *Congreso*, having been founded in 1977 in its current constitutional and institutional set-up, is a comparatively young institution, making it easier to track its development over time. As Schattschneider (1942) argued, political parties create democracy, emphasising that parties shape legislatures and parliamentary rules in their favour, which influences their subsequent behaviour. This framework and Carroll's et al. (2006) identical claim that 'political parties create democracy' aligns with the Spanish case. In its early years, the *Congreso* was an informal and unstructured legislative body, with no clear regulations governing plenary time or the committee system. Cox and McCubbins (2008) as well as Oñate et al. (2022) describe this as a 'legislative state of nature', referring to a parliamentary set up that creates incentives for the implementation of formal rules and the emergence of institutional roles, which MPs will later pursue as part of their legislative careers.

These instititutional roles, referred to in the literature as megaseats, are high-ranking parliamentary positions such as committee chairs, other committee positions, junior ministers or the speaker of the parliament (Carroll et al., 2006; Martin, 2014; Strøm, 1997). As the institutional development of the *Congreso* progressed, congressional rules became more structured during the 1980s, coinciding with the dominance of the Socialist Party (Oñate et al., 2022). The committee system that emerged reflected the period of Socialist majorities, during which institutions were largely shaped by that party (Balfour, 2005; Heywood, 1995). However, as absolute majorities became less common, certain new institutional dynamics emerged, changing some of the parliamentary structures and its committees. This means that megaseats were no longer filled by PSOE backbenchers, but started to be occupied by MPs of other parties, opening the door for the bargaining of these positions.

Megaseats have never been analysed nor used as a relevant variable in government formation explanations. The existing literature has overlooked their allocation dynamics, the incentives driving politicians to pursue them and their role in negotiations. Research in other parliamentary systems demonstrates that megaseats have a strong influence on MPs behaviour. For example, Martin (2014) finds that Irish MPs who are not occupying megaseats, and are just backbenchers, are more likely to vote against their party. Similarly, Benedetto and Hix (2007) show that MPs who are not offered a ministerial promotion are more likely to rebel against the government. These findings align with Strøm's theory (1997) or Daniel's (2015) who focus on the European Parliament. Both authors find that career advancement incentives in legislatures are shaped by institutional norms and party leadership decisions. These findings acknowledge that megaseats and career advancement perspectives play a role in legislative politics and hence justify their study.

I argue that the Spanish electoral system provides a particularly interesting case study to analyse the allocation of megaseats as a bargaining tool in government formation negotiations. First, Spain's weak parliament vis-a-vis the executive and informationally inefficient committee structure (Strøm, 1997) with a low specialisation (Oñate et al., 2022) creates a fertile ground to examine how political parties might use megaseats strategically. If committees are not relevant institutions to promote policy changes, parties can use them in order to fulfill other goals, within their own backbenchers' career advancement or their support party partners. As in other countries, the committee megaseats are decided by parliamentary groups, which are essentially political parties (Strøm, 1997). In line with this and following the partisan theory of legislatures (Aldrich, 1995), I argue that committees in Spain primarily serve two strategic purposes. First, advancing MPs' careers, as megaseats provide a stepping stone for a relevant political career or the desired influence in policy and relevance MPs seek. Most importantly, the fact that committees have been public in Spain since their inception means these roles have the public prestige and media relevance for those politicians willing to increase their exposure. Second, and most importantly for this project, they function as bargaining chips during government

formation, as parties negotiate not only over competence transfers but also over megaseats and other offices.[4]

Furthermore, the importance for this project of the allocation of megaseats is relevant because of the temporal coincidence between parliamentary roles negotiations and government formation negotiations. These two processes overlap and are intertwined. Understanding the role of megaseats in Spain thus contributes to broader debates on government formation strategies and legislative organisation. More importantly, levels of party unity are high, as party organisations are very hierarchical and extremely low levels of dissent are the norm (Muro & Lago, 2020). This makes the interlinking of negotiations even more relevant, as we can consider the actors involved as unified around the very same guidelines and negotiation arrangements, meaning that the assumption of political parties as unitary entities matches the empirical reality.

7.2 Case Selection and Data Collection

To study the megaseat allocation dynamics, I focus on four regional parties that have played a role in Spain's parliamentary politics, and most importantly, as support parties: the PNV, the mainstream right-wing Basque nationalist party; CiU, the Catalan mainstream right; ERC, the Catalan left-wing nationalist party; and, lastly, Coalición Canaria, the moderate regional party from the Canary Islands. All four parties have held seats in the *Congreso* and, at different times, have been support parties during government formation processes. A detailed summary of the background and ideological evolution of each party can be found in Appendix 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, other support parties have also provided support during government formation instances, but they either have not had a consistent presence in the *Congreso* or they have not provided support more than once. In some cases, the regional parties have disappeared and not been replaced by a similar ideological platform or party.

In the *Congreso*, each parliamentary committee includes seven main roles or 'megaseats': one chair (*Presidente*), two vice-presidents, and four secretaries. The seven are considered to be the board of the committee and as the directing body of the committee they have agenda powers, as well as control over arranging the speaking time allocation and a general authority regarding the running of the committee. Most notably, committee leading roles provide privileged access to information in legislative making that can be valuable for the implementation of regional and group-oriented policies. MPs allocated to each committee vote for their favourite candidates, and although, votes are not public in this case, parties frequently state their voting intentions during the first session as regards to who is their favourite candidate to chair the committee. Crucially, MPs follow their party's guidelines and vote as one (Oñate et al., 2022).

As mentioned above, a crucial element for my argument and theory to make sense is that committee chairs are allocated in negotiations between the parliamentary groups, at the same time as government formation negotiations are taking place. Parties reaching agreements regarding the allocation of megaseats has been reported in the past. For example, in 2004, one of the main newspapers in Spain, *El País*, gave coverage of the agreement the PSOE had reached with the different regional parties regarding some megaseats in the *Congreso's* internal organisation.[5] Furthermore, both Jordi Pujol, Catalan President from 1980 to 2003, and Josep Antoni Duran i Lleida, MP in the *Congreso* for CiU between 1982 and 2016 (with a break from 1999 to 2001) highlight in their memoirs the importance they attached to holding influential positions within the *Congreso*. Pujol viewed it as a source of influence for the promotion and agenda control of Catalan interests (Pujol, 2012). Duran i Lleida openly acknowledged that securing committee chairs or other senior roles (such as vice-presidencies or secretary positions) was aimed to strengthen CiU's ability to influence policy areas where Catalan interests might be most vulnerable, notably in foreign policy and constitutional reform (Duran i Lleida, 2011). Among other roles, CiU had megaseats in both the Constitutional Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee throughout the years.

Over this period, parliamentary parties in Spain consistently ensured representation in these parliamentary committees, regardless of whether they were state-wide or regional. Furthermore, the allocation of megaseats is especially relevant for regional parties with limited access to executive office at the national level. That being said, allocation of a megaseat is also considered an achievement in a politician's career (Daniel, 2015).

This research strategy also allows me to revisit the traditional dichotomy in the literature between policy-seeking and office-seeking goals in political parties (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Rather than viewing these as mutually exclusive, the CiU example cited above illustrates how committee positions can satisfy both goals simultaneously. First, they grant office benefits such as status, visibility, and influence, which MPs in national parliament often lack if they do not have access to these roles. Second, they serve policy goals by allowing parties to monitor, influence, and sometimes block legislative initiatives that might threaten their interests. From this perspective, it becomes clear that for regional parties, holding an influential post in the *Congreso* may yield more political and symbolic capital than a position in a regional executive.

7.3 Data

To carry out this research, I analyse the allocation of all committee chairs from the beginning of Spain's current democratic period starting in 1982 until the present legislative term. The choice of starting in 1982 is that previous parliaments were not operating under the legal framework that was established after the 1978 Constitution and the subsequent organic laws that regulated parliamentary rules. Furthermore, Spanish democracy was not considered to be fully guaranteed until after the failure of the attempted coup d'etat on 23rd February 1981 by members of the Spanish Civil Guard (Heywood, 1995). One important aspect to note is that, as shown in Figure 5, the number of parliamentary committees has grown significantly over time. The lowest number was 23 in 1986, while the highest was 45 in 2020. Given that each committee has seven megaseats, this means that in 1982 there were 161 total megaseats to be allocated, whereas by 2020 this had

risen to 315. The numbers are not absolute as the establishment of inquiry committees vary in number in each legislative term, but these do not substantially change the results. For the purpose of my research, this growth in megaseats provides an opportunity to study how access to these roles has been distributed over time and how political parties have participated in that process. In my project, I focus on the allocation of these seats to the aforementioned four regional parties.

In examining the allocation of megaseats within the Spanish committee system in the *Congreso*. To do this, I collected data on the number of megaseats held by regional parties in Spanish parliamentary committees from 1982 through to the current legislative term, which began in 2023. A committee megaseat in my coding refers to the seven high-ranked positions within each committee: the chair (president), the two vice-presidents, and the four secretaries. I added three binary variables for each regional party, corresponding to the three types of megaseats: chair, vice-president, and secretary. Essentially, each line of data entry is a different committee during that legislative term. Then, each party has three columns: one for presidency, one for vice-presidency and one for secretary. As it has never been the case that two vice-presidencies have been from the same support party or that there has been more than one secretary from the same support party, a binary variable is the right way to code this. For each legislative term, I recorded all the committees and coded it as 1 if a regional party held the role, and 0 if it did not. In the logistic regression all three megaseats were coded jointly, meaning that if a regional party held any of the three roles, it was coded as 1, and it was coded as 0 if it did not hold any of the three roles in that committee during that legislative term. This approach is essentially designed to capture the bargaining dynamics involved in trading megaseats to facilitate government formation, without needing to delve further into distinctions between presidencies, vice-presidencies and secretaries. This allows for a systematic analysis of how often regional parties secured committee roles and to see under what independent variables are regional parties more likely or not to get a committee megaseat.

