

## **Parliament on the center-right, government on the left: Explaining the Basque exceptionalism**

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The Autonomous elections of 2009 entailed a large change in Basque politics, given that the PNV, the party that had been governing the Basque institutions continuously since 1980, was removed from power by the PSE-EE. However, the Basques did not vote very differently compared to other elections, the majority voting for nationalist parties, as it has been doing since 1980, and for center-right parties, as it had done at the beginning of the autonomy and as of 2001. In this article, we aim to explain how, despite this clear tendency towards nationalism and the center-right, a leftist and non-nationalist party is currently governing in the Basque Country.

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## **The Basque polarised pluralism**

The Basque Country or Euskadi, along with Navarra, is the only Spanish Autonomous Community in which an average of seven political forces competes relatively successfully to obtain parliamentary representation, and that due to the complexity of the party system, they often hold prominent positions with respect to governability. There are two major branches of competition: the classic left-right, present in the vast majority of western countries (Laver and Hunt, 1992), and center-periphery one, which distinguishes the Basque nationalist forces from those who are not and are loyal to the Spanish state. The two dimensions provide enough political spaces to make the Basque party system in Sartori's terms (1976) one of polarized pluralism (Gunther, Sani and Shabad, 1986; Linz et al., 1986; Llera, 1994, 2000). The Basque party system, then, can be characterized by its elevated multipartism<sup>1</sup> with high and stable fragmentation<sup>2</sup>, strong partisan competitiveness, a high degree of multiple polarization, and above all, the possibility of being blackmailed by a strong anti-system element legitimizing terrorism (Llera, 2000; Llera, et al., 2008)<sup>3</sup>.

In eight out of nine regional parliamentary legislatures seven parliamentary parties were represented. Over the course of these years, there have been five Basque nationalist parties (PNV, EA, EE, HB/ EH/ EHAK and Aralar) and seven non-nationalist parties<sup>4</sup> (PSE, AP/PP, PCE/IU, UCD, CDS, UA and UPD); six in the center and the right (PNV, UCD, CDS, AP/PP, UA and UPD) and six on the left (PSE, HB/EH/EHAK, EE, EA, PCE/IU and Aralar). Of these 11 political forces, only 3 have been present in all of the parliamentary sessions (PNV, AP/PP and PSE), whereas the rest have been present in eight (HB/EH/EHAK), seven (EA), six (PCE/IU), four (EE and UA), two (Aralar) and one parliamentary session (UCD, CDS and UPD).

To be specific, at this time there are seven political parties in the Parliament, three of which are nationalist, and the other four are non-nationalist. To the former belongs the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which is due to its firm roots in society, the strength of its organization, its voter support, and the length of time that it remains in power, the most prominent political force in the Basque Country (Llera, 2000). In fact, the PNV won, with the exception of the Spanish national elections in 1993 and 2008, all elections held in Euskadi. It has led the Basque government from the beginning of the Basque autonomy until 2009 and has negotiated agreements with all of the Basque political forces in various institutions. In 1986, the PNV split, and EA (Basque Solidarity) emerged as a party that is clearly pro-independence with a social democratic backbone, compared with the ambiguities and more conservative image of the PNV. Although, initially they were characterized as rivals (indeed EA was formed with the intention of substituting the PNV's monopoly of moderate nationalism), as of 1994 (and at least until 2009), they have been strategic allies who have shared the duties of government and even voting coalitions. Finally, in the field of nationalist parties, we also find the *Izquierda Abertzale* (Patriotic Left), which has organized itself as a large anti-system movement with roots in both nationalism and extremist leftism (Mata, 1993). Now it is divided into two different parties. One is legal, Aralar, and has 4 MPs in the Basque Parliament. It was created in 2001 as a split of the now illegal Batasuna (Unity), the major party of the *Izquierda Abertzale*. Its historical acronym is HB (People's Unity), it has also been known as EH (We the Basques) or Batasuna (Unity). It has links with the terrorist group ETA and, due to its affiliation with the group, the party was banned in 2003 by the Supreme Court of Spain. Nonetheless, it managed to present itself as EHAK (Communist Party of the Basque Homelands) at the Basque regional elections in 2005, as ANV (Basque Nationalist Action) at the municipal elections in

2007 and as II (Internationalist Initiative) at the European Elections in 2009. It has tried to present itself in the rest of the elections since 2003, but its lists have been banned.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are four parties in the non-nationalist field. All of them belong to the major political parties present throughout all of Spain. Thus, we find the Basque section of the PP (People's Party, until 1989 AP, People's Alliance), a conservative political party which governed in Spain from 1996 to 2004; the PSE-EE (Socialist Party of Euskadi- Basque Country Left)<sup>5</sup>, the Basque section of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Worker's Party), the socialist party that governed Spain between 1982 and 1996, and is the current ruling party since 2004; United Left (IU), formerly the PCE (Communist Party of Spain), which represents the post-communist tendency or the "new left". Despite the fact that in theory IU is not considered nationalist, it was a loyal ally of the PNV and EA since 1998, joining them to form part of the Basque Government in 2001 until 2009; and finally UPD (Union, Progress and Democracy), a very small centrist party built around the image of a former socialist leader.<sup>6</sup>

### **Electoral Evolution**

In Table 1, we can see the evolution of the Basque vote in the Autonomous elections. As we can observe, the PNV has had an absolute predominance, triumphing in all of the elections and obtaining the highest number of seats in all of them, except in 1986<sup>7</sup>. The governing party in Spain has always occupied second place, except for the first legislature, when HB occupied this position. Until it was illegalized, HB occupied third place (1980's and 1990's) or if not, fourth place (2001 and 2005)<sup>8</sup>. After these four

parties, which are always present in elections, there has been a series of other parties that have been emerging and disappearing over the years.

