Subnational Governance in Europe: Engaging Students With The Spanish Sub-state

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Although the study of regional and local politics has been largely conducted in the context of the United States (Loughlin 2001), in recent decades, researchers have studied sub-state transformations and multilevel governance in Europe (see, for example, Marks 1993; Bukowski et al. 2003; Weatherill 2005). In this article, I urge professors to incorporate this literature in undergraduate, comparative politics classrooms and I suggest how to do so using the case of Spain. I argue that Spain, and more generally southern Europe, provides an exciting context in which to discuss subnational themes. The article is structured in four sections. First, I explain the Comparative European Politics course in which I discuss the Spanish sub-state. The second section demonstrates Spain's comparative appeal by summarizing its State of Autonomies and situating it within the European context. The third section raises theoretical debates about democracy, subnational institutions, and the European Union. The final section offers accessible lecture examples for European politics courses.

Teaching Approach: The Appeal of Southern Europe

From the perspective of professors and undergraduate students, there are constraints to teaching subnational politics. I informally questioned several comparative professors, asking what hinders them from discussing sub-state actors or regional governments in comparative politics courses. The overwhelming response was time constraints, for in a European politics course it is difficult to cover the national politics of many European countries, and in a general comparative politics course the national political content to be covered is even broader. Explaining how national executives and legislatures function inevitably squeezes out subnational themes from course syllabi. My experience in the classroom also indicates that undergraduates are more inclined toward national and international affairs than subnational ones. Students in my spring 2007 Comparative European Politics course, when questioned on this matter, opined that they were not familiar with or terribly interested in sub-state politics. By contrast, they highly prioritized learning about the European Union.

I too am subject to time constraints in the Comparative European Politics course I teach that covers the national politics of European states and the European Union. My teaching goal is not to extensively discuss subnational politics in every country-context or devote several weeks to multilevel governance, defined here as governance spread between supranational, national, and subnational institutions. Rather, I incorporate exciting sub-state illustrations within the context of other syllabus topics, specifically those pertaining to southern Europe and the European Union that are situated in the latter third of the class. At that point in the semester, students have covered the politics of the United Kingdom and Germany, and thus are aware of center-periphery cleavages that challenge European states. The Spanish case, in the context of southern Europe, allows students to refresh this content knowledge and to further compare subnational institutions within Europe. Moreover, the Spanish case provides a bridge to initiating a theoretical conversation about democracy in an era of globalization and multilevel governance.

For a variety of reasons, Spain and southern Europe generally appeal to undergraduates. Southern Europe is attractive to U.S undergraduates because many of them study abroad there. In 2006, the Institute of International Education reported that Italy and Spain are, respectively, the second and third most popular destinations of U.S. study abroad students (with the UK ranking first) (Institute of International Education 2006). While traveling around Spain and Italy, students typically observe differences among the countries' regions, from architecture to language. I have found that students are relatively excited to learn about historical and political differences in regions they have visited. Therefore, professors teaching at schools with study abroad programs in southern Europe are in a special position to connect subnational themes to students' recent experiences.

Another reason why southern Europe successfully elucidates subnational themes is that Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* provides a key resource (1992). Familiarizing oneself with subnational politics and finding suitable lecture examples are also constrained by available resources, for many textbooks are short on subnational examples and most students (and many professors) do not have the language skills necessary to research them further. *Making Democracy Work* brings the subnational sphere in Italy alive to those not fluent in Italian, and it is written in a style that is accessible to upper-level undergraduate students. I have found that after reading a portion of *Making*

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Democracy Work and discussing Italian regionalism, students are convinced that subnational politics matter. At this point, I introduce the case of Spain and begin a discussion of the European Union and multilevel governance.

The Spanish case is also useful because its hybrid, quasi-federal state initiates a rich comparative discussion. On one hand, Spanish Autonomous Communities (ACs) have significant policy competencies stronger than that of other southern European sub-state units. Compared to the federations of Switzerland and Germany, however, Spain's federalized state appears weak.

