

Boundary shifts and vote alignment in Catalonia

This paper analyses the dynamics between ethnic boundaries and electoral alignment in the context of Western minority nationalisms by focusing on the Catalan case. In particular, the research explores the changes in boundary shifts at the electoral level, whether they affect differently pro-sovereignty and pro-union parties, and to what extent changes have reinforced the ethnic alignment of vote. Methodologically, the analysis is based on observational data from the elections of 2010 and 2012, which allows to overcome some of the traditional limits of opinion studies. The results suggest that ethnicity is a dynamic factor that has gained relevance for both substate and state-wide parties, and that processes of boundary contraction are not necessarily associated to electoral failure.

The study of minority nationalisms in Western contexts has traditionally emphasized the role of identity, their ethnocultural basis or the importance of socialization processes linked to nation-building policies (Connor, 1978; Guibernau, 2006; Smith, 1989; Sorens, 2005). In quantitative electoral studies, the most common approach relies on individuals' national identification from opinion polls which, given the strong encompassing capacity of identity, usually overrun the effects of primary and secondary socialization factors (Lachapelle, 2007; Moreno et al., 1998). Recent research has also explored elements not directly linked to national identification such as welfare, economic or instrumental considerations, but rather surprisingly the analytical role of different conceptions of ethnicity has received much less attention (Curtice, 2014; Muñoz and Tormos, 2014). A second flaw in quantitative studies is that ethnicity is usually associated to substate nationalisms neglecting the possible influence over state-wide parties competing at the regional level and the limits of the ethnic/civic distinction

if understood as a simple dichotomy (Brubaker, 1999: 199; Kuzio, 2002; McCrone, 2002: 310, Connor 2002, Chandra 2006, 2012). Nationalisms, either state or substate, often emphasize not only their cultural or ethnic roots but also political and democratic elements to reach a wider segment of the population, particularly in the context of decentralized states and diverse societies. Self-government institutions can foster a double allegiance both to the state and the substate identity, but also competing processes of nation-building appealing to the same population which can fuel further nationalist demands (Erk and Anderson, 2009; Meadwell, 2009). Thus, it is common among substate and state nationalisms to emphasize core-values based on potentially inclusive elements and not only on primary markers such as race or birth (Guibernau, 1999; Keating, 2001; Olivieri, 2015; Conversi, 1990).

However, we will show that from an analytical perspective a primary definition of ethnicity can be not only relevant but even increase its influence over the electoral choices of individuals, especially in contexts of political polarization. Focusing on the regional elections of 2010 and 2012 in Catalonia, the aim of the paper is to explore whether political polarization can reflect the persistence and even the reinforcement of ethnicity primarily defined as place of birth in a Western context. At the methodological level, the paper relies on observational data, which offers the possibility to complement some of the traditional limits of survey data analysis. Our results show how ethnicity affects both substate and state-wide parties competing in regional elections, that polarization can result in a growing alignment of vote along these ethnic lines, and that contraction shifts in group boundaries are not necessarily associated to electoral losses.

The electoral salience of ethnicity

To understand its possible role as a determinant of vote, our analysis departs from an analytical and dynamic conception of ethnicity. Following the classical definition of Max Weber, ethnicity can be broadly defined as a sense of belonging to a group characterized by common ancestry and culture (Weber, 1978: 385). This sense of belonging in terms of shared ancestry and culture can be based on multiple combinations of social markers, reflecting the dynamic rather than static or essentialist character of ethnicity (Conversi 1995:77). Markers such as religion, language, birth or descent have varying degrees of openness, this is, the extent to which they can be more or less acquired by means of socialization processes can delimit the potential expansion of a group's boundary (Brubaker 1996). From an analytical perspective, individuals can 'belong' to an *ethnie* as a category externally defined, but this is not necessarily relevant to shape their identities or to influence their political behaviour. It is important then to distinguish between ethnicity as a category of analysis and as a category of practice or, in other terms, between its nominal or activated character, avoiding the problem of 'groupism' (Bourdieu, 1991: 223; Brubaker, 2004: 31; Chandra, 2011: 154). These distinctions reflect how an ethnic marker does not necessarily imply the existence of a unitary actor or an effective mobilization along ethnic lines (Banton, 1994; Brubaker, 2004: 8; Jenkins, 2014: 811). The politicization of ethnicity is rather a social process – more or less successful- of creation and maintenance of boundaries, defined by a categorical and behavioural dimension (Barth, 1969: 15; Wimmer, 2008b: 975, Conversi 1990). Thus, boundary shifts can reflect the expansion or contraction of the potential range of individuals included in a given category, the emergence of alternative cleavages or positional moves at the individual or group level (Wimmer, 2008a: 1038,