Observing Table 1, we can see that stability in the vote has not been the dominant note over the past 30 years. There have been major fluctuations in all of the parties, such as the PNV for example (with a minimum of 23.6% and a maximum of 41.8%) or AP-PP (with a minimum of 4.8% and a maximum of 22.9%, when it was in coalition with UA). The fluctuations have also occurred in the small parties: EA in 2009 obtained only 23% of the vote that it obtained when it first presented itself in 1986, and Aralar almost tripled its vote from 2005 to 2009.

[Table 1 about here]

However, all of this volatility is more apparent than real. If we group the different parties, we can observe how, within the inevitable ups and downs over 30 years, there has been certain stability in the vote of the Basques. Thus, in Figure 1,<sup>9</sup> where we group the parties into ideological tendencies, we can see how the line of the so-called moderate or institutional nationalism (PNV and EA) maintains an impressive stability, always ahead of the rest and representing approximately 40% of the votes. The *Izquierda Abertzale* (Patriotic Left), except for its drop in 2001 after breaking the truce with ETA, also shows great stability, with approximately 15% of the votes. The decrease in recent years of what we might call the *official Patriotic Left*, which does not condemn ETA, has been offset with the advance of Aralar, *Patriotic Left* which does reject terrorism. As for that regarding Statewide Parties, we have distinguished the left (represented only by the socialists) and the Spanish right, a space where AP/PP has had to compete with UCD, CDS, UA and recently with UPD. In both spaces, left and right

at the State level, we observe greater ups and downs than in the two nationalist groups, but with a clear tendency, at least apparently, of transferring votes between both spaces. After the first elections, where they obtained a percentage of similar votes, in 1984, the PSE consolidated as the main non-nationalist party. As of this date, as the PSE began to fall, the right began to rise, until catching up with it in 1994. From that point on and until 2005, the right led the non-nationalist Basque space, coinciding with the best moment for the PP in Spain. In 2005, and coinciding with the arrival of the PSOE at the Spanish government, the PSE-EE recovered its leadership. Finally, we observe a fifth space occupied by EE and the PCE and IU in the front and by IU after the integration of EE into the PSE. It is a space of leftists and Basquists, and only nationalist in part. Although EE emerged as a clearly nationalist party with ties to one of the branches of ETA (Llera et al., 2005), it was gradually moderating this characteristic, eventually even accepting the Spanish Constitution in 1998, which it had rejected 10 years earlier. Thus, EE went from belonging to the *Patriotic Left* in the beginning to a lukewarm nationalism in its final stage<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, IU did not belong to the nationalist field either, but contrary to the rest of the non-nationalist forces, it supported classical nationalist demands such as the right to self-determination or the dialogue with ETA. Therefore, although the former is officially nationalist and the latter is non-nationalist, it would not be correct to assign them to any of the four spaces aforementioned into which we have grouped the rest of the Basque parties.

[Figure 1 about here]

If we now concentrate on the electoral results from the point of view of the nationalism-Pro-Spain cleavage (see Figure 2), we see how the hegemony of the

nationalist parties has been constant<sup>11</sup>. We can clearly see how there is a great stability in the vote, with a slight narrowing in 1994 and 1998. In fact, the sum of moderate nationalism and leftist Basque nationalism has been between a maximum of 58.3% in 1990 and a minimum of 52.3% in 2009. On the other hand, the total vote between PSE and what we have called the Spanish right has been accounting for 30% to 40% of the votes, with a minimum in 1980 (30.8%) and a maximum in 2009 (42%). Therefore, in the 1980's, the nationalist votes were hegemonic, as they represented about 60% of the votes (the difference would be even greater if we considered EE as part of the nationalist group) compared to 30% non-nationalist. The situation changed in the mid-1990's when the space narrowed, but always with the nationalist parties dominating more than 50% of the votes. In any case, what we want to point out is the great stability that this data shows and that it is a symptom of the little transfer of votes between two blocks that have been taking on the form of watertight departments.

[Figure 2 about here]

This stability has nothing to do with the ups and downs that we observe if we group the Basque parties according to their ideological tendency. In Figure 3, we can see how the parties of the center and right are the majority in the first two legislatures to then go down strepitously in the elections of 1986, when the left claimed 70% of the votes. As of this date, these parties have been gaining in strength until 2001, at which point they shift downwards until 2009, when the forces are balanced out. However, the shifts to the right or to the left are not due to a realigning of the electorate towards one side or the other, rather they have more to do with the non-nationalist party that was stronger at the time, and especially with the splitting of the PNV. Thus, after the first

two legislatures where the center-right was the majority, the splitting of the PNV and the dividing of its vote between this party, Christian democrat, and EA, social-democrat, caused the parties of the left to become the electoral majority. However, as we have said, this was not a consequence of the electorate leaning to the left; rather it was a realignment of the vote within the institutional nationalism. The vote for EA was not due to being more to the left, but rather to different causes, such as the leadership of Garaikoetxea (the former *Lehendakari*, Basque President), the more modern image or its less ambiguous position in that regarding the national issue. We support this argument in the greater prevalence of the identity cleavage versus the ideological, which will be debated a little further below.

[Figure 3 about here]

### **Stages in Basque politics**

In such a fragmented system, governance has not been easy, and various alternatives ranging from homogeneous governments to various types of coalitions and agreements of parliamentary stability have been implemented. The composition of these governments has had a lot to do with whether the type of political dynamics worked: centrifuge, the product of *political adversaries* (Finer, 1975), or centripetal, a consequence of the *politics of consensus* (Lijphart, 1999). Based on that, we may define four stages in the Basque autonomous period (in addition to the initial consensual stage prior to the autonomy, in accordance with the politics of consensus that guided the democratic transition in Spain). The first stage begins with the first Basque regional



elections in 1980, and is characterized by adversary politics, with constant tension and confrontation between the Basque political forces (Llera, 2000). In the first parliamentary session, despite not having obtained the absolute majority, the PNV managed to form a homogeneous government, which was possible due to the artificial majority that afforded it the institutional abstentionism of HB.