Furthermore, the control variables I added were constant for each legislative term. First,

I included a variable for support party status, coded as 1 if the regional party supported the government during the government investiture process, and 0 if it did not. This means I consider a support party a party that voted in favour of the formation of the government, regardless of their subsequent behaviour. Second, I added a variable for opposition status in the regional parliament, which was coded as 1 if, at the time of government formation in the national parliament, the regional party was in opposition in its regional parliament, and 0 if it was either in government or it was a support party in the regional parliament. Third, I added a variable on minority government, which indicates if the national government was in a minority situation in the national parliament. This is important, as there have been cases in the past in which regional parties provided support even when the *formateur* had an absolute majority. I also controlled for the number of parliamentary committees in the *Congreso* to take into account that these have increased during the forty years of the *Congreso's* recent history, as Figure 5 shows.

7.4 Results

First, as we can see in Figure 6, support parties have in some way developed an institutional learning process whereby they have increased their megaseat share, perhaps by realising the importance of megaseats through time. Figure 6 shows that there has been a growth in absolute terms in the number of megaseats occupied by support parties since 1982. Although, it is not a clear pattern of growth, the trend is definitely upwards. Furthermore, it must be noted that in 2011 or 1989, the governing party held an absolute majority in parliament, which made it easier for them to allocate megaseats to their own backbenchers. However, I see this as evidence that something is at play in the allocation of megaseats when the *formateur* lacks an absolute majority. The negotiation dynamics and the reliance on support parties suggest that their involvement creates a bargaining environment in which they are more likely to be allocated these roles, or that they actively seek them when it becomes a bargaining chip in the negotiation.

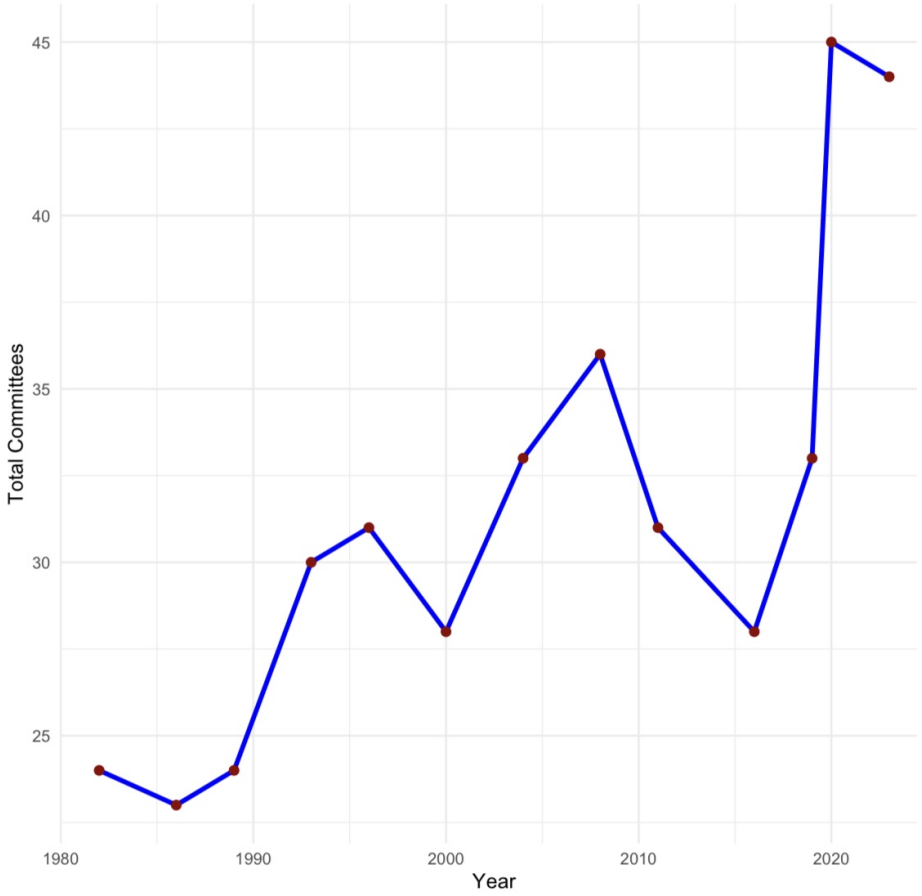


Figure 5: Total Number of Committees in the Congreso

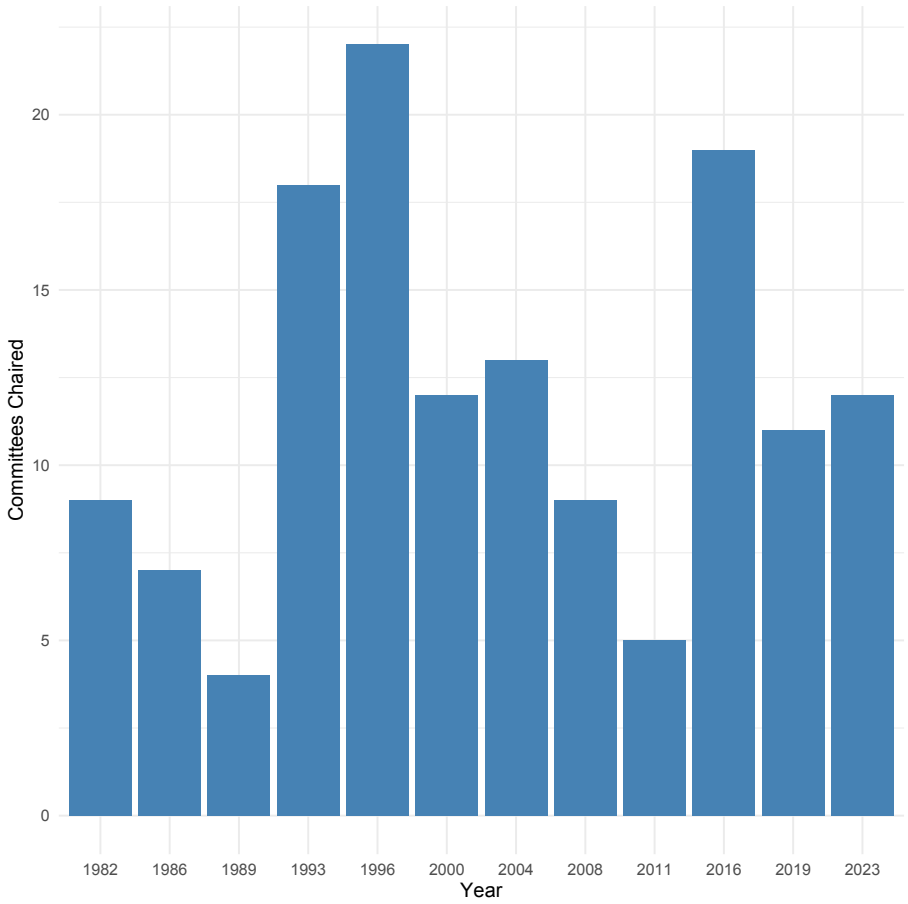


Figure 6: Megaseats held by support parties

Table 4 presents the results of logistic regressions where the dependent variable is the allocation of megaseats, analysed separately for each of the four regional support parties. The independent variables, as stated before, are support party status, opposition status in the regional parliament, national minority government and number of committees.

The first important finding in Table 4 is that, in some cases, controlling for the other variables, being a support party increases the likelihood of obtaining a committee chair - but only for some cases. Partially, consistent with my theoretical expectations in H1, there is a positive relationship between being a support party and receiving a megaseat for two of the four regional parties examined. Specifically, CiU exhibits a strong and statistically significant effect, with a coefficient of 1.85, confirming H1 in this case. ERC also shows a positive association, though the effect is weaker and only marginally significant, suggesting tentative support for H1. In contrast, PNV shows a small and non-significant positive coefficient, while CC displays a negative and non-significant relationship.

The findings challenge, to some extent, the conventional portrayal of regional parties as purely policy-seeking actors at the national level focused exclusively on decentralisation. Instead, at least in CiU's case, strategic office-seeking behaviour through megaseats appears to be a relevant part of the bargaining for their support. This means it is likely that Catalan parties are more interested in megaseats than the other regional parties. Still, the lack of statistical significance in two of the four cases means I can only partially confirm H1. Additional data may help clarify whether these differences are due to party-specific dynamics, bargaining capacity, or institutional context. I will further discuss the implications of these findings in Section 9.

Overall, these findings remain exploratory and are subject to further robustness checks. They provide preliminary evidence that regional parties do not operate within a simplistic framework of policy-seeking versus office-seeking across levels. Instead, their behaviour in the national legislature reflects a more strategic engagement in government formation bargaining dynamics and office goals.

To further evaluate H1, Figure 7 presents a plot of the predicted probabilities of obtaining a megaseat controlling for the other variables, comparing cases when a party is a support party of the national government versus when it is not. CiU and ERC are the parties that are the most likely to obtain a megaseat when being a support party. CC and PNV's behaviour is contrary to H1, which suggests that CC and PNV might not be interested in the allocation of megaseats during government formation bargaining process. I use this as evidence to partially confirm H1.