2008b: 987). The politicization of ethnicity also requires a structure of political opportunity understood as a condition of possibility that can be more or less institutionalized such as the territorial decentralization of power with competitive elections at the regional level (Máiz, 2003: 201). This structure of opportunity allows for its activation as a resource of mobilization, associated to a variety of political demands for recognition and self-government (Hale, 2008: 38; Máiz, 2003: 197). The existence of a group defined in terms of ethnic boundaries and an institutional structure of opportunity for political mobilization allows to explore the effects of ethnicity in a variety of dimensions, such as political discourses or group practices. In the electoral arena, the salience of ethnicity would imply that individuals significantly behave along ethnic lines. That is, if ethnicity is relevant in electoral terms, there will be a significant ethnic alignment of vote.

From this approach, boundary shifts can influence electoral results but they are not necessarily associated with a particular electoral performance. The usual expectation in the literature on electoral behaviour is that a vote-maximizing party will take a position in an area of legitimate acceptability by the electorate, avoiding to appear as an extreme option that would risk the possibility to expand its electoral base (Rabinowitz et al., 1991:151-153). However, in complex or volatile settings, parties can move within these limits to adopt relatively more extreme positions than their electorate, even though electoral studies too often assume that voters and their preferences are fixed (Iversen, 1994: 177, 184). Tensions can also emerge between boundary expansion and electoral outcomes when parties change their positions on competitive issues, especially because the size of a given group is not likely to change in short periods of time but the salience of an issue can vary due to a change in the voting behaviour of individuals (Flanagan

and Dalton, 1984; Lachat, 2007: 3). Voters can remain loyal by adapting their ideology to the party, but they can also experience cross-pressures that lead them to choose another party closer to their views (Levendusky, 2009: 13; Mutz, 2002). However, when the political debate is polarized around a salient issue, expanding the boundary to reach a wider target can be detrimental to the preservation of a party's electoral base. On the other hand, political parties are sensitive to their core-issues but also to what is perceived as the majority position of the electorate. This can lead them –and especially *catch-all* parties- to focus on their traditional electoral base but at the same time this can affect their capacity to appeal to non-core voters (Budge, 2001: 116; Levendusky, 2009: 128). Thus, a structure of political opportunity such as democratically elected institutions of self-government where the national question is reinforced, can prompt individual and group variations reflecting ongoing boundary shifts resulting in different levels of electoral success (Huszka, 2014: 156; Wimmer, 2008a: 1031). Therefore, it could be possible that narrowing the potential target of individuals of a given category can maximize votes within the contracted group, while widening the electoral target does not necessarily result in electoral gains, as individuals may not significantly mobilize around this new boundary.

The electoral implications of ethnic alignment in Catalonia

Given the socio-demographic characteristics of Catalonia, an ethnic alignment of vote could be a determinant factor of electoral results. The demographic structure of contemporary Catalonia reflects the massive migrations of the 1960s and 1970s from deprived areas of the rest of Spain that usually moved to peripheral districts and cities of metropolitan areas such as Barcelona or Tarragona. Today, approximately one third of

eligible voters belong to this group of population, even though it is an ageing population that tends to represent a smaller fraction of the electorate. The magnitude of the migration process raised the question of whether this new group of citizens would enter into a process of assimilation or would retain their original Spanish identities, supporting state-wide parties and not fully engaging in regional politics (Riba, 2000).

With the restoration of democracy and self-government institutions, mainstream Catalan nationalism emphasized self-government demands short of independence and nation-building policies for the promotion of the Catalan language in key areas such as education and mass media (Miller and Miller, 1996; Strubell, 1998). Given its sociodemographic diversity, language became the core-value for Catalan nationalism, conceived as an inclusive factor that could expand the potential boundaries of Catalanness, instead of a primary conception based on descent that would have limited the possibilities to become hegemonic (Conversi 1990:63). This strategy can explain the relatively inclusive character of Catalan nationalism (Conversi, 2000: 208; Laitin, 1989: 303; Shafir, 1995: 70). Nevertheless, whether this is a successful process or has rather fostered adaptative strategies of language acquisition -such as increasing the chances for social mobility- that do not generate stable or significant assimilation is still an open question (De La Calle and Jeffrey Miley, 2008: 717; Laitin, 2007: 53–55). Therefore, the first step is to explore the persistence of a significant association between birth and vote:

Hypothesis 1. There is a significant association between place of birth and pro-union or pro-sovereignty vote. Higher levels of population born in Catalonia are associated with higher levels of vote for pro-sovereignty parties, and the same positive correlation is

expected between percentage of population born in the rest of Spain and vote for pro-union parties.