In the second parliamentary session, once again there was a homogeneous government, but as the opposition received the same number of seats, the PNV had to sign an alliance in Parliament with the PSE, which placed Basque politics on the path of the consociative politics of coalitions and agreements (Llera, 2000). It was in this second legislature when the rupture of nationalism occurred, which would culminate in the splitting of the parliamentary group of the PNV, the creation of EA and the calling of new elections.

The elections of 1986, beginning of the second stage, produced a very fragmented political map (see Table 1) in which a homogeneous minority was impossible, and therefore, it marked the beginning of a long stage (three parliamentary sessions) characterized by government coalitions and political stability (Llera, 2000). At the core of this second stage were the government agreements (both on a local and a regional level) between the main nationalist party (PNV) and the key player on a national level in the Basque Country (PSE). From 1987 to 1998, the PNV and Basque socialists governed together, either alone or along with EE (from 1991 until the integration of these parties into the PSE in 1993) or with EA (1994-1998). The only exception to this period was the months following the elections of 1990, after which the PNV-PSE pact from the previous legislature could not be reissued and a nationalist three party combination PNV-EA-EE was formed, which broke because EA began to ally with HB at the local level with movements in favor of self-determination. With EA

leaving and the PSE coming in, we returned to the consociational politics that characterized this period. The great benchmark in this stage was in 1988, with the signing of the Ajuria-Enea Agreement, which marked a clear dividing line between the parties that rejected ETA's violence and HB, which thus remained absolutely isolated in the Basque political arena.

However, at the beginning of 1998, the consensus was broken, which is the result of a series of events: the failure of the peace plan led by the then *Lehendakari* Ardanza, the beginning of PNV-ETA conversations, the agreement of nationalists (including HB) and IU in the plenary elections of the Basque Parliament on topics such as the rapprochement of ETA prisoners to the Basque Country or the Basque sports selections, and finally and above all, the abandoning of the Basque Government by the PSE-EE. The last straw to all of this was the Lizarra Agreement signed by the PNV, EA, HB, IU and different organizations and trade unions of the nationalist sphere, which in order to overcome the violence in the Basque Country, basically proposed a dialogue without conditions between all of the political forces prior to ceasing all expressions of violence that should approach what the signees called "*the causes of the conflict*". The Lizarra Agreement substituted the Ajuria-Enea Agreement in that regarding the diagnosis that the moderate nationalist parties and IU made of terrorism.

Thus, the third stage was characterized by a return to adversary politics of rivalry and confrontation. It began with signing of the Lizarra Agreement in 1998, and its main characteristics were tension, fragmentation and constant confrontation between the parties. The Lizarra Agreement split the Basque political parties into two opposite sides, with the nationalists and IU on one side; and on the other side were the parties that began calling themselves "constitutionalists" or "autonomists", that is, PP, PSE-EE and UA. Following the elections of 1998, and right in the middle of a truce offered by

ETA, a PNV-EA minority government was formed with the external support of EH. The exclusively nationalist character of the new government caused tensions to grow, which would multiply with the occurrence of new attacks by ETA, and would reach its highest level of expression in the year and a half prior to the elections of May 2001, in which the PNV-EA coalition defeated the alliance between PSE-EE and the coalition between PP and UA. Following 2005 elections, however, the adversary politics simmered down quite a bit with the budgetary agreements between the PNV and the PSOE in the Spanish Parliament, and the PSE-EE and the PNV in the Basque Parliament.

Finally, with the Autonomous elections of 2009, the Basque Country entered into a fourth stage that is very different from the rest, given that the PNV is in opposition for the first time. Despite its clear victory (38.1% of the votes and 30 seats, to almost 8 points and 5 seats of the second, PSE-EE), the downfall of the partners in government up to that point<sup>12</sup> and its inability to agree with the PP as well as the PSE-EE, which amounted to an absolute majority, made it possible for Patxi López (leader of the Basque socialists) to be elected *Lehendakari* with the votes of the People's Party.

Thus, after the elections of 2009, we find ourselves in a situation that may initially seem paradoxical. The majority of votes in these elections were nationalists and center-right, yet a leftist and non-nationalist government was formed. The explanation for the first case is pretty simple: the majority of the nationalist electoral vote did not lead to a parliamentary majority because the candidates of the *official Patriotic Left* were illegalized. Had the null vote (before its illegalization, the *Patriotic Left* asked its supporters to cast a null vote) been considered legal, the nationalist parties would continue to have the majority of the seats. The previous cases lead us to think that the *Patriotic Left* would have voted for Ibarretxe in its investiture (as it did in 1999 and in 2005) in order to avoid a non-nationalist government. However, as we say, the resulting

Parliament consisted mainly of non-nationalist forces, and the PP decided to support the investiture of the *Lehendakari* López. In 1999 and 2005, why did a party to the far left with ties to terrorism (Mata, 1993) vote the investiture of a *Lehendakari* from a center-right party? And in 2009, why did a conservative party vote the investiture of a *Lehendakari* from a social democratic party when there is a large central-right majority in the Parliament? In our opinion, the answer is clear: the left-right axis, predominant in the majority of Western countries (Laver and Hunt, 1992), is of secondary importance in the Basque Country. In Euskadi, it is the center-periphery cleavage that divides the Basque nationalists from those who are not, and that which governs Basque politics. In the following section, we will try to demonstrate this greater importance with various empirical data from the *Euskobarometro*.<sup>13</sup>

### **The saliency of the center-periphery cleavage**

The question we want to answer here is: *What is the most salient cleavage in the Basque Country?* For some, the topics the Basques consider most important while voting are socioeconomic (Fernández, 2002). According to others, the Basques place more emphasis on aspects concerning the left-right dimension except during periods of increased identity polarization, in which the emphasis is more on the Basque-Spanish divide (De la Calle, 2005). For others, finally, the center-periphery or Basque-Spanish cleavage is the most influential dividing line in Basque politics (Gillespie, 2000; Llera, 1989, 1994; Llera et al., 2008; Pallarés et al., 2006; Wilson, 2009). Entering into the debate, we present a series of data below that, in our opinion, tip the balance towards those that think that the center-periphery axis is predominant in Basque politics.