This evidence reinforces the argument that, beyond policy concessions, regional parties may also seek office goals through megaseats during government formation. While ERC's increase is more modest and confidence intervals are wider, the difference between probabilities remains consistent with H1. By contrast, PNV and CC exhibit flat or slightly negative differences in predicted probabilities, indicating that their role as support parties does not systematically translate into megaseats. The analysis of the predicted probabilities confirm that H1 is partially supported: support party status is associated with a greater likelihood of obtaining megaseats, but this pattern is concentrated in the Catalan regional parties, CiU and ERC.

Table 4: Logistic Regression Results: Megaseats and Committee Chairs

Variable	**CiU**	**ERC**	**PNV**	**CC**
Intercept	-0.693*** (0.151)	-0.728** (0.230)	-0.602** (0.197)	-0.474* (0.241)
Support Party	1.851*** (0.308)	0.853$^{\cdot}$ (0.484)	0.201 (0.542)	-0.691 (0.795)
Opposition in Regional Parliament	-0.926* (0.463)	-0.904** (1.411)	2.669 (1.658)	-1.527 (1.522)
Minority Government	0.402 (0.355)	2.371 (1.565)	3.431* (1.479)	2.132 (1.485)
Number of Committees	-0.118** (0.042)	0.014 (0.035)	-0.070 (0.047)	-0.115 (0.078)
Early	2.0602 (0.2811)***	-1.1574 (0.3623)**	-0.3027 (0.4235)	1.7661 (0.8231)*
Not Support & Opposition	–	0.540† (0.296)	–	-0.179 (0.341)
Support & Government	1.200*** (0.252)	0.317 (0.287)	0.499* (0.231)	0.096 (0.273)
Support & Opposition	0.206 (0.245)	0.451 (0.351)	-1.010† (0.528)	–
Observations	462	415	462	415

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.
For the interactions, "Not Support & Government" is the reference category.
$^{\dagger}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.
'–' indicates that the coefficient could not be estimated due to no cases.

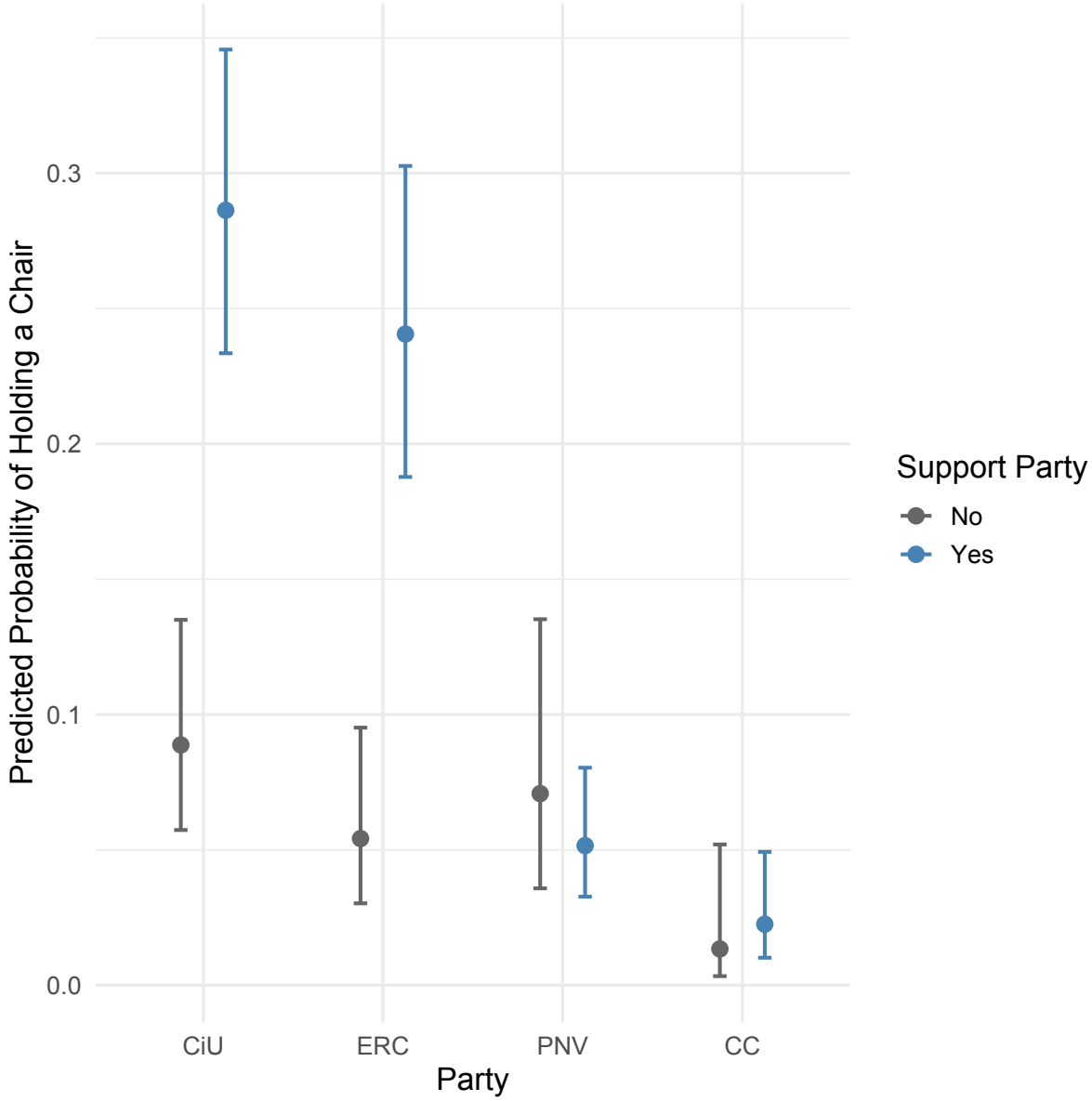


Figure 7: Predicted Probability of Committee Chair by Support Status

To continue testing my hypotheses, the interaction terms in Table 4 examine whether the effect of being a support party at the national level is conditioned by a party's status in the regional parliament, specifically, whether it is in the regional government or in opposition.

The clearest evidence of the interaction effects, once again, comes from CiU. The Support and Government interaction is positive and highly significant, suggesting that when CiU supports the national government and governs at the regional level, it is particularly benefited with the allocation of megaseats in government formation negotiations. ERC also shows a positive coefficient for Support and Government, but the effect is not statistically significant. For PNV, the Support and Government interaction is positive and statistically significant. Conversely, the Support and Opposition interaction is particularly notable in PNV's case. Here, the coefficient is negative and marginally significant, implying that when PNV is in opposition at the regional level, supporting the national government may actually reduce its likelihood of securing megaseats. For the other parties, this interaction term is positive but not statistically significant, suggesting weaker or inconsistent patterns.

Taken together, these interaction effects challenge some of the expectations laid out in H2. I hypothesised that support parties would be more likely to obtain megaseats when they are in regional opposition, since they would not directly benefit from decentralisation and would therefore pursue other goals in the national parliament instead. Contrary to this expectation, the results show that support parties are more likely to receive megaseats when they are in regional government, particularly in the cases of CiU and PNV. As such, the findings do not support H2. On the contrary, they indicate that support parties with regional government control are in a stronger position to leverage their support for megaseats.

To sum up the results found in Table 4, the first major finding is that being a support party of the national government increases the likelihood of obtaining a committee chair for the two Catalan parties, ERC and CiU, partially confirming H1 and providing evidence

that megaseats are indeed used as bargaining chips in national government formation. Moreover, the case of being in government or in opposition at the regional level introduces some complexity but there does not seem to be a clear picture from these results. CiU clearly benefits more being in regional government than in opposition to the regional government when it is a support party in the national parliament.

To examine how the megaseat allocation dynamics have been shaped by the constitutional maximum framework, I also analyze whether it is more likely that a support party obtains a megaseat in later stages of the decentralization process than in the early stages. As explained in H5, I expect that, as the constitutional maximum is approached and competence transfers are no longer a viable goal, other priorities will take precedence in support party demands. To test this, every megaseat allocated before 2004, including the 2004 government formation process, is considered an early stage of decentralization. In other words, I expect support parties to demand fewer megaseats before 2004, as there were still a large number of competences to be transferred. Although one could argue that each region was at a different stage of decentralization in 2004, the competence transfers were relatively similar in terms of devolved powers, which allows 2004 to serve as a clear-cut point in time for all parties. In Table 4, this variable is called Early, referring to the pre-2004 period, and coded as 1 if the government formation was pre-2004 (2004 included). The results in Table 4 indicate, once again, that my theory is partially correct. CiU and CC are significantly more likely to obtain megaseats in the early stage of the decentralization process, which contradicts my theory. This is because when I expected competence transfers to be more central to government formation bargaining, and other goals less central, CC and CiU were more likely to obtain megaseats. ERC, however, is less likely to obtain a megaseat in the early stages, which confirms H5. PNV does not show any significant difference, which suggests that their demand for megaseats does not significantly change across stages of decentralisation.

7.5 Conclusions of Analysis 1

In conclusion, the analysis of megaseat allocation dynamics, as presented in Table 4, provides valuable insights into the strategic behaviour of regional parties in national government formation processes. The results offer partial confirmation of the hypotheses laid out in Section 5.