Catalan nationalism has evolved during the last years towards a pro-sovereignty agenda emphasizing cultural and welfare aspects linked to an alleged unfair treatment by the State, particularly after the controversial decision of the Constitutional Court in 2010 that overruled sensitive aspects of the new Statute of Autonomy approved in 2006 (Dowling, 2014; Muñoz and Guinjoan, 2013: 48; Rodon, 2012: 140). The territorial question was relevant in the election of 2010 after the Court's decision, but the campaign was also focused on the evaluation of the leftist coalition in government since 2003. In 2012 the territorial dimension monopolized the electoral campaign, the media and the parties' manifestos, which clarified their positions towards self-determination and the possibility to hold a unilateral referendum on the constitutional status of Catalonia (Martí, 2013; Rico, 2012; Rico and Liñeira, 2014). This context resulted in a contested campaign. Turnout increased almost ten points compared to the election of 2010, up to 67.8 per cent of eligible voters. Pro-sovereignty parties obtained 59 per cent of the total vote, a 1.7 points increase compared to the 2010 election, and pro-union parties obtained a 37 per cent of the vote, a 0.5 points increase. Considering the total census, pro-sovereignty parties obtained a 39.5 per cent of the vote with a 6.1 points increase while pro-union parties increased 3.5 points obtaining a 24.8 per cent of the vote.

The increasing turnout raises the question of to what extent Catalan nationalism would have appealed to the population born in the rest of Spain, emphasizing welfare and civic aspects. On the other hand, also parties against independence could have mobilized this

electorate along basic ethnocultural lines. These mechanisms would be in accordance with evidence suggesting that attitudes towards independence have an ethnocultural component even though they are usually subsumed under national identification defined in civic terms (Guidi and Karagiannis, 2014: 11; Serrano, 2013: 535). According to survey data from post-electoral studiesⁱ, voters born in the rest of Spain represent the core electoral base of parties favouring the *status quo*. This importance even grows in 2012, where approximately 40 per cent of C's voters, 50 per cent of PSC's voters and 66 per cent of PP's voters were born in the rest of Spain, significantly above the average population. Conversely, this group of population is underrepresented among pro-sovereignty parties; less than ten per cent for ERC, around fifteen per cent for CUP or CiU, and ICV being the only case where this group represents a quarter of their electoral base. However, the electoral choices of this group of voters offer a more nuanced perspective. More than a fifty per cent of population born in the rest of Spain opted for PSC and CiU in the elections of 2010 but in 2012 both parties experienced a strong decline losing around on third of this vote. Left-wing parties increased their support among this group of population. The coalition ICV reached a fifteen per cent of this electorate, while another ten per cent opted for leftist pro-independence parties such as CUP or ERC. The rest of parties favouring the *status quo* present remarkable differences, with the PP remaining stable with approximately ten per cent of support among this group and C's almost tripling supports up to approximately 7.5 per cent. Thus, the next two hypotheses explore to what extent the pro-independence debate in the electoral arena has reinforced the ethnic alignment of vote, and secondly, whether it has reduced the traditional gap in voter turnout between population born in Catalonia and the rest of Spain:

Hypothesis 1a. Ethnic alignment becomes stronger in the elections of 2012 for both pro-sovereignty and pro-union vote.

Hypothesis 1b. Differential turnout associated with percentage of population born in Catalonia and the rest of Spain has declined.

Given the tensions between boundary shifts and parties' clarification on the self-determination debate, an increasing polarization could put cross-pressures on individuals between remaining loyal to their previous electoral choices or changing parties. Accordingly, our next two hypothesis test whether this change has resulted in patterns of contraction rather than expansion and how major parties can be more affected,, *given that clarifying positions can be detrimental to expanding their electoral results:*

Hypothesis 2. The intensification of the electoral agenda around the sovereignty debate will generate patterns of contraction rather than expansion especially affecting catch-all parties.