One source of evidence is the postelectoral survey of the *Euskobarometro* conducted in May of 2009, which report the mean ideological self-positioning on the left-right and Basque-Spanish scale by the voters of the regional elections of 2009 (see Figure 4 and Table 2).

[Figure 4 and Table 2 about here]

In the first place, we see how it is the same two parties that occupy the ends of both poles of conflict. Thus, the left-right cleavage, the most far-left position corresponds to the null vote (that is, Batasuna) with 2.83, whereas the PP is the party that is closest to the right (6.26). In the center-periphery cleavage, the distance is greater, given that the null vote is 1.83, whereas the PP moves even further away, up to 6.88. However, this does not occur at the two ends alone. The two following parties that are most distant from one another (Aralar and UPD) are also more spread apart on the national issue than on the left-right axis.

Thus, noteworthy is the polarization resulting from the distances between the voters, which is greater on the identity dimension than on the ideological one. The polarization rate<sup>14</sup> in this election is 0.56 for the Basque-Spanish scale and 0.38 for the left-right scale. By dividing the parties into two opposite blocks, the Basque-Spanish divide determines the playing field in which the competition on the left-right axis is possible. In other words, the identity axis establishes “thresholds” for the party competition which are difficult to overcome. Thus, in Figure 4 we can observe a Basque nationalist block with a distance of only little more than one point between the maximum Null vote and the minimum PNV, and a Spanish constitutionalist block formed by PSE-EE, UPD and PP, with a distance of only one point and a half between the maximum PP and the minimum PSE-EE. However, the two blocks are separated

from each other by a distance of more than two points (PNV and PSE-EE). IU is situated right in the middle, reflecting its traditional equidistance between both blocks.

This distance between blocks is broadened even more so if we take as a reference the locations of the political parties by their voters and by the electorate in general. Figure 5 shows the same diagram as shown in the previous Figure, but with the parties spread further apart from each other and from the center, especially in that concerning the constitutionalist block. Thus, the voters of the nationalist forces view their respective parties as more nationalist than they identify themselves, whereas the non-nationalist forces are perceived as more pro-Spanish than what their voters view themselves. As far as the left-right axis, the voters of leftist parties perceive their parties as being more to the left than what they view themselves, except the voters of the PSE-EE, and the voters of center-right parties perceive their parties as leaning more to the right. Finally, as far as that pertaining to the location of each political party by the electorate in general, the graph draws a very similar map, with a small difference between blocks: the locations are practically the same with respect to the nationalist parties and there are differences in that regarding the parties at the State level, except IU. From there, we deduce that the Basque electorate has an unambiguous image of the nationalist parties, but differs when viewing the parties of the State sphere: the nationalists view them as more pro-Spanish and more to the right than the non-nationalist voters.

[Figure 5 about here]

The data from Figure 5 shows some greater percentages of polarization than those of Figure 4, although always predominating on the identity axis. The same thing occurs if we take a look at data from other years. There are two aspects that stand out in

Table 3. In the first place, the polarization of the identity axis is always greater than that of the ideological axis, whether it is self-locations of the voters, locations of the parties by their voters or locations of the parties by the electorate in general. In the second place, the polarization in both cleavages is always less in the self-locations of the voters, greater when the parties are placed by their voters and reaches its maximum when the electorate locates each party.

[Table 3 about here]

The dominance of the Basque-Spanish cleavage is even more obvious considering the intersection of the vote in the elections of 2009 with the proximity<sup>15</sup> to the various parties on the *Euskobarometro* in May 2009. In Table 4 the parties are arranged in their order on the Basque-Spanish dimension. With little surprise we note that most voters end up voting for the party with which they identify most. More interesting, however, we also observe that the proximity gradually decreases as the parties move further away on the identity axis. For example those who vote null in 2009 identify to 100% with Batasuna, to 54% with Aralar, to 18% with EA, hardly with PNV and IU and not at all with the PP or PSE-EE. This means that the *Patriotic Left* voters feel closer to the PNV, which shares the Basque identity but is very distinct on the left-right scale, than to the PSE-EE which is closer on the left-right dimension, but does not share the strong Basque identity. Exactly the same occurs on the other end of the scale. Those who vote for the PP mainly identify themselves with this party, and gradually spread apart as we move further along the identity axis, highlighting 17% of the voters of the PP who identify themselves with the PSE-EE, despite the wide distance with the voters of both parties (2.5 points) on the left-right axis. And although the PNV is closer

on the left-right axis, the voters of the PP identify themselves more with the PSE-EE (17%) than with the PNV (5%). Yet, this does not only occur on both ends of the axis: no voter of EA and practically no voters of Aralar identify themselves with the PSE-EE, despite their proximity on the left-right axis; the same thing occurs in the opposite case, where among the socialist voters, only 5% and 1% are situated close to Aralar and EA, respectively. The same can be observed for the PNV. Their voters identify more with the nationalist parties than with the non-nationalist parties, despite the fact that the PNV is closer to the PSE-EE than to Aralar or EA on the left-right axis.

[Table 4 about here]

An especially significant case is the proximity between the PNV and EA. Their figures of proximity are among the highest in Table 4 (except, of course, those of the voters towards the party for which they have voted). Thus, 48% of those who voted for EA feel close to the PNV, and it is these same voters for EA that situate themselves in 3.59 on the left-right axis, situate the PNV at 2.18 points (5.34), but only 0.83 points on the identity axis (2.63 compared to 3.46). The same thing occurs with those who voted for the PNV. Almost 40% of them feel close to EA, and although they view it close on the two axes, they are closer in the identity cleavage (they are situated at 3.19, whereas they view EA at 2.69) than in the left-right cleavage (4.60 vs. 3.91).