The findings partially support H1, which predicted that being a support party would increase the likelihood of obtaining a megaseat. This relationship holds true for CiU and ERC, where the effect is both positive and statistically significant, particularly for CiU, which shows a strong effect. However, the marginally significant result for ERC and the non-significant results for PNV and CC suggest that H1 can be valuable only for some regional parties, more specifically the Catalan support parties. Overall, these findings challenge the traditional view of regional parties as purely policy-seeking actors, indicating that some regional parties, may engage in office-seeking behaviour through megaseat demands, in addition to pursuing policy concessions. Regarding H3, which hypothesised that support parties in regional opposition would be more likely to obtain megaseats, the results contradict this expectation. Instead, the data shows that support parties in regional government are more likely to secure megaseats, with CiU and PNV being the most notable examples.

The interaction terms also reveal important nuances. The positive and significant effect for CiU in the "Support and Government" category underscores the importance of holding regional government power when engaging in national-level bargaining for megaseats. However, the marginally significant negative coefficient for PNV in the "Support and Opposition" interaction suggests that my theory is correct for some parties, and allows me to partially confirm H3.

Moreover, examining whether support parties are more likely to obtain megaseats in later stages of decentralisation, the results offer partial support for H5. The results indicate that CiU and CC are more likely to obtain megaseats in the early stages of decentralisation,

contrary to expectations that support parties would prioritize other goals once competence transfers became less central. ERC, however, is less likely to secure megaseats in the early stages, confirming the expectation that as decentralization progresses, ERC would focus more on other policy goals.

In sum, the evidence presented in Table 4 partially confirms the hypotheses, particularly with respect to H1, H3 and H5. The analysis suggests that regional parties engage in a more strategic form of bargaining than previously thought, where both office-seeking and policy-seeking behaviour shape their demands for megaseats in national government formation.

8 Analysis 2

8.1 Support agreements and Large Language Models

Since 1996, *formateurs* at the national level and support parties have frequently signed support agreements. As explained in Section 3, these agreements, known as formal agreements, tend to be public and have the intention of binding parties to certain commitments (Krauss, 2018; Krauss & Thürk, 2022). In the case of Spain, support parties, as regional parties, do not typically agree on policies that could be associated with the left-right dimension, such as social spending or financial regulation. Instead, they agree on benefits for their home regions, essentially through two mechanisms: the transfer of competences or guaranteeing pork-barrel investments from the national budget to their regions. Although there are, potentially, more categories that could be used to classify the content of these agreements, due to the limited nature of the project, I limit myself to these two. Field (2016) or Heller (2002) conclude that the transfer of competences is the main goal of support parties in government formation negotiations. However, my research focuses on seeing if the existing literature provides only a partial account of what support parties strive for when negotiating support agreements. To do this I undertake a content analysis of fourteen support agreements[6], the total number of agreements I have available, to observe under what circumstances parties have agreed to different deals.

Texts, however, have always been a challenge for analysis in the social sciences. Consistency and replicability are two essential features for the development of scientific inquiry, and texts are often difficult to code as they are inherently complex, context-dependent and open to multiple interpretations. The literature's usual practice has been to train human coders in order to acquire certain consistency in the classification of text-as-data and ensure that replicability through time remains. For example, The Manifesto Project has had a significant success in using text-as-data as it has collected and, using human coders, classified political manifestos that cover over 1000 parties from 1945 until today. It is a widely used resource by scholars to understand party policy preferences and com-

pare party positioning over time. The method consists in developing a systematic and consistent coding scheme to analyse party manifestos (Lehmann et al., 2024). More importantly for my project, these rules and coding schemes have, recently, been also used to interrogate support agreements (Anghel & Thürk, 2021; Krauss & Thürk, 2022). Its methodology of quasi-sentences and predefined policy categories has become a widely accepted standard in comparative politics to analyse texts. However, since the Manifesto Project relies on human coders, and without questioning that this has its advantages, it is also subject to limitations such as coding biases, training methods, and the high costs of time and labour.

Since the Manifesto Project started and its methodology was developed, the use of Large Language Models (LLMs) has emerged as a potential alternative for text coding instead of human coders. Within the political science community, there is still considerable debate on how these models should be used, in which contexts they are most valuable, and how effective they truly are at performing the tasks required of them (Barrie et al., 2024). Of particular relevance to my thesis is the ongoing discussion about their ability to carry out tasks that political scientists have traditionally assigned to human coders (Aher et al., 2023; Gilardi et al., 2023). The main advantages of using LLMs are twofold. First, they introduce an element of automation that allows large volumes of text to be processed instantly. This potentially reduces coding biases, as well as being more cost-efficient in terms of time and labour. Second, and more importantly, they open up new avenues for reproducibility, consistency and scalability in text analysis. The capacity of LLMs to handle language and respond to coding instructions makes them particularly well-suited for structured tasks like a Manifesto Project style classification. This thesis aims to be a small step in consolidating the use of LLMs and generative AI models in social sciences, within the wider debate that these tools have engendered.

Given these limits and with the aim of exploring and expanding the methodological toolkit available to political scientists, I have chosen to use two LLMs for the task of coding support agreements. According to Bosley et al. (2023), this is a task that Generative AI

can help with. Nevertheless, one must be aware of the potential risks of using this new technology, and the need to explain its methodological decisions.

First, the current computational capacity of LLMs remains limited when it comes to analysing and coding very long texts, understood as more than 150 pages (Wang et al., 2024). When tasked to do this, they often produce errors and lose consistency in their coding schemes. For my thesis, this should not be a concern, as the support agreements analysed here are between 10 to 55 pages. Knowing this, it is then vital to give an LLM clear instructions, since this is considered a fundamental principle when using these tools for scientific inquiry (Barrie et al., 2024). With an easy and non-exhaustive categorisation, performing a coding task is a particularly straightforward job for LLMs (Bosley et al., 2023). Furthermore, if the instructions are clear, LLMs are more reliable and tend not to confuse the concepts deployed within an academic field (Yang et al., 2025). As previously argued by scholars, LLMs are Few-Shot Learners, which means that when given a series of simple rules that one would give to human coders, LLMs are able to perform as efficiently as humans (Brown et al. 2020). However, as acknowledged by (Bosley et al., 2023), LLMs struggle with a text's meaning and the intensity of an ideological positioning, for instance with gradient scales.

Second, as already mentioned, one of the most debated issues regarding the use of LLMs in the social sciences concerns their lack of replicability. As (Barrie et al., 2024) argued and showed, the capacity of LLMs to reproduce the same results if given the same instructions multiple times is questionable. I am aware of this limitation. Yet, the relatively small scale and low computational demands of my project allow me to mitigate these concerns and use LLMs as practical tools in my research. I try to overcome any potential shortcomings by performing my analysis multiple times with different sources. My results show that there is no substantial variation in LLM outputs and they perform well when giving the same instructions for short sentences and non-exhaustive categories.

Third, and related to the second concern, is the fact that most LLMs are proprietary (i.e., paid), and their underlying code and training data are not publicly accessible. To

overcome this last concern identified by the literature, I use two LLMs: GPT 4.0 and Mistral7B. GPT-4.0 is a closed-source proprietary model, whereas Mistral-7B is an open-source alternative, with both its code and architecture publicly available. By employing both models, I aim to mitigate potential transparency concerns and provide a more robust and replicable methodological approach.

8.2 Research Strategy and Results

In this project, I leveraged the potential of LLMs to perform text analysis. First, I segmented each support agreement into quasi-sentences myself, using the coding instructions of the Manifesto Project. I did this because, as (Yang et al., 2025) argue, LLMs struggle with the categorisation of long texts. Furthermore, after some attempts with LLMs dividing the text into quasi-sentences, it was clear that the Generative AI was making substantial mistakes with this task. Consequently, by breaking up the text myself, I make it easier for the LLM to understand its task, that is to code each given quasi-sentence into a category. Then I tell the LLM that it will be given a series of documents that consist of agreements between two political parties, a *formateur* and a regional party. I give to it three examples of each one of these categories. Subsequently, I asked both LLMs, GPT 4.0 and Mistral7B to classify each quasi-sentence into one of the three following categories: transfer of competences, pork-barrel investments, or other unrelated issues to the previous two. I then ran the code five times for each agreement and with each LLM. The full results can be found in Appendix 2.

The set of support parties includes a total of eight different formations that have, at various points, signed formal agreements with the *formateurs*. Among these are the four regional parties previously analysed in relation to their megaseat allocation: CiU (Junts in 2023), the PNV, ERC, and CC. To this list, I add four additional parties that have also signed formal agreements with state-wide parties: Teruel Existe (TE!), Compromís, Nueva Canarias (NC), and the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG). Each of these parties represents a different region and ideological orientation.

We can see the first exploratory results of the content of the fourteen agreements available for analysis in Figure 8. Figure 8 shows the average of quasi-sentences per agreement of each category. To briefly explain, it takes the ten data points of each category for each agreement, takes the average and then calculates how much of the percentage of the agreement is dedicated to that category.

The results in Figure 8 show three relevant patterns. The first one is that, although with some irregularity, the pattern of competence transfers (blue in Figure 8) has decreased as the available pool of competences became smaller. In general, the results show a partial fulfilment of H4, meaning that support parties tended to seek transfer of competences in earlier government formation negotiations, but were then more prone to accept other concessions, such as pork-barrel investments, as the available pool of competences diminished. The chart, however, indicates that there were two agreements that are outliers in terms of the expansion of competences for their regional governments: the 1996 PP-CiU agreement and the 2023 PSOE-PNV agreement. The 1996 PP-CiU agreement is in line with my theoretical expectations in H4, as in the earlier stages of the development of the Spanish autonomous state, with a larger pool of competences to be transferred, the support agreement was used as a tool to transfer competences from the central to the regional level.