To sum up, the general expectation is that the growing ethnic alignment of vote affecting both state-wide and regional parties can be combined with electoral net gains or losses depending on whether expansion or contraction processes are in place, and that particularly major parties will experience greater tensions between between these dimensions.

Methods and data

Nationalism studies analyzing electoral results usually rely on survey data despite some relevant limitations such as validity of self-reported vote, especially in polarized

contexts where individuals can be reluctant to express their actual choices (Clausen, 1968; Fisher, 1993; Hooghe and Reeskens, 2007; Traugott and Katosh, 1979). For instance, in the Catalan election of 2012, approximately 87 per cent of respondents of post-electoral surveys declared they had voted while the actual turnout of the election was of 67 per centⁱⁱ. There is a growing number of research using alternative approaches to traditional survey analysis, but the use of observational data has received much less attention even though it offers the possibility to rely not on self-reported behaviour by survey respondents but on actual data (de la Calle and Fazi, 2010; Evans and Tonge, 2009; Guidi and Karagiannis, 2014). Observational data has its own limitations such as the variety of information registered or restrictions due to privacy regulations, which do not allow to include relevant variables that would at least complement the analysis and that must be taken into account when interpreting results. Methodologically, a further question refers to how aggregate data must be interpreted cautiously in order to avoid problems of ecological or individualistic fallacy (Teune and Przeworski, 1970: 72). Alternatives such as ecological inference models are far from offering a conventionally accepted solution, and on the other hand we do not aim at inferring individual behaviour as much as detecting patterns of change at the aggregate level (Cho and Gaines, 2004; Robinson, 2009; Welzel and Inglehart, 2007: 303). Moreover, as we will see later our analysis offers consistent results suggesting these limitations fall within reasonable margins.

We built a database including the 5067 territorial units into which the Catalan territory is divided for electoral and census purposes. These electoral sections have an average of approximately one thousand voters, and 90 per cent of the sections have between 500 and 3000 voters. The number of sections varies due to changes in

population, which affected a total of 47 sections between 2010 and 2012. We merged raw electoral results and sociodemographic information from two official sources for each of these electoral sectionsⁱⁱⁱ. Electoral results were calculated as percentage of vote over the census. This option offers a more accurate representation as it includes eligible voters who do not participate in the elections, in contrast to electoral studies that too often restrict the analysis to valid votes. Three dependent variables were built for each election: turnout, pro-sovereignty and pro-union vote. Pro-sovereignty parties are defined as those defending Catalonia's right to self-determination, while pro-union parties are those closer to the *status quo*. Under this criteria pro-sovereignty parties include *Convergència i Unió* (CiU), *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC), *Iniciativa per Catalunya-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (ICV-EUiA), *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (CUP) and *Solidaritat per la Independència* (SI)^{iv}. Pro-union parties include *Partido Popular* (PP), *Ciutadans-Partido de la Ciudadanía* (C's), and the *Partit Socialista de Catalunya* (PSC-PSOE), which combines a generic support to self-government with the opposition to a referendum, in accordance with its national partner's position, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE). We also include under this category two extra-parliamentary parties, the xenophobic far-right *Plataform for Catalonia* (PxC), with 2.4 per cent of the vote in 2010 and 1.6 per cent in 2012, and *Union, Progress and Democracy* (UpyD) that favours recentralization of autonomy and obtained 0.4 per cent of the vote in 2012. The independent variables are defined considering the limits of data availability. The main independent variable is the percentage of residents over 20 years having born in the rest of Spain. Two measures of age -population over 65 years old and between 20 and 35 years- were added as confounding factors, that is, they are independently associated with the rest of variables

without being part of the causal chain between them (Box-Steffensmeier et al., 2008: 240)(Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier 2008, 240). Age meets these requirements as there is an association with origins that reflects the migration process of 1960s and 1970s, and on the other hand it can influence electoral behaviour without being an intermediate variable as origins precede age. Lastly, the model controls for density of population as a *proxy* to characterize urban sections, which correspond to more densely populated areas.

Results

Regression models were run for the dependent variables presented in the previous section: turnout, pro-sovereignty, pro-union and party vote in the elections of 2010 and 2012. Linear regression models offered both consistent and parsimonious results after having explored non-linear models and interactions in a preliminary analysis.

