

# Regional politicians in Spain are more disassociated from central government than other countries

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Regional politicians in Spain are more disassociated from central government than those in the United Kingdom and France. Credit: Presidency of Government

Researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and the University of Valencia (UV) have looked into the dominant career patterns of regional politicians in Spain, France and the United Kingdom. The results show that the evolution of decentralisation in each of the countries has led to differences between them. In Spain, for example, only one out of every 10 autonomous region presidents cut their teeth in central government.

"Our research is novel, because this is the first empirical study focusing

on the political careers of regional government leaders. It also makes it clear that, in some countries, regionalisation in centralised states is giving rise to a new group of [political leaders](#) whose field of action is not within the "national arena" but rather within 'sub-state arenas', Juan Rodríguez Teruel, a researcher at the UV and co-author of the study, tells SINC.

The study, which has been published in the journal REIS, provides a comparative analysis of France, the United Kingdom and Spain, and explains the differences between the institutional characteristics of each country, and the political background of their leaders from 1980 to 2010.

In [Spain](#), while regional leaders during the first years of decentralisation followed career paths similar to those of their counterparts in France and the United Kingdom, an important phenomenon developed from the 1990s onwards, with a proliferation of autonomous region presidents whose only or main experience was within the politics of their own region.

"Leaders who received their training in national parliament have disappeared, with the exception of some significant ministers who have gone on to become autonomous region presidents", says Rodríguez Teruel, as has been the case with Manuel Chaves, José Antonio Griñán, José Montilla, Esperanza Aguirre, Manuel Fraga and Jaume Matas.

The heads of regional governments in the United Kingdom (Scotland and Wales), meanwhile, which have experienced a "relatively short" process of decentralisation, have always passed through the national institutions, and in some cases are individuals with ministerial experience who were involved in the drive to promote decentralisation laws in Britain at the end of the 1990s.

In the case of France, however, the regional political élites retain a typical feature of French politicians, who cut their teeth at a range of different institutional levels. "However, in recent years there has been a new wave of political leaders whose principal experience is at regional level, heralding a new development in French politics", the expert explains.

## **Consequences of political decentralisation**

According to the experts, if this trend becomes consolidated in future, we will be faced with a situation that those behind the decentralisation process never imagined. "In short, the creation of regional institutions can lead to the appearance of leaders who are disconnected from the national political circuit".

Rodríguez Teruel says this fact could have positive effects in terms of legitimising sub-national political action, bringing about better response to public demands, due to proximity, and could also drive increased regional development.

However, it could also have negative effects, such as increasing conflict between the national and sub-national spheres, due to the lack of shared experiences between the political leaders of each level, and also demands for greater self-government and regional claims, and the strengthening of 'client' networks within regional politics.

"The patterns identified by our study do not necessarily determine whether decentralisation has a positive or negative impact on the life of citizens, but they do underline important changes that are occurring among the political classes in these countries", concludes Rodríguez Teruel.

**More information:** Joan Botella, Juan Rodríguez Teruel, Oscar

Barberà y Astrid Barrio. "Las carreras políticas de los jefes de gobierno regionales en España, Francia y Reino Unido (1980 – 2010)", Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas, enero – March 2011.

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