Second, we can see some differences between support parties. For instance, the PNV and both Catalan parties, ERC and Junts/CiU seem more likely to agree to transfer of competences than the other parties. The explanation for this lies in the fact that these two regions are widely considered to be the two most pro-autonomy regions in the Spanish state, with an historical mission to expand their competences. This aligns with the argument, previously noted in the literature, that regional parties in Catalonia and the Basque are the most important agents of decentralization within Spanish politics (Gray, 2020; Meguid, 2024).

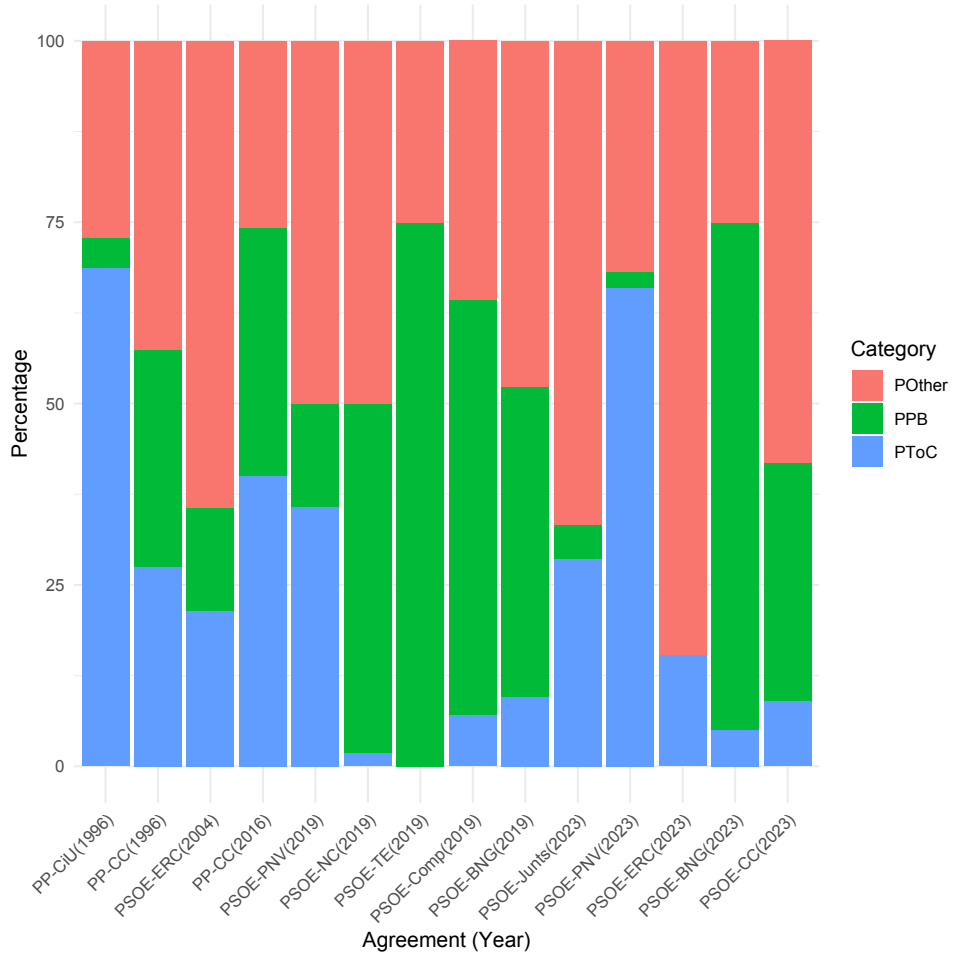


Figure 8: Support Agreements Divided Into Transfers of Competences, Pork-barrel Investments and Other

Along the same lines, it seems that other support parties such as TE!, the Canary Islands parties, NC and CC, and the Galician BNG are more likely to agree to pork barrel investments (green in Figure 8). This shows that these support parties, from regions other than Catalonia and the Basque Country (Gray, 2020) are more in favour of obtaining material benefits for their regions and electorates rather than empowering their regional administrations.

To further test my hypotheses, I ran a logistic regression to see under what circumstances competence transfers and pork-barrel investments occur. To do this, I create a new dataset where each new data entry (i.e. each row) is each quasi-sentence coded. Each quasi-sentence extracted from the agreements is coded into one of three mutually exclusive categories: competence transfers, pork-barrel investments, and other unrelated issues.

Each quasi-sentence receives a binary value (1 or 0) for each category, with a value of 1 assigned if it falls under that specific category, and 0 in the other two.

In the logistic regression results set out in Table 5, I model the probability that a quasi-sentence refers to a competence transfer as a function of whether the agreement occurred in the early period (Early), meaning pre-2004 as we did in Analysis 1, controlling for the support party being in the regional government, and whether it was a Catalan or a Basque support party. The results show that competence transfers were significantly more likely to be present in early agreements, as well as in those involving parties in regional government. These two findings are consistent with my theoretical expectations in H2 and H4, as competence transfers were more likely in the early stages of decentralization as well as when the party is in the regional government. Furthermore, and although not part of my hypotheses, the results show that the territorial scope also matters. Agreements involving Catalonia and, especially, the Basque Country are significantly more likely to include quasi-sentences referring to competence transfers.

Table 5: Logistic Regression For Competence Transfers

Variable	**Estimate**	**Std. Error**	**z value**	**Pr(> |z|)**
(Intercept)	-2.5925***	0.2517	-10.299	<2e-16
Early Stages of Decentralization	1.3096***	0.3315	3.950	7.81e-05
In Regional Government	0.9389**	0.3359	2.796	0.00518
Catalan Party	0.7787**	0.2986	2.608	0.00912
Basque Party	2.1461***	0.4070	5.273	1.34e-07

Significance levels $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

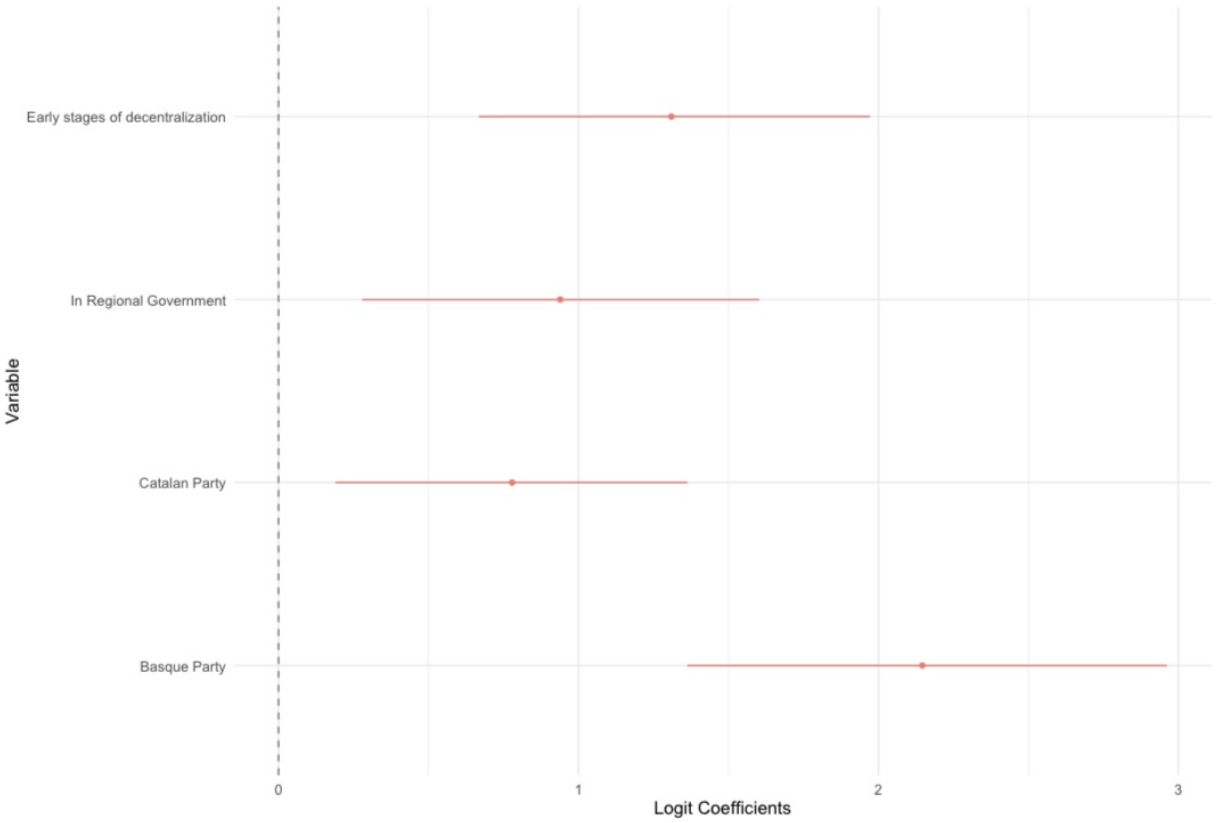


Figure 9: Logit Coefficients with 95% Confidence Intervals

The results in Table 5 can be seen more graphically in Figure 9, where the dots represent the point estimates (logit coefficients) for each variable and the horizontal lines represent 95% confidence intervals. The more to the right the dots are, the higher the likelihood of competence transfers are. The longer the horizontal lines are the more uncertain the estimate is. In Figure 9, we can see that all variables are statistically significant and relevant to explain competence transfers, which is H4 in my thesis, meaning that the transfer of competences is more likely when the region is in early stages of decentralisation.