TABLE 1
REGRESSION MODELS FOR TURNOUT, PRO-SOVEREIGN AND PRO-UNION
VOTE 2010-2012

The results confirm a strong ethnic alignment of vote which is reinforced in the elections of 2012. As expected, there is a positive correlation between vote for pro-union parties and percentage of population born in the rest of Spain, while the correlation is negative for pro-sovereignty vote. Data show an intense process of ethnification in pro-union vote, becoming practically equivalent -as observed in partials R squared- to pro-sovereignty vote, which remains rather stable. The model also

suggests an increase in voter turnout correlated with higher levels of population born in the rest of Spain. However, turnout also increased in sections with high levels of population born in Catalonia even though voter turnout was already higher. This suggests an ethnic dealignment of turnout, as origins lose explanatory capacity despite a political agenda centered on the question of sovereignty.

Confounding and control variables also offer interesting results. Pro-sovereignty vote is positively associated to higher percentages of elder population, and this relation becomes stronger in 2012. The relation also becomes stronger but negative for pro-union vote. This would suggest that, adjusting for origins, higher percentages of elder population are associated to pro-sovereignty vote. On the other hand, the effects of elder population do not indicate an opposite pattern among high percentages of young population, which in fact has a negative association both for pro-sovereignty and pro-union parties. Moreover, this negative association becomes the strongest factor associated with turnout, which can reflect a general higher level of electoral disengagement among younger voters.

TABLE 2

REGRESSION MODELS FOR PARTY VOTE, 2010-2012

At the party level the evidence shows varying degrees of ethnic alignment combined with different patterns of change. There is a strong correlation between vote and place of birth in the expected direction for all parties with one significant exception, the former communists' coalition ICV-EUiA, which combined a pro-sovereignty

position with the possibility of accommodation within Spain. Ethnic alignment becomes more relevant in the election of 2012, with common patterns but also relevant differences affecting major parties. CiU and PSC are the only ones losing parliamentary representation and percentage of valid vote, even though they remain stable in absolute votes. In the case of CiU, there is an additional factor related to age. The positive association with the percentage of elder population and the negative association with high percentages of younger population indicates that, to a significant extent, age seems to have an independent effect on the coalition's results. There are also remarkable effects in the most leftist parties, ICV and CUP. Origins are significant in both cases but ICV represents a particular case, as this relation becomes more intense and positive with percentage of population born in the rest of Spain, which could reflect the coalition's more moderate stance on self-determination. In the case of CUP, it is the only party where percentage of young population is not negatively associated with vote, which would reflect how the party performs better in areas with high percentages of young population. The first set of hypothesis confirms the dynamic salience of ethnicity and also reflects how it can coexist with boundary expansion or contraction and net electoral results. These possible variations around basic forms of boundary shifts can be further explored by plotting the fitted values of the regression models. The next figures represent predicted turnout (Figure 1), pro-sovereignty and pro-union vote (Figure 2 and 3) and party vote (Figure 4) for each electoral section in 2010 and 2012. The horizontal axis represents the percentage of population born outside Catalonia.

FIGURE 1

PREDICTED TURNOUT FOR EACH ELECTORAL SECTION BY PERCENTAGE
OF POPULATION BORN IN THE REST OF SPAIN, 2010-2012.

Figure 1 reflects the process of ethnic dealignment in voter turnout. The differential effects of origins diminish in predicting electoral participation despite turnout grows at the general level in the elections of 2012. More nuanced patterns emerge for pro-sovereignty and pro-union vote, with interesting variations of the expected contraction shift as defined in our hypothesis.

FIGURE 2

PREDICTED PRO-SOVEREIGNTY VOTE FOR EACH ELECTORAL SECTION BY
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BORN IN THE REST OF SPAIN, 2010-2012.

Figure 2 shows how pro-sovereignty vote improve the electoral results in core-sections, that is, vote grows as the percentage of population born in the rest of Spain declines. This negative correlation generates marginal losses in a small number of sections with the highest levels of population born in the rest of Spain, suggesting that contraction shifts are not only compatible with the intensification of an ethnic alignment but also with a net positive balance of vote. A similar pattern is found for pro-union vote, as represented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3

PREDICTED PRO-UNION VOTE FOR EACH ELECTORAL SECTION BY
PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BORN IN THE REST OF SPAIN, 2010-2012.