The case of EA with IU and Aralar is also very significant. The three parties are really close on the left-right axis (only 0.35 points of distance between the voters of the two ends, IU and EA), whereas on the other cleavage, EA shares a spot with Aralar and is far from IU. Thus, those who vote EA feel much closer to Aralar (48%) than to IU (21%), whereas those of IU are not as close to EA (12%) as to Aralar (33%). The case



of IU and Aralar appears to be the only exception where, in the competition between both parties, the ideological issue seems to have more weight than the identity issue. Despite its relative distance (1.6 points) on the nationalism-Pro-Spain axis, this is not enough to prevent competition on the left-right axis, where both parties share a spot and, therefore, a niche of voters. Finally, we must point out that the bare proximity of the nationalist voters (except those who voted Aralar) to Batasuna is probably due more to the rejection of ETA violence than to an actual distancing from such party.

## **Conclusions**

In this article, we have tried to explain the apparent paradox that after the Autonomous elections in the Basque Country, a leftist and non-nationalist government (PSE-EE) was formed when the majority of the votes were for nationalist candidates (legal or illegal) and the parliament resulting from these elections was center-right. This was mainly due to two circumstances. The first is evident. The illegalization of the candidates of the *Patriotic Left* that had ties with ETA caused the majority of nationalist votes in the elections not to lead to a nationalist majority in the Basque parliament. In this manner, the absolute majority obtained by the PSE-EE and PP has enabled there to be a non-nationalist *Lehendakari* for the first time in the history of Basque Autonomous elections. Thus, the socialist Patxi López became *Lehendakari* due to the votes of the PP, which then became “preferred partner” of its government.

That is, two very distant parties on the left-right axis and maximum electoral rivals in Spain came to an agreement about forming a government in the Basque Country. Something so uncommon, such as in 1999 and 2005, when a party of the far left supported a party of the center-right to form a government. This is due to the secondary character of the left-right axis, eclipsed in the Basque Country by the center-

periphery or nationalism-Pro-Spain cleavage. It is the predominance of this cleavage that we have aimed to show in the last part of this article through the analysis of a series of empirical data.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The average indicator of the actual number of parties (Taagepera and Laakso, 1980 and Taagepera and Shugart, 1989) is around 5.5.

<sup>2</sup>On Rae's index of party fragmentation (Rae, 1971) it is 0.8.

<sup>3</sup>Due to all these characteristics, the literature has focused with increasing attention on the Basque Country. The works of Conversé (1997), Díez Medrano (1995), Lecours (2007), Mansvelt Beck (2005), Mees (2003), Moreno (2004) or Woodworth (2007) are clear examples.

<sup>4</sup>When we classify a party as nationalist or non-nationalist we are referring to Basque nationalism. Although the PP, for example, could be easily considered a (Spanish) nationalist force, we use here the label "non-nationalist" to all those parties which are not Basque nationalists. This is the most common language in the academy and in the Basque daily life.

<sup>5</sup>The acronym EE (Basque Left) corresponds to a former Basque nationalist party that merged with the PSE in 1993.

<sup>6</sup>The following is a description of the rest of the acronyms that we have referred to above: UCD (Union of the Democratic Center), of the center right and the governing party in Spain from 1977 to 1982; CDS (Democratic and Social Center) of the center, and UA (Alevese Unity) small party that used to be active on an exclusively provincial level, on which it defended the separation of Álava (a Basque province) from the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. None of them no longer exist.

<sup>7</sup>A circumstance that makes the Basque electoral system possible, which grants the same number of seats to the three provinces despite their difference with respect to the size of the population (Vizcaya is almost quadruple the size of Álava). This has always benefited the non-nationalist parties, which are stronger in Álava.

<sup>8</sup>If it had been legal in 2009, it would also have occupied fourth place in the Basque Parliament.

<sup>9</sup>The percentages in the figures refer to the valid votes, except for the 2009 data, which are carried out on the total votes. In this manner, we include the null vote as though it were valid and equivalent to the *Patriotic Left*, as we believe that it better reflects the electoral photography of Euskadi in 2009.

<sup>10</sup>So lukewarm that the most nationalist militants of EE split in 1992, forming EuE (*Euskal Ezkerra*, Basque Left), a short-lived party that had five Basque parliament seats, because five of the six parliament seats that were occupied by EE left to form EuE.

<sup>11</sup>Once again, the percentages are on valid vote, except for 2009, which are on the total vote for the same reason that we previously mentioned. For the reasons that we just mentioned, we do not consider the space occupied by EE and IU to be nationalist or pro-Spain.

<sup>12</sup>IU lost two of the three seats that it had, whereas EA had just one, when in the past elections it had obtained seven seats by presenting itself as united with the PNV.

<sup>13</sup>This is a periodic study of the Basque public opinion carried out every six months by a group of professors and researchers at the University of the Basque Country ([www.ehu.es/euskobarometro](http://www.ehu.es/euskobarometro)).

<sup>14</sup>The polarization rate is obtained by dividing the distances between the opposite party positions by the maximum possible distance (Flanagan, 1973). Over the years, the ratings of polarization show a systematic predominance of the aspect of identity (Llera et al., 2008).

<sup>15</sup>People were asked if they feel "very close, close, nor close nor distant, distant, or very distant" to the parties. In Table 4 we report the shares of those feeling close or very close.