Comparing Sub-state Developments

Elazar, in describing the "federalism revolution" of the 1980s and 1990s, estimated that "nearly 40 percent of the world's population" lived "within polities that are formally federal [and] . . . another third [lived] . . . in polities that apply federal arrangements in some ways." (1991, 6). Europe also experienced significant sub-state transformations during this period. Ansell and Gingrich cite Belgium's 1992 transition from a unitary to a federal state as the most "dramatic reform" since 1965 (2003, 143); sub-state institutional changes in other states are also notable. For example, Spain experienced federalization in the 1980s, France pursued decentralization in the 1980s, and Finland strengthened its municipalities in the 1990s. Scholars suggest that these worldwide institutional changes are a part of the greatest transformation of democracy since the development of modern, mass democracy in the early 1900s (Cain et al. 2003; Loughlin 2001). Moreover, institutional changes in southern Europe mark a strong reversal of centralizing state dynamics associated with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal) (Llamazares and Marks 2006).

Spain developed its State of Autonomies (Estado de Autonomías) within the context of democratization (Newton and Donaghy 1997). Whereas the right-wing, authoritarian Franco regime (1939–1975) enforced centralization, the democratic transition was an opportunity to revive subnational sentiment. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 provides that regions (ACs) share policy competencies with the central state. ACs signed autonomy statutes in the early 1980s and the central state devolved many competencies during the 1980s and 1990s, including, for example, social policy, transport, tourism, agriculture, and fisheries (see Closa and Heywood 2004). The policy competencies reserved for the central government are international relations, defense, justice, and the monetary system. Debates about regionalism remain salient in Spain, for Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero, elected in 2004, has allowed regions to negotiate new autonomy statutes.

Although ACs have many policy competencies and autonomy is a dynamic process, the Spanish state is typically referred to as an arrangement short of federalism, often with terms such as emerging federation, quasi-federalism, hybrid state, or regionalized unitary state. Spain's "in-between" status provides an excellent illustration in the classroom for explaining what ingredients are needed to constitute a federation (e.g. two orders of government, federalism inscribed in a constitution, sub-state units with a significant role in national institutions; see Elazar 1991; Watts 1999). Although Spanish ACs provide an excellent example of the so-called revolution toward federal arrangements, what Spain lacks is significant. Federalism is not mentioned explicitly in the Spanish Constitution, which stresses national unity, and the ACs do not play a "major role as territories in the national government" (Elazar 1991, 165). Unlike the German Bundesrat or the U.S. Senate, which offers representation to sub-state units, the Spanish Senate is popularly elected by provinces and partially appointed by AC legislatures. Without clear AC representation in the Senate, and because the Senate is limited in power anyway, national politics lack true federal dynamics.

Although Spain is not a true federation, it is more federalized than its southern European counterparts (see Llamazares and Marks 2006; Bukowski et al. 2003). Keeping in mind that students are generally impressed with the differences between southern and northern Italy in *Making Democracy Work*, they are surprised to learn that Spain is an even stronger example of sub-state institutions and regional nationalism. Italy's 1948 constitution provided for regional institutions; yet regions did not gain power until the late 1970s, Italians rejected quasi-federalist reforms in a July 2006 referendum, and regions are weak in terms of financial power and competencies. Furthermore, while Italy "has not had a legacy of strong ethno-territorial movements" (Llamazares and Marks 2006, 239), "two-thirds of [Spanish] citizens express a dual identity or compound nationality" (Moreno 2001, 5) and regional parties are based on said nationalities. Portugal is similar to Italy in that its 1976 constitution permitted regionalism, which was not immediately pursued. Moreover, in 1998, Portuguese citizens rejected a referendum for greater regional autonomy. With the exception of Madeira and the Azores, Portugal functions as a unitary state.