Pro-union vote confirms even more clearly a pattern of contraction. Vote declines in those sections with higher levels of population born in Catalonia and grows with the percentage of population born in the rest of Spain, but the net balance of vote is still positive. Both cases show, with different intensities, a successful variation of contraction shifts. This could suggest the possibility that narrowing an ethnic boundary, with the subsequent exclusion of hitherto potential voters, does not necessarily generate significant losses in non-core sections or a net negative balance of votes. The interaction between ethnicity and electoral results also results in variations around the basic forms of boundary shifts at the party level, where also hybrid or nuanced patterns emerge, as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4

PREDICTED PARTY VOTE FOR EACH ELECTORAL SECTION BY PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BORN IN THE REST OF SPAIN, 2010-2012.

The two parties that historically dominated the Catalan electoral arena -PSC and CiU- actually improve their results in those sections where they already performed relatively well, but these gains do not compensate the decline in less favourable sections. This dynamic suggests they are losing one of the basic characteristics of catch-all parties, that is, the capacity to reach an heterogeneous electoral base obtaining significant results even in non-core sections (Gunther and Diamond, 2003:186). Medium and small-sized parties also offer interesting variations of boundary shifts and electoral results, even though this must be taken cautiously as minor parties tend to obtain marginal results in a significant number of sections, and consequently net electoral losses can not be observed. With this caveat in mind, we find different variations such as a 'limited'

expansion, which would be the case of ERC, the third party in number of votes. The party's results combine the intensification of the ethnic alignment with a positive balance in absolute votes, that is, vote gains decline with the percentage of population born in the rest of Spain, but the party obtains better results in almost all sections. The coalition ICV is the only case of a diverging pattern between the ethnic alignment of vote and the party's position towards sovereignty. Despite the coalition's vote is relatively low in all sections -usually below 10 per cent of the census- results grow with the percentage of population born in the rest of Spain. These results could be related to the coalition's emphasis on the ideological dimension and a stance towards self-determination that does not exclude a possible accommodation within the existing state. This highlights how parties may be able to expand their electoral boundaries and the salience of non-strategical or even detrimental cleavages for their electoral strategy. Lastly, the evolution of C's and PP show a process of successful contraction. The evolution of these two pro-union parties is characterized by the combination of electoral gains and the intensification of the ethnic alignment of vote. This process is particularly clear in the case of C's, which experience a process of intense alignment compared to the election of 2010. Thus, this pattern points at the possibility that contraction shifts are not necessarily associated to electoral losses. Moreover, this sort of successful contraction that results in a positive balance of vote would suggest the rationality behind parties' clarification shifts towards polarized positions.

Conclusions. An ethnic realignment of vote?

The analytical role of ethnicity in terms of origins over electoral results first addressed the general question of to what extent this association was significant, given that most

research usually relies on secondary socialization factors such as identity or even on policy preferences and political values. The results show the existence of an ethnic alignment of vote (H1) and that this relation grows as reflected in the variation between the elections of 2010 and 2012 in Catalonia, when the political debate was focused on polarized questions such as self-determination and political parties clarified their positions (H1a). These results suggest how in contexts of growing political polarization, a primary conception of ethnicity such as birth can regain importance in explaining electoral behaviour. Furthermore, if this mechanism is at play, a further question to be introduced in the research agenda of ethnicity and nationalism would be to what extent factors associated to expanded conceptions of ethnicity -such as language, identity or civic aspects- can lose relevance in polarized contexts. The results also found evidence of an ethnic dealignment in voter turnout (H1b), suggesting that polarization around the sovereignty question fostered mobilization in such a generalized way that origins lost explanatory capacity, a factor which had been traditionally attributed to the distance between the parties' agenda and the voters' interests in the national dimension of electoral competition (Lago, Montero, and Torcal 2007; Pérez-Nievas and Fraile 2000). The analysis also shows that boundary shifts of contraction and expansion are not necessarily associated to either electoral gains or losses. Contraction shifts are associated with growing ethnic alignment, while expansion shifts at the party level can be at most defined as 'limited', combining significant gains in core-sections with marginal gains or stability in non-core sections. At the aggregate level, pro-sovereignty and pro-union vote feature a pattern of change that could be defined as successful contraction, combining electoral net gains with the intensification of ethnic voting alignment (H2). We also found compelling evidence of contraction shifts that involve