To continue analysing the content of the agreements, and to test H5, I ran a logistic regression analysing whether pork-barrel investments are more likely in the late stages of decentralisation controlling for the party not being a Catalan or Basque party, being in the regional government and if it was signed by the PSOE. As Catalan and Basque parties are potentially more likely to focus on the transfer of competences, it is important

to control for this variable. I also control for PSOE, as the party is supposed to be more federalist than the other potential governing parties, most notably the PP. The results for this regression are shown in Table 6. My results indicate that pork-barrel investments are significantly more likely to occur in the late stages of the decentralization process controlling for the other variables. This can also be seen in Figure 10, where I show in a plot the predicted probabiltiy that a pork-barrel investment occurs in later stages of decentrlization. Although, the confidence intervals are quite large, the steeping line shows that pork-barrel investments are more likely in later stages of decentralization.

Table 6: Logistic Regression for Pork-Barrel Investments

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> |z|)
(Intercept)	-5.3622***	1.2072	-4.442	0.00000892
Late Stages of Decentralization	1.1308*	0.4680	2.416	0.01568
Not Catalan nor Basque	2.7202***	0.6249	4.353	0.000134
In Regional Government	1.8339**	0.6668	2.750	0.00596
PSOE	1.5388*	0.7631	2.016	0.04375

Significance levels: $^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

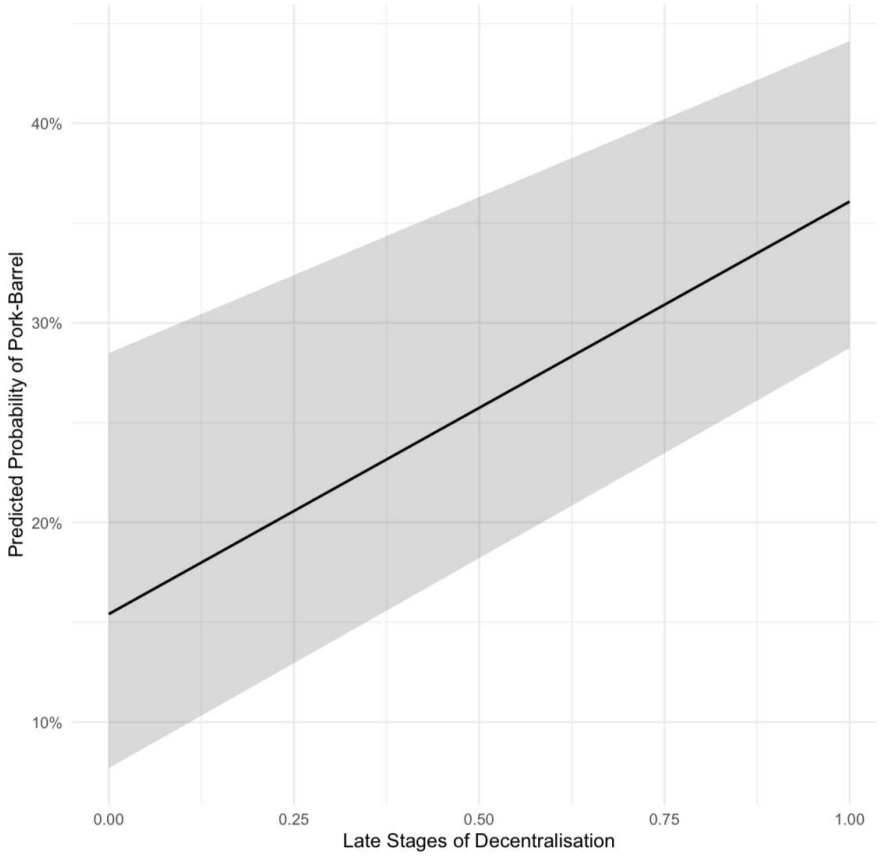


Figure 10: Predicted Probability of Pork-Barrel Investment

8.3 Conclusions of Analysis 2

This section has explored how LLMs can be leveraged to analyse the content of support agreements in Spanish politics. From a methodological perspective, I have shown that LLMs, when properly instructed and guided, can effectively perform text classification tasks that traditionally required human coders. While limitations regarding replicability and interpretability persist, the use of two distinct LLMs helps address concerns around transparency and robustness, especially when helped with careful human pre-processing of the data.

Regarding the results, my analysis confirms that the nature of concessions extracted by support parties has evolved over time, consistent with my theoretical expectations. Early in the decentralisation process, agreements were more likely to include commitments of transfer of competences, especially when the support party was in regional government and from pro-autonomy regions like Catalonia or the Basque Country. As decentralisation progressed and the pool of remaining competences diminished, the focus of negotiations shifted towards pork-barrel investments, particularly among support parties that were not from either Catalonia or the Basque Country. These findings align with H4 and H5 and suggest that support parties have changed through time their focus in the transfer of competences, and are now more open to include other goals in their support agreements.

9 Conclusions, Implications and Further Avenues for Research

In this concluding section, I want to focus on my theory and its needed refinements, my findings, my null hypothesis and the implications of this project, opening the door for further research on this topic.

9.1 Conclusions

The origin of my theory lies in the recognition that the standard account of support parties and the formation of minority government in Spain was incomplete. Field (2014, 2016, 2022) argued that support parties in Spain are office-seeking in the regional arena, and policy-seeking in the national arena. However, I suspected that certain variables influencing these objectives had been overlooked, and crucially, that these variables also played a significant role in the formation of minority governments.

For my thesis, I concentrated on the second part of Field's model, meaning I thought the idea that support parties were policy-seeking at the national level needed further refinement and nuance. To do this, I analysed three different variables: the transfer of competences from the national to the regional level, pork-barrel investments and the allocation of megaseats. For the first two, I analysed the content of fourteen support agreements that have previously not been used as a unit of analysis in the literature. For the third variable, I built my own dataset to analyse the allocation of megaseats to support parties in the *Congreso* since 1982.

First, on the transfer of competences, this variable was considered of paramoutn importance to explanations in the standard account of why minority governments form in Spain. My thesis reaches the same conclusions. First, as we can see in Figure 8, it is a relevant element in almost all the support agreements, sometimes accounting for over 50% of the quasi-sentences within those texts. To deepen our understanding of when and how these

transfers occur, I formulated two hypotheses. H2 proposed that competence transfers are more likely during the early stages of decentralisation within Spain's flexible quasi-federal model. H4 suggested that such transfers are more likely when support parties are in the regional government. Both hypotheses are confirmed by my results.

My theory argued that when the pool of competences to transfer was bigger, support parties and regional governments, under the umbrella of the same organisation, saw these transfers in empowering their regional administrations, their fellow party colleagues governing the region (and ultimately their constituencies) as the most seductive bargaining chip in government formation negotiations. Moreover, my findings also show an interesting pattern regarding the differences across regional parties and their demands. As Table 5 illustrates, competence transfers are significantly more likely when a Catalan, and especially a Basque party, is involved in the negotiations. While this may appear as intuitive, as the Catalan and Basque regions are the most distinctive national communities within Spain, to my knowledge this pattern had not been formally demonstrated before.

I will now focus on my second relevant variable, pork-barrel investments. In this case, my findings are less conclusive. In this case, I hypothesised that such investments would be more likely when the support party was in opposition to its regional government, as it would not be willing to focus its demands on the transfer of competences and empower its regional government, controlled by its regional rivals. Additionally, I argued that as decentralisation progressed and the pool of competences available to transfer diminished, support parties would increasingly shift their demands to other goals such as national budget investments for their regions.

My results confirmed H5, but did not find evidence for H3. With regard to H5, the evidence aligns with my theoretical expectations: support parties are more likely to pursue pork-barrel investments in the later stages of the decentralisation process, as competence transfers become less available and less appealing as a bargaining chip. However, contrary to my expectations, support parties were less likely to agree to pork-barrel investments when they were in the opposition in the regional parliament. In light of this, my theory

needs further refinement. In retrospect, it is intuitively plausible that support parties that are in the regional government are more likely to also agree to pork-barrel investments in their region. Regional administrations can capitalise on the electoral rewards of increased state investment in their territories without bearing the fiscal costs in the regional budget.

Finally, turning to my last analysed variable, the allocation of megaseats, I focused in this case on the *Congreso's* dynamics and its potential importance as an arena for deals between parties that then facilitated the formation of minority governments. An important finding of my thesis is that some support parties are more likely to obtain megaseats, particularly in the case of CiU and ERC. Although this makes intuitive sense, it had not been previously proven by the literature. This suggests that the allocation of megaseats, to some extent, constitutes a relevant bargaining chip in government formation negotiations. The implications of this finding are significant for understanding the strategic goals of support parties at the national level. Specifically, the conventional categorisation of support parties as policy-seeking parties, in Spain and elsewhere, needs further refining. These less publicly visible roles, or other appointments that are controlled by the executive, can still satisfy the office-seeking ambitions of party elites. Outside of the public profile and potential implications of holding a cabinet portfolio that might be detrimental for the support party if perceived as too collaborative with the governing party, these less visible roles are high-ranked and managerial positions that could satisfy the office goals of support party leadership.