Exploring Theoretical Debates

The aforementioned federalism revolution lies at the heart of theoretical debates about democracy in an age of internationalism. Related questions students should ask themselves include: Is democracy furthered by sub-state institutional developments? Is the sub-state more or less relevant in an age of globalization and Europeanization? Several explanations point to the sub-state's growing importance in an age of globalization. First, the neo-liberal discourse that has accompanied globalization promotes sub-national jurisdictions as a marketplace for public services in which policy ideas are tested and the most effective ones emerge (see Ansell and Gingrich 2003). Another explanation of growing sub-state importance suggests that subnational institutions are tied to citizen demands for greater democracy. Some scholars argue that citizens in an age of globalization recognize that factors outside their immediate ambit influence their lives, leading them to re-embrace localism and community and to seek direct access to democratic processes (see Ansell and Gingrich 2003; Loughlin 2001). Recent public opinion polls in advanced industrial democracies show that citizens prefer "direct involvement in the political process" over elite driven decision-making (Cain et al. 2003, 2). The sub-state arguably meets citizen preferences because its close-by nature offers easy access to government institutions. Furthermore, as subnational politics develop and citizens politically activate their local identities, a cultural re-affirmation of subnational politics may occur (Llamazares and Marks 2006).

The European Union's growing importance in recent decades is a "further complication" to the development of sub-state democracy (Loughlin 2001, 17). The EU draws power away from the nation-state in an upward direction *and* it pushes power in a downward direction. At times, the EU has served as a political opportunity for sub-state actors who face closed national political environments (Fairbrass and Jordan 2001). Subsidiarity, structural funds, and regional voice in EU institutions are oft-cited as keys to sub-state empowerment. The concept of subsidiarity endorses policymaking at the level closest to citizens in order to honor local policy preferences (see Bainbridge 2002). Subsidiarity was included in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the failed 2005 EU Constitution. The EU more concretely empowers regions through its regional policies implemented through structural funds. These aid schemes develop disadvantaged regions, and in doing so, empower regional political elites who

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administer funds. The European Union Committee of Regions and regional offices in Brussels are further means for expressing regional preferences. The EU Committee of Regions is comprised of regional and local officials and is consulted by the Commission, Council, and Parliament, whereas regional offices liaison with Commission officials.

Considering the union's overall "democratic deficit," however, students should also bear in mind ways the EU constrains regions and reaffirms state power. The EU is indeed "blind" to the "internal territorial and constitutional arrangements of its Member States" in that it does not mandate their sub-state arrangements (Weatherill 2005, 1). Moreover, the European Union historically is an organization of nation-states and its main institutions provide for central-state representation, not sub-state representation. Because the aforementioned Committee of Regions is merely an advisory body, central-state officials remain the ultimate arbiters of EU policies.

Spanish ACs demonstrate the empowering yet awkward position of regions in today's multilevel context. The Spanish case confirms that subnational institutions meet citizens' preference for democratic access. Aja reports that Spanish citizens are greatly satisfied with the State of Autonomies and citizens report more interest in activities of local and AC governments than those of the national government (2001, 247). ACs also utilize empowering channels available to them in the European Union. The flow of EU monies facilitates work projects in lesser developed regions, all ACs have regional offices in Brussels (Closa and Heywood 2004), and ACs participate in the Committee of Regions.

However, because of the Spanish state's not-quite federal nature, the European Union has been closed to ACs. Due to its constitutional responsibility for foreign affairs, the central-state has blocked AC influence in European matters. ACs often lack access to information about European Union matters (Bengoetxea 2005), and, when the Basque Country first established a regional office in Brussels, the state petitioned the Spanish Constitutional Court in opposition. The court ruled in 1995 that regional offices are permissible (Closa and Heywood 2004), and, since that time, further mechanisms for AC-EU communications have been established (e.g. commissioner for the ACs, see Bengoetxea 2005). That said, national politicians still prefer power over EU affairs, and the Spanish Senate has yet to become an institution that represents ACs in national debates about EU affairs. Therefore, as Spain offers an in-between example of substate institutional design, it gives a middle-of-the-road view of multilevel politics.

Memorable Spanish Examples: Highways, Milk, Bananas, Fish, and Islands

Each year my students are intrigued with the same part of *Making Democracy Work*: the contrast between the "modern, high-tech firm" appearance of the Emilia-Romagna regional headquarters and "the nondescript regional headquarters beyond the railroad yards" in Puglia (1992, 5). This description is memorable because it provides a vivid illustration of subnational variation. The examples below bring to light advantages and disadvantages of the EU's multilevel context for Spanish ACs, and they interest students on account of their vivid nature and/or internet availability. Professors can introduce examples with the aforementioned theory, or, if limited for time, in lectures about Spain, the European Union, or women and politics.