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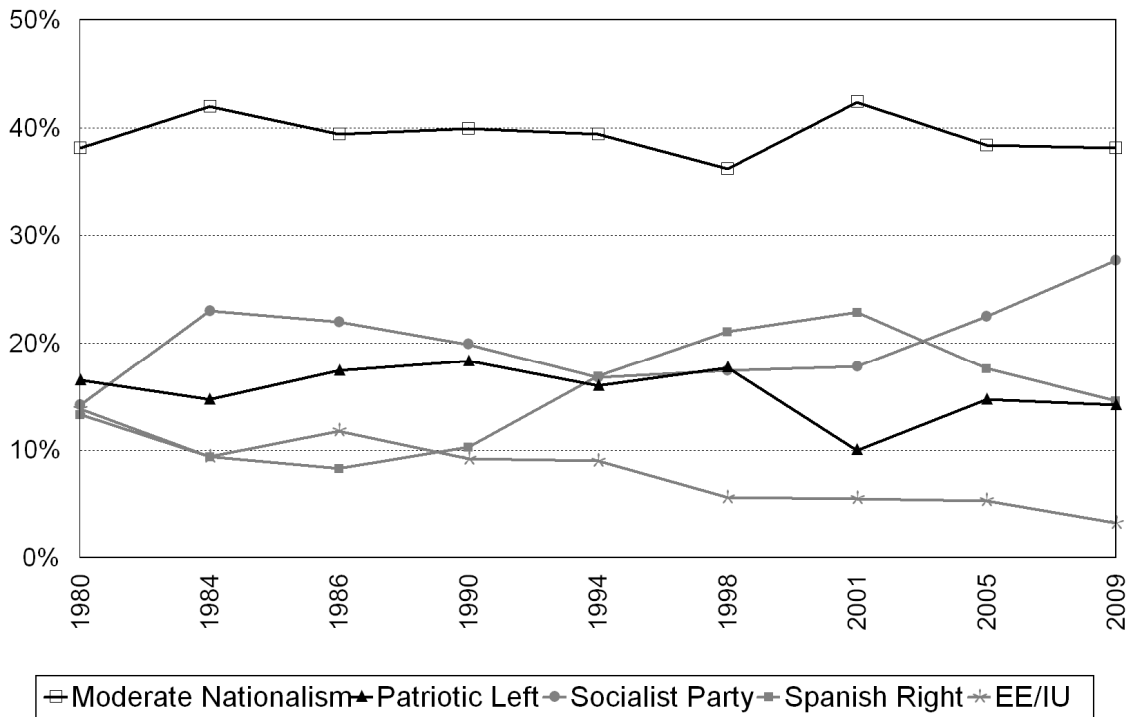
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**Table 1.** Electoral Evolution in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country in the Autonomous Elections, 1980–2009 (% of Valid Votes and Seats gained)

	1980		1984		1986		1990		1994		1998		2001		2005		2009	
	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S
PNV	38.0	25	41.8	32	23.6	17	28.3	22	29.3	22	27.6	21	--	--	--	--	38.1	30
EA	--	--	--	--	15.8	13	11.3	9	10.1	8	8.6	6	--	--	--	--	3.6	1
PNV-EA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	42.4	33	38.4	29	--	--
HB/EH*	16.5	11	14.6	11	17.4	13	18.2	13	16.0	11	17.7	14	10.0	7	12.4	9	(8.8)	(7)
EE	9.8	6	7.9	6	10.8	9	7.7	6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Aralar	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.3	1	6.0	4
PSE/EE	14.2	9	23.0	19	22.0	19	19.8	16	16.8	12	17.4	14	17.8	13	22.5	18	30.4	25
UCD	8.5	6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
CDS	--	--	--	--	3.5	2	0.7	0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
PCE/IU	4.0	1	1.4	--	0.6	--	1.4	--	9.0	6	5.6	2	5.5	3	5.3	3	3.5	1
AP/CP/PP	4.8	2	9.3	7	4.8	2	8.2	6	14.2	11	19.9	16	--	--	17.3	15	13.9	13
UA	--	--	--	--	--	--	1.4	3	2.7	5	1.2	2	--	--	0.3	0	--	--
PP-UA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	22.9	19	--	--	--	--
UPD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.1	1

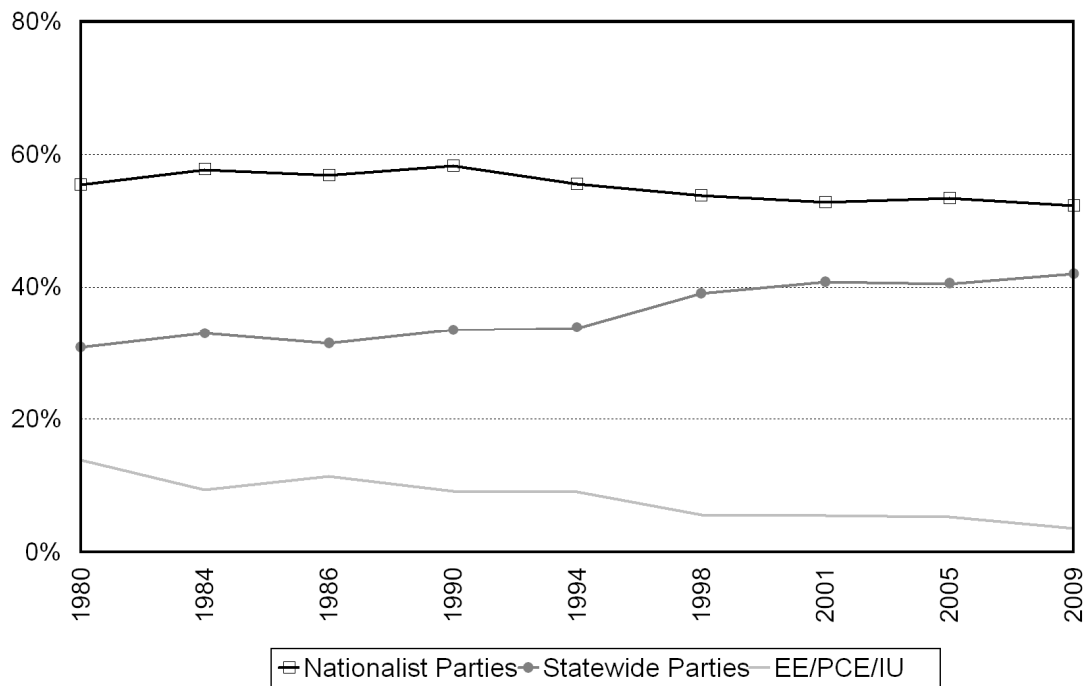
\* In 2009, the candidates of the Abertzale Left were barred from running for office, so the party asked its supporters to cast a null vote, which represented 8.8% of the total votes. Had such party been considered legal, it would have obtained 7 seats.