On the other hand, when using megaseats as a proxy for the broader goals of support parties, I do not find evidence in support of H3 or H5. Support parties in regional governments are more likely to obtain megaseats, contradicting H3. I lack a clear and straighforward explanation for this unexpected result, but I offer two speculative possibilities. First, I suspect that support parties in regional government might be in stronger bargaining position to demand megaseats. Second, these parties may view megaseats in the national parliament as strategic platforms to advocate for policies that benefit their regional administrations. Another null finding of my project is that support parties were more likely

to obtain megaseats in the early stages of decentralisation, contradicting H5. My theory posited (and my findings confirmed) that competence transfers became less likely in the later stages of the decentralisation process. Accordingly, I hypothesised that support parties would increasingly rely on alternative bargaining chips, such as megaseats, during government formation negotiations. However, the regression results indicate the opposite: megaseats were more commonly allocated in the earlier phases of decentralisation. I do not have a definitive explanation for this outcome. One possible interpretation is that, as national identities and sentiments have grown stronger in certain regions over time, regional support parties may have become less inclined to pursue roles within the Spanish state apparatus, and megaseats thus could be perceived as overly cooperative with the central state, potentially undermining the party's credibility among pro-independence constituencies. However, this remains speculative and requires further inquiry.

9.2 Further Avenues for Research

I want to conclude my thesis by highlighting potential avenues for research in the study of government formation and minority governments literature.

First, focusing on the findings of my thesis, it seems that executive appointments and their importance as bargaining chips have been overlooked by the literature. Support parties are political parties too and have office-seeking goals as any other political party though not necessarily focused on accessing cabinet portfolios. However, the executive controls the appointments of a vast number of roles in public-private companies, on boards in national agencies and positions on other committees. These roles are potentially of interest for politicians, including support party leaders, and further research to see if these are a relevant element in deals between parties, regardless of whether they are part of deals for government formation or not, is needed.

Second, as noted before, it seems to me that it is relevant to analyse which regional parties focus on which demands. As my findings show, Catalan and Basque parties have

historically been more focused in the transfer of competences, whereas other regional parties with less distinctive national communities have primarily focused on pork barrel investments from the state budget in their region. However this could be an exclusive feature of the Spanish political system, thus more research is needed in seeing if these patterns are also the case in other similar federal political systems.

Third, this thesis tries to increase our knowledge of how multilevel politics are important in understanding political parties and their incentives in these type of systems. Although some recent research is starting to show how multilevel politics are relevant in how voters perceive their parties, infer party positioning and make choices at the ballot box (Hjermitslev et al., 2024), more research is needed on how voters might have different inference strategies and understanding of politics in multilevel systems.

Finally, given the core focus of this project on political agreements, it is crucial to emphasise the need for political science to devote greater attention to the deals struck between political parties. As support agreements become increasingly common (Bale & Bergman, 2006; Krauss & Thürk, 2022) and party systems more fragmented (Vries & Hobolt, 2020), negotiated deals are likely to become more frequent. Investigating the dynamics of these negotiations represents a important direction for future research in the discipline.

Notes

[1]Spain has traditionally not been classified as a federal system. However, its federal nature and distinctive features, particularly the asymmetrical distribution of powers, have made it a frequent point of reference in comparative analyses of federalism. Throughout this thesis, I adopt the term quasi-federal system to more accurately reflect the complex and hybrid nature of the Spanish model. (Aja, 2003; Beramendi & Maiz, 2004; Colomer, 1998; Maiz & Requejo, 2005)

[2]"PP y CiU alcanzan su acuerdo con el reparto de las Mesas del Congreso y el Senado," *El País*, 21 March 1996. Available at: https://elpais.com/diario/1996/03/21/espana/827362816_850215.html

[3]"ERC reclama al PSOE un puesto en la Mesa del Congreso," *Cadena Ser*, 31 March 2004. Available at: https://cadenaser.com/ser/2004/03/31/espana/1080690620_850215.html

[4]"AENA incorpora a Ramon Tremosa, exconsejero de Junts que acusaba a la compañía de hacer 'chantaje' a Cataluña y darle un trato 'colonial'", *El País*, 26 February 2025. Available at: https://elpais.com/espana/catalunya/2025-02-26/aena-incorpora-a-ramon-tremosa-exconsejero-de-junts-que-acusaba-a-la-compania-d
html

[5]"ERC reclama al PSOE un puesto en la Mesa del Congreso" *Cadena Ser*, 31 March 2004. Available at: https://cadenaser.com/ser/2004/03/31/espana/1080690620$_8$50215.*html*

[6]The 2004 PSOE-ERC Agreement is not public, meaning one cannot see it online. However, asking ERC's official channels I obtained the agreement. The 2016 PP-CC agreement did not lead to a successful government formation because the PP lost the investiture vote. However, CC made the agreement public.

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Appendix 1

Support parties in Spain

In this section, I will give a short introduction of the main support parties in Spain and go through their distinctive characteristics. There are three main regions that have had consistently relevant support parties in the government formation process in the Spanish national arena. Although, as shown in Table 1, in some instances, other support parties have been very relevant, having the kingmaker role, this study will only focus on those regions and parties that have had a relevant bargaining situation with the national government in at least two minority situations in parliament that resulted in a minority government. These regions are the Basque Country, Catalonia and the Canary Islands.

Basque Country

In the Basque Country, there have been two relevant support parties, or political families throughout its recent democratic history, EH-Bildu (its current name) and PNV. Although, both considered autonomist parties but non-independentist, they do have very different policy stances in the Left-Right dimension, EH-Bildu being a far-left party and PNV being a centre moderate party.

The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), was formed during the late 19th century and has always advocated for Basque nationalism and the region's autonomy within Spain. Throughout the tumultuous political landscape of Spain in the 20th century, the PNV played a significant role in defending Basque interests and cultural identity.

With the transition to democracy in Spain in the late 1970s, the PNV re-emerged as a key political force in the Basque Country. The PNV has governed the Basque region for the last forty years except from 2009 to 2012, when the region was governed by the Basque socialists a branch of PSOE in the Basque country. Similar to Junts or CiU, the PNV has used its parliamentary power in the national parliament to gain concessions for the Basque region, often aligning with centre-right or centre-left parties to advance Basque

interests.

EH Bildu, the Basque left coalition, emerged in the wake of ETA's declaration of a permanent ceasefire in 2011. It represents a diverse spectrum of left-wing Basque nationalist parties, including Eusko Alkartasuna, Alternatiba, and Sortu, which were formed by former members of ETA. EH Bildu's formation marked a significant shift in Basque politics, offering a peaceful and democratic alternative for those advocating for Basque self-determination.

Similarly to the PNV, EH Bildu advocates for Basque nationalism and greater autonomy within Spain. However, its approach differs in its emphasis on social justice, environmentalism, and progressive policies. Since its inception, EH Bildu has gained considerable support, particularly among younger voters and those disillusioned with traditional Basque political parties.

In terms of governance, EH Bildu has had a significant presence in Basque municipal governments, particularly in areas where support for Basque nationalism is strong. However, it has not held power in the region to the same extent as the PNV, nor enjoyed the bargaining power PNV has had in Spanish government formation processes. However, the current presence of the party in mass media due to its loose connections to ETA and its support to Sánchez II government, make it a very relevant political actor in the Spain's multilevel political system.

Catalonia

In a very similar fashion to the Basque Country, Catalonia has been governed for most of its history by a centre moderate regionalist party, CiU. However, the fragmentation of the Catalan political system led to various left-wing coalitions that ousted CiU's government. A much more complex political system due to the relevance of the Catalan socialists, the Catalan party system has, historically, had three main parties or political families: CiU (or its continuations), ERC and the Catalan socialists. For the purpose of this analysis only the first two are relevant, as the Catalan socialists are a de facto member of the

Spanish socialists.

Convergència i Unió, CiU, was a coalition of two parties on the centre-right of the political spectrum. Convergència, being the more socially and economically liberal faction, and Unió, a traditional Christian-democrat party, very similar to other Christian-democrat parties across Europe. The coalition, considered a united party by mass media and public opinion, governed Catalonia from 1980 to 2003, with multiple absolute majorities as well as in minority with support agreements with PSC (the Catalan branch of PSOE). The party lost governmental control in 2003 after the tripartite, a left-wing three-party coalition, ousted them from power. The historical mission of the party has always been to be in government in Catalonia and obtain competences or powers in the Spanish national parliament that benefitted the Catalan region (Pujol, 2012). In 2010, the party governed again with Artur Mas as President. The party began pressing claims for more autonomy for the Catalan region during this period. The coalition also broke with Unió, as it remained a unionist party and disagreed with Convergència's independentist and nationalist drift. The party provided key support to the formation of the Spanish government in 1993 (PSOE) and 1996 (PP).

Junts, was the political continuation of Junts pel sí, a coalition of ERC (left-wing nationalist) and Convergència that ran in the 2015 regional election on a purely independentist stance. After Junts pel sí governed Catalonia from 2015 to 2017, Junts per Catalunya was officially founded in 2018. This party kept the same political factions and leaders as the previous Convergència. Junts, as its predecessor Junts per Catalunya, can be considered a big tent and one-issue party that focused exclusively on Catalan independence from the Spanish state and it can be loosely considered the political continuation of Convergència, in terms of the political space it occupies in the Catalan party system as well as its electoral and political appeal to the Catalan middle classes. With conflicting images, factions and ideologies, the party had a very personalistic aura based on its charismatic leader Carles Puigdemont, the President of Catalonia in 2016 to 2017 and the main political figure of Catalan nationalism of the last decade. The party is considered the main

Catalan party that supports independence especially after the 2017 Catalan referendum, which led to the imprisonment of its most vocal leaders. The party did not support any Spanish governments until 2023, when it supported the formation of the Pedro Sánchez II government.