Examples pertaining to highways and agricultural products provide a memorable and critical evaluation of the EU's impact on ACs. Structural funds have certainly developed Spanish ACs (see Success Stories), yet Dudek explains how the Galician administration's use of funds has fueled clientelism reminiscent of the Franco era (2003). The small town of Lalín received a "circumventing highway to alleviate traffic problems" before the larger, port city of Pontevedra because a former Lalín mayor had become a regional government official and obtained EU funds through political connections.

Milk is to Galicia as bananas are to the Canary Islands: they are both famed regional products, provide regional employment, and are challenged by EU policies. When Spain joined the EC in the 1980s, dairy production in Europe was overly plentiful, and, as a new member-state, Spanish officials negotiated quotas that permitted older EU member-states to produce more milk than Spain (Dudek 2005). Quotas inevitably concerned Galician farmers who had to slow milk production. Moreover, when the EU levied fines on Spain for milk overproduction in the 1990s, Galician farmers were partially responsible for payment. The public's response to milk quotas demonstrates that EU central-state negotiations can challenge regional governance. Although Galicians partially blamed the central state for negotiating an unfavorable quota upon EU accession, they also have protested against the regional government even though it is constrained by EU regulations.

The more recent banana controversy in the Canary Islands demonstrates how multilevel negotiations influence subnational elections. In 2007, the EU began negotiating an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with developing nations to open European markets to their agricultural products, except for rice and sugar which will be phased into the agreement at a later date (Bounds 2007). Spanish officials argued for phased-in status for bananas as well, arguing that it is a vital product for the Canaries. Spain's wishes were not immediately granted, yet after May 2007 negotiations, the EU agreed to reconsider protections for bananas while continuing EPA trade talks. This temporary solution was engineered during the 2007 regional and municipal election season in Spain in which Socialist national officials scurried to find an EU solution that might secure Canary Island votes for their regional presidential candidate.

Gender equality policies are also multilevel, but they more clearly demonstrate the EU's positive influence on ACs. In the 1980s, the EC and its member-states inspired newly democratized Spain to pursue equality policies. The socialist feminists advocating for the national Women's Institute (Instituto de la Mujer, IM) argued that Spain should "emulate" European countries with women's policy agencies (i.e., institutions with the goal to improve women's lives) (Valiente 1995, 224). The IM was established in 1983 and ACs created women's agencies in the following decade. Today, the EU supplies the national and AC governments with a legal framework for developing equality policies, and, more recently, EU regional funds have contributed to AC equality programs (Bustelo and Ortbals 2007).

The Basque Women's Institute (Emakunde) and the Andalusian Women's Institute (Instituto Andaluz de la Mujer, IAM) are good classroom examples of regional women's policy agencies. They are considered among the most active agencies in Spain, and English language resources regarding their histories and goals are available online. The English-translated web site of the Basque Women's Institute explains, for example, how the Basque women's movement pressured political parties to create the Basque Women's Institute in 1988 (Emakunde 2007). IAM history and policy goals are accessible through a pamphlet available in PDF format (The Women's Institute of Andalusia 2007).

The Galician women's policy agency has been less active; however, EU funds have created an opportunity for the Galician government to promote equality. The project Gamela, designed in Galicia and utilized in several ACs, is described as a good gender practice in an EU Commission report available online

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z(European Commission 2000). Gamela encouraged women to be leaders in small-scale fisheries, and in Galicia, officials helped women upgrade fishing operations so that shellfish products met European quality standards. Proyecto Violeta also provides a unique example of solving subnational challenges with European Union resources. Proyecto Violeta aimed to network officials from the Atlantic islands of Madeira, the Azores, and the Canaries and to publish an islands resource guide (e.g. with contact information for women's organizations, women's help centers, etc.) (Interreg Violeta 2004). Because cooperation between island officials is exacerbated by island geography, Proyecto Violeta's role in linking local and regional officials is especially notable.

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