Figure 1. Electoral Evolution in the Basque Country in the Autonomous Elections, 1980-2009



Source: Department of Political Science of the University of the Basque Country based on data from the Electoral Boards.

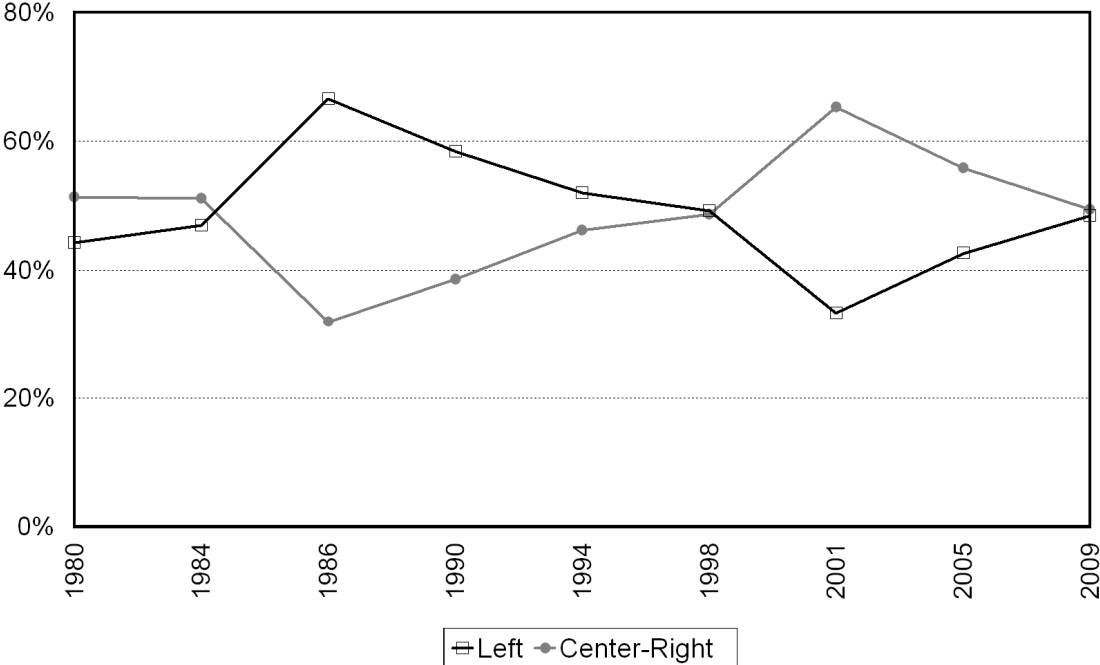
Figure 2: Electoral Evolution of the nationalist / non nationalist vote in the Basque Country in the Autonomous Elections, 1980-2009



Source: Department of Political Science of the University of the Basque Country based on data from the Electoral Boards.

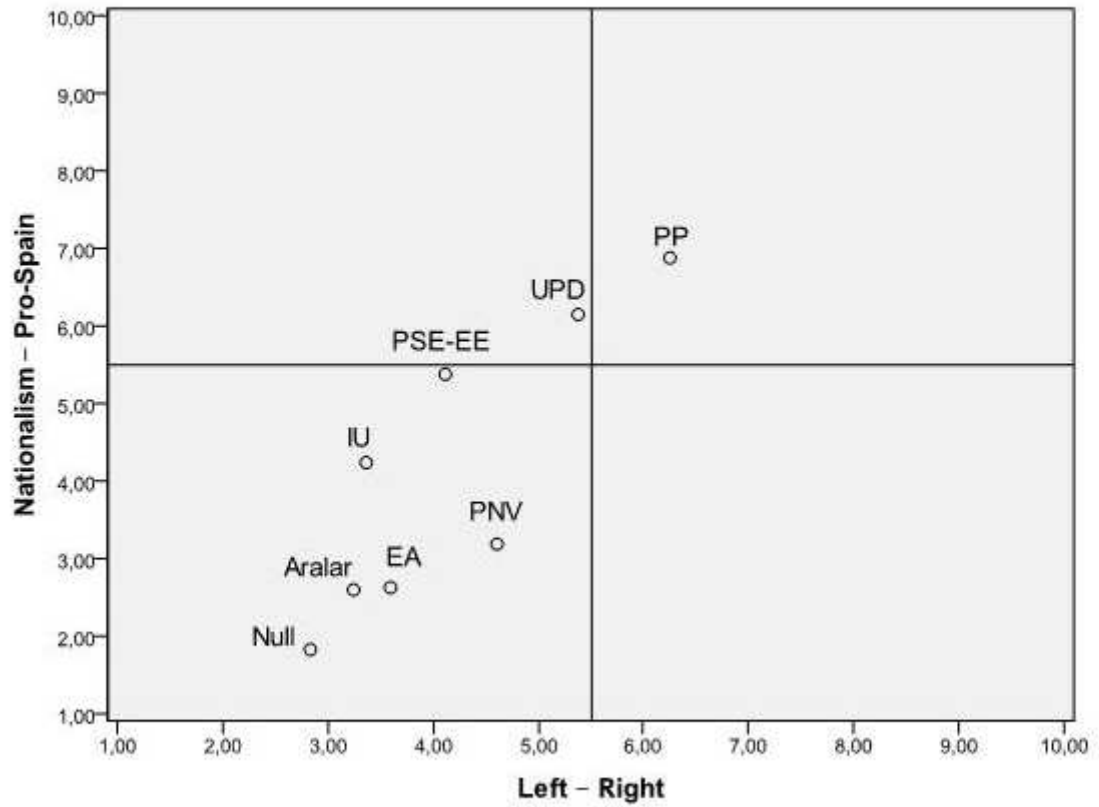


Figure 3: Electoral Evolution of the Left / Center-Right vote in the Basque Country in the Autonomous Elections, 1980-2009



Source: Department of Political Science of the University of the Basque Country based on data from the Electoral Boards.