net electoral losses for traditional major parties, which would have suffered from the clarification effect (H2a). This would suggest that individuals could experience cross-pressures between a conception of ethnicity associated to moderate political claims, such as increasing autonomy within the existing state, and the polarization of the political agenda between the *status quo* and independence. This conflictual interaction could eventually reinforce the electoral salience of a primary conception of ethnicity. The evidence also suggests particular forms of what could be defined as a limited expansion or successful contraction. These variations around well-established categories of analysis can offer a better understanding of how, for instance, political parties' rational option is not always necessarily to expand their electoral boundaries but rather to concentrate and maximize their vote within a contracted category if this is relevant enough in terms of size to result in electoral gains. Thus, these variations would open the possibility to discuss a wider range of options when addressing the question of why political parties succeed, an aspect that could be further complemented with methods estimating vote transfers and differentiating between strategies aimed at reinforcing the salience of a given cleavage and those aimed at redefining the electoral boundaries of the party.

These results also raise a number of empirical, methodological and theoretical questions to be addressed in further research. There are complex combinations between boundary shifts, electoral results and ethnic alignment of vote. Variations around these ideal types including successful contraction or limited expansion suggest boundary shifts are not easily analyzed in dichotomous or categorical terms but must be rather approached as continuous variables. On the other hand, electoral studies measuring vote alignment and polarization mostly rely on survey data and do not usually take into

account the ethnic dimension, and when they do it is often based on incomplete information due to the limits of available data (Kriesi et al., 2008; Pardos-Prado and Dinas, 2010; Strijbis and Kotnarowski, 2015). The use of observational data can also overcome or at least complement some of these limitations, including validity of self-reported voting behaviour by individuals, vote transfers across parties and elections, or the effects of the territorial context on individual behaviour (Barceló, 2014: 715). Also the electoral effects of ethnic mobilization would deserve further attention in establishing causal relations with political parties' discourses by differentiating how parties can activate an ethnic dimension in the electoral competition and how they strategically define their electoral boundaries (Dickson and Scheeves, 2006). Recent research has focused on how parties' emphasize the territorial, national and ethnic dimensions in their electoral manifestos by means of quantitative analysis, but causal relations operating between the political and electoral level have not been yet sufficiently explored (Gadjanova, 2015). In this sense the evidence presented here did not aimed at testing the 'ethnification' of the political debate, as it would assume individuals rationalize their electoral choices along ethnic lines, behaving as a unitary actor, but the results open the possibility to measure the electoral success of ethnic mobilization by analysing how political and social actors 'activate' the ethnic dimension of politics. Concerning the use of observational data, this approach could also overcome some problems of comparability among minority nations, assessing the extent to which ethnic alignment or dealignment are in place for both substate and state movements despite significant variations in the demographic composition of well-studied cases such as Flanders, the Basque Country, Scotland or Quebec. Lastly, all these different avenues for further research should take into account the fact that ethnicity affects both regional

and state-wide parties, highlighting the necessity to prevent a certain bias in the literature that associates the idea of ethnicity only to minority but not state nationalisms.

i Post-electoral surveys were retrieved from the Barometer of Public Opinion conducted by the *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió*. Reports REO-631 and REO-712 <http://www.gencat.cat/ceo>

ii Data retrieved from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Report number 2970, retrieved from http://datos.cis.es/pdf/Es2970rei_A.pdf

iii Sociodemographic data was retrieved from the Spanish National Statistics Institute, available at <http://www.ine.es/jaxi/menu.do?type=pcaxis&file=pcaxis&path=%2Ft20%2Fe245%2Fp07%2F%2Fa2012>. Electoral results were retrieved from the Catalan Government Website, available at http://governacio.gencat.cat/ca/pgov_ambits_d_actuacio/pgov_eleccions/pgov_dades_lectorals/

iv CUP participated for the first time in the election of 2012 obtaining 3 representatives. SI obtained three representatives in the election of 2010 but did not get representation in the election of 2012. The results of 2010 also include an extraparlimentary party, Pro-independence Reunification (RI) that obtained 1.3 per cent of the vote, that later merged with *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* in the elections of 2012. We opted to include ICV in the pro-sovereignty block as we defined it in terms of supporting the right of Catalonia to call for a referendum, despite the coalition's more moderate position on independence. We tested the models excluding ICV from the pro-sovereignty block but the general results did not changed in a relevant way, which is partially due to the relative electoral weight of the coalition.

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