On the left-wing side of the Catalan political system, there is Esquerra Republicana de Catalonia (ERC), a party founded in 1931 and has remained the main left-wing Catalan nationalist party ever since. Its ideology has been quite constant throughout its history, supporting Catalan independence and a social-democratic post-Marxist stance since Spain's democratisation in the late 1970s. The party did not govern the Catalan region until 2003, forming a coalition with PSC (PSOE's Catalan branch) and ICV (Catalan greens). The coalition lasted until 2010 when it lost power again to CiU. It joined Convergència in a coalition in the 2015 regional election with the label Junts pel sí, a one-issue coalition that used the 2015 election as a referendum to see if Catalans supported independence from Spain. The coalition did not obtain a majority of seats nor votes but was able to form the Catalan government with the support of CUP (a far-left Catalan nationalist party). After the 2017 referendum and constitutional challenge, the Catalan government was dissolved and ERC was the support party to subsequent governments led by Junts. The party has governed Catalonia since 2021 and has been a reliable support party to the PSOE government of Pedro Sánchez, the Spanish PM in power since 2019.

Canary Islands

In the Canary Islands, the interests of the region have been defended in the Spanish Congress principally by one party, Coalición Canaria (CC). CC is a political alliance formed in the Canary Islands, advocating for the archipelago's interests and autonomy within Spain. Established in the 1990s, CC has played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of the Canary Islands, becoming a key player in regional governance. It emerged during a time of increased demands for self-governance in Spain's autonomous communities, particularly in regions with distinct cultural identities like the Canary Islands. Over the years, CC has formed alliances with various political parties to govern

its region, demonstrating its flexibility and willingness to collaborate to achieve its goals, often aligning with both centre-right and centre-left parties to advance regional interests. However, it has never advocated for independence of the Canary Islands region from Spain. Considered a moderate party within the Spanish political spectrum, CC's pragmatic approach has facilitated its positioning as a core party in many parliamentary situations, allowing it to effectively advocate for the Canary Islands' interests while maintaining stability and continuity in regional governance.

Appendix 2

Table 7: Support agreement classification statistics

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PP-CIU	GPT	1996	33	2	13	48
PP-CIU	GPT	1996	30	3	15	48
PP-CIU	GPT	1996	33	0	15	48
PP-CIU	GPT	1996	30	4	14	48
PP-CIU	GPT	1996	31	5	12	48
PP-CIU	Mistral7B	1996	30	4	14	48
PP-CIU	Mistral7B	1996	31	4	13	48
PP-CIU	Mistral7B	1996	32	3	13	48
PP-CIU	Mistral7B	1996	35	0	13	48
PP-CIU	Mistral7B	1996	33	3	12	48
PP-CC	GPT	1996	11	12	17	40
PP-CC	GPT	1996	13	10	17	40
PP-CC	GPT	1996	10	10	20	40
PP-CC	GPT	1996	13	10	17	40
PP-CC	GPT	1996	13	11	16	40
PP-CC	Mistral7B	1996	14	10	16	40
PP-CC	Mistral7B	1996	14	12	14	40

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PP-CC	Mistral7B	1996	13	11	16	40
PP-CC	Mistral7B	1996	15	10	15	40
PP-CC	Mistral7B	1996	14	11	15	40
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2019	5	2	7	14
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2019	5	3	6	14
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2019	7	5	2	14
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2019	7	4	3	14
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2019	8	4	2	14
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2019	5	4	5	14
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2019	6	4	4	14
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2019	6	3	5	14
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2019	6	4	4	14
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2019	5	4	5	14
PSOE-NC	GPT	2019	1	22	33	56
PSOE-NC	GPT	2019	6	24	26	56
PSOE-NC	GPT	2019	1	27	28	56
PSOE-NC	GPT	2019	4	21	31	56
PSOE-NC	GPT	2019	2	27	27	56
PSOE-NC	Mistral7B	2019	5	24	27	56

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PSOE-NC	Mistral7B	2019	4	26	26	56
PSOE-NC	Mistral7B	2019	3	27	26	56
PSOE-NC	Mistral7B	2019	4	27	25	56
PSOE-NC	Mistral7B	2019	5	24	27	56
PSOE-Junts	GPT	2023	6	1	14	21
PSOE-Junts	GPT	2023	5	0	16	21
PSOE-Junts	GPT	2023	4	0	17	21
PSOE-Junts	GPT	2023	5	0	16	21
PSOE-Junts	GPT	2023	4	1	16	21
PSOE-Junts	Mistral7B	2023	3	0	18	21
PSOE-Junts	Mistral7B	2023	4	1	16	21
PSOE-Junts	Mistral7B	2023	5	0	16	21
PSOE-Junts	Mistral7B	2023	4	1	16	21
PSOE-Junts	Mistral7B	2023	3	1	17	21
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2023	29	1	14	44
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2023	37	1	6	44
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2023	33	2	9	44
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2023	30	2	12	44
PSOE-PNV	GPT	2023	31	1	12	44

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2023	30	1	13	44
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2023	35	2	7	44
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2023	31	2	11	44
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2023	33	1	10	44
PSOE-PNV	Mistral7B	2023	32	1	11	44
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2023	1	1	24	26
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2023	4	0	22	26
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2023	2	0	24	26
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2023	6	3	17	26
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2023	4	0	22	26
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2023	6	2	18	26
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2023	5	1	20	26
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2023	3	0	23	26
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2023	2	2	22	26
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2023	4	0	22	26
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2023	3	17	20	40
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2023	2	30	8	40
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2023	3	35	2	40
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2023	2	31	7	40

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2023	5	30	5	40
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2023	3	33	4	40
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2023	2	32	6	40
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2023	3	33	4	40
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2023	4	31	5	40
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2023	3	30	7	40
PSOE-CC	GPT	2023	5	18	32	55
PSOE-CC	GPT	2023	4	22	29	55
PSOE-CC	GPT	2023	5	20	30	55
PSOE-CC	GPT	2023	3	19	33	55
PSOE-CC	GPT	2023	4	23	28	55
PSOE-CC	MIstral7B	2023	4	24	27	55
PSOE-CC	MIstral7B	2023	4	20	31	55
PSOE-CC	MIstral7B	2023	5	19	31	55
PSOE-CC	MIstral7B	2023	3	21	31	55
PSOE-CC	MIstral7B	2023	3	24	28	55
PSOE-TE	GPT	2019	0	10	2	12
PSOE-TE	GPT	2019	0	9	3	12
PSOE-TE	GPT	2019	0	10	2	12

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PSOE-TE	GPT	2019	0	11	1	12
PSOE-TE	GPT	2019	0	10	2	12
PSOE-TE	Mistral7B	2019	0	9	3	12
PSOE-TE	Mistral7B	2019	0	11	1	12
PSOE-TE	Mistral7B	2019	0	10	2	12
PSOE-TE	Mistral7B	2019	0	10	2	12
PSOE-TE	Mistral7B	2019	0	11	1	12
PSOE-Compromís	GPT	2019	3	7	4	14
PSOE-Compromís	GPT	2019	1	7	6	14
PSOE-Compromís	GPT	2019	0	9	5	14
PSOE-Compromís	GPT	2019	1	8	5	14
PSOE-Compromís	GPT	2019	1	7	6	14
PSOE-Compromís	Mistral7B	2019	1	8	5	14
PSOE-Compromís	Mistral7B	2019	2	7	5	14
PSOE-Compromís	Mistral7B	2019	1	7	6	14
PSOE-Compromís	Mistral7B	2019	1	8	5	14
PSOE-Compromís	Mistral7B	2019	3	7	4	14
PP-CC	GPT	2016	8	20	7	35
PP-CC	GPT	2016	7	19	9	35

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PP-CC	GPT	2016	7	19	9	35
PP-CC	GPT	2016	8	23	4	35
PP-CC	GPT	2016	8	23	4	35
PP-CC	Mistral7B	2016	8	21	6	35
PP-CC	Mistral7B	2016	6	22	7	35
PP-CC	Mistral7B	2016	9	21	5	35
PP-CC	Mistral7B	2016	7	20	8	35
PP-CC	Mistral7B	2016	6	20	9	35
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2019	4	12	5	21
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2019	5	11	5	21
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2019	3	11	7	21
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2019	4	11	6	21
PSOE-BNG	GPT	2019	4	12	5	21
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2019	5	10	6	21
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2019	6	7	8	21
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2019	2	9	10	21
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2019	4	12	5	21
PSOE-BNG	Mistral7B	2019	2	15	4	21
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2004	4	2	8	14

Agreement	LLM	Year	ToC	PB	Other	Total
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2004	3	2	9	14
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2004	4	0	10	14
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2004	4	1	9	14
PSOE-ERC	GPT	2004	5	1	8	14
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2004	5	0	9	14
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2004	3	1	10	14
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2004	4	0	10	14
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2004	4	1	9	14
PSOE-ERC	Mistral7B	2004	5	1	8	14