**Figure 4. Average self-positioning in 2009 of the voters of different Basque parties in the regional elections of 2009**

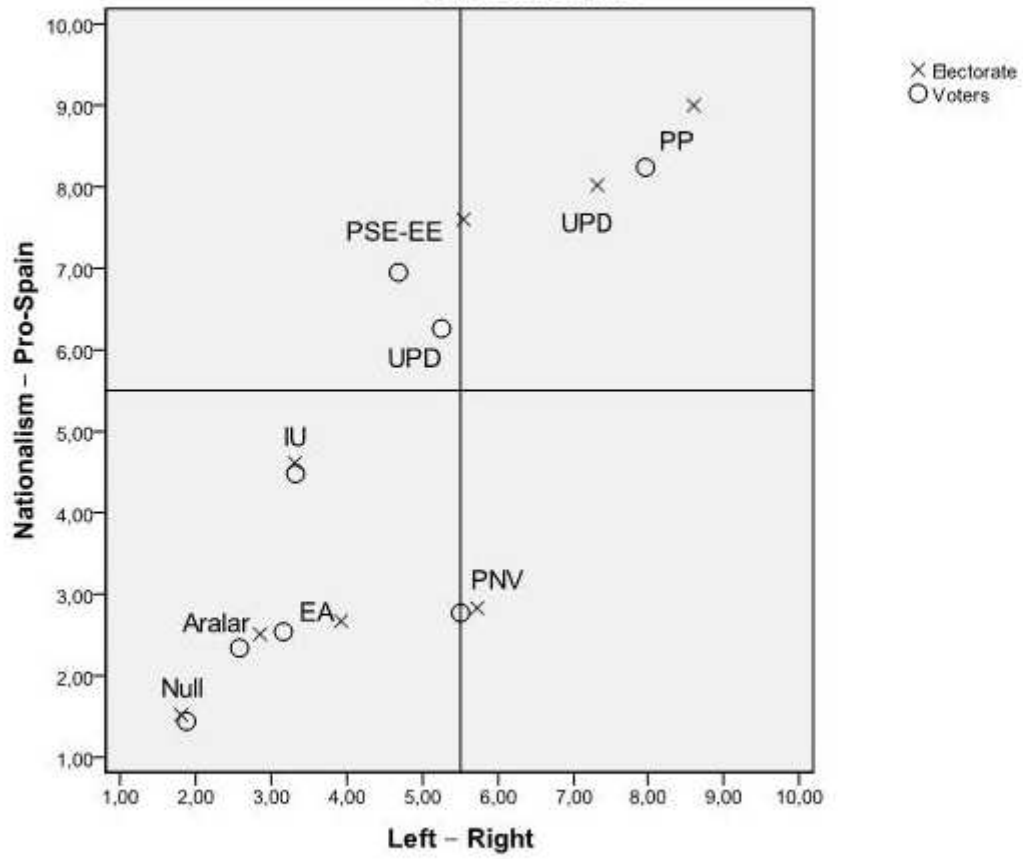


**Table 2.** Average self-positioning in 2009 of the voters of different Basque parties in the regional elections of 2009

	Null	Aralar	IU	EA	PSE-EE	Average	PNV	UPD	PP
Left-Right	2,83	3,24	3,36	3,59	4,11	4,21	4,60	5,37	6,26
	Null	Aralar	EA	PNV	Average	IU	PSE-EE	UPD	PP
Nationalism- Spain	1,83	2,60	2,63	3,19	4,10	4,24	5,38	6,15	6,88

Source: Euskobarometro, May 2009

Figure 5. Position of the different parties according to their voters and according to the electorate



**Table 3.** Left-Right and Basque nationalism-Pro-Spain index of polarization in Basque Country

	Voters					Parties according to voters					Parties according to Electorate				
	99	00	04	08	09	99	00	04	08	09	99	00	04	08	09
Left-right	.47	.44	.46	.42	.38	.62	.72	.66	.59	.67	.66	.74	.82	.73	.75
Nationalism-Pro Spain	.55	.54	.56	.62	.56	.69	.80	.76	.72	.75	.78	.85	.89	.82	.83
Difference	.08	.10	.10	.20	.18	.07	.08	.10	.13	.08	.12	.11	.07	.09	.08

*Source:* Euskobarometro, various surveys

**Table 4.** Proximity of the voters to the political parties in 2009

		Vote in 2009						
		Null	Aralar	EA	PNV	IU/EB	PSE	PP
Proximity	Batasuna	100%	34%	0%	5%	9%	1%	0%
	Aralar	54%	89%	48%	32%	33%	5%	0%
	EA	18%	41%	87%	38%	15%	1%	0%
	PNV	10%	16%	48%	94%	12%	7%	5%
	IU/EB	10%	40%	21%	10%	100%	17%	0%
	PSE	0%	2%	0%	7%	25%	89%	17%
	UPD	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	4%	14%
	PP	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	91%
	N	78	82	23	288	33	183	42

*Source:* Euskobarometro, May 2009

*Note:* We do not include the UPD voters because their sample is not sufficiently reliable (N=5).

