

# **Citizen preferences for devolution of public management: An analysis of health, pensions, and education in Spain**

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# **Citizen preferences for devolution of public management: An analysis of health, pensions, and education in Spain**

## **Abstract**

*This paper analyzes citizen preferences for devolution of public management in Spain, with a focus on health, pensions, and education. Spain provides a compelling case to consider because of the strength and autonomy of its regional governments (Autonomous Communities) and its recent experience with reform of the welfare state. Our empirical analysis employs data from a 2005 survey carried out by the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS) and the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)1.*

*We find distinct differences among Spain's regions in the strength of citizen preferences for devolution of health, pensions, and education. These regional differences largely persist, even after controlling for socio-demographics, political values, and regional capacity and performance perceptions. Education, age, a preference for lower taxes, voting for a non-national party, and the regional government's budget per capita (regional fiscal capacity) emerge as important determinants of devolution preferences. Implications of these findings for understanding citizen preference for public management in an era of increasingly complex, multilevel government are discussed.*

*Key Words: public opinion; health; pensions; education; regionalism; devolution; Spain.*

## **I. Introduction**

Given the growing trend toward regional autonomy in Europe and other parts of the world, it is important to better understand citizen preferences for devolution of public policy and management. Citizens hold varying views about the level of government that should have managerial responsibility over different policy areas (Reeves 1987; Cantril and Cantril 1999; Thompson and Elling 1999; Shaw and Reinhart 2001 Cole *et al.* 2004). And policymakers appear to respond to changes in public opinion about the distribution of functional responsibilities within a federal system (Arceneaux 2005:311). Health services, pensions, and education are especially important policy areas in this regard as

they provide direct services or financial benefits to a broad cross-section of the general population and thus enjoy broad popular support. In recent years, however, debate has arisen over the benefits and drawbacks of the growing trend toward decentralization of public policy and management in Europe and across the globe.

In this paper, we empirically analyze citizen preferences for devolution of public management in Spain. Spain provides a compelling case to consider because of the strength and autonomy of its regional governments (Autonomous Communities) and its recent experiences with reform of the welfare state. The Spanish case is explored using a 2005 survey carried out by the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS) and the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC).<sup>1</sup> To preview our results: We find distinct differences among Spain's regions in the strength of public preferences for devolution of health, pensions, and education. These regional differences largely persist even after controlling for socio-demographic and political factors. However, the regional differences do appear to be somewhat mediated by regional capacity and performance, particularly regional fiscal capacity. Education, age, a preference for lower taxes, voting for a non-national party, and regional fiscal capacity emerge as important individual determinants of devolution preferences.

The paper is organized as follows: In Sections II we provide some background on the evolution of the Spanish State of Autonomies and public attitudes toward devolution. Section III then articulates the main hypotheses and describes the data, measures, and univariate results. Section IV presents the findings of our multivariate analysis. Finally, in Section V, we discuss the results and implications of this research for societies like Spain that have experimented with regional devolution of public management and suggest topics for future research.

## ***II. Background***

In this section, we begin with some background on government in modern Spain, with a focus on regionalism in the post-Franco era. We then review prior studies of public support for devolution of public policy and management, with a focus on the Spanish context.

## **The Spanish State of Autonomies**

Spain provides a compelling national context in which to consider the question of citizen preferences for the devolution of public management. The 1978 Spanish Constitution, which established democracy in Spain after four decades under General Franco's rule, recognized and empowered various Autonomous Communities (hereafter ACs) through an extensive decentralization of government power. The so-called State of Autonomies that emerged during this period attempted to recognize and protect different languages, political traditions, civil laws, and even special fiscal arrangements in Spain's various historical, cultural, and geographic regions (Aja 2003). But because the devolution process was left somewhat unresolved in the original constitutional pact (Fossas 1998), the Spanish State of Autonomies has displayed a high degree of flexibility and openness. The initiative to accede to devolution was left to the regions themselves, although the scope of devolution had to be negotiated with the central government. After the Constitution was enacted, several different legal routes towards autonomy were pursued by different regions. Among the 17 ACs that currently exist in Spain, those that achieved autonomy most rapidly and fully were Cataluña, Galicia, País Vasco and Andalucía. However, three more ACs—Navarra, Valencia and Canarias—soon attained a similar level of autonomy. This novel model of devolution, a rapid and unique federalization process—alongside increasing Europeanization of the country from 1986 (when Spain joined the European Union)—has meant a complete redistribution of power and a historic reshaping of the traditional Spanish state model (Colino 2008).

The parameters of the Spanish State of Autonomies continue to evolve and today constitute a source of intense debate within the country. Indeed, recent developments in Spain illustrate well the process of new regionalism responding to complex drivers. Some recent reforms to regional constitutions (2006-2007) have led some experts to conclude that the state model has been deepened and has entered a new phase. Various actors have emerged as drivers of reform, including new regional political classes, institutions and bureaucracies—and especially the nationalist or regionalist political parties that have formed in both the historical and new regions (Pallarés *et al.* 1997). These regional parties claim to reflect regional needs and aspirations better than the national parties that

operate across Spain (PSOE, PP and IU). The persistence of some unresolved problems— such as incapacity to integrate various territorial demands, insufficient autonomy for regions to promote their own development, and coordination problems— also remain important drivers of reform (Subirats 2006).

Along with democratization, a modern welfare state has been built in Spain (Guillén 2007), but its development remains strongly conditioned by the unfinished process of devolution (Moreno 2000). The country put in place a universal National Health System in 1986 that provides almost all primary care and 75 per cent of specialist care. The Spanish health system is generally considered fair and efficient, with relatively high quality care and low costs compared with other established European health systems (WHO 2002). The education system also is universal, free and compulsory between 6 and 16 years of age. Public education is provided through a mix of public schools and publicly funded private (mostly Catholic) schools known as *concertada* (or contract schools). The system of public pensions is a *pay-as-you go* system. There is also a non-contributory pension, introduced in the beginning of 1990's to protect citizens not covered by the contributory system. Between 1999 and 2003, the average total public spending in education, health, and pensions was the 5.3, 7.7 and 8.0 percent of the GDP, respectively.

Regional and local governments currently control more than 50 per cent of public expenditure and employ over 70 per cent of all public employees in Spain (MAP 2008). As a result, several tiers of government must now interact in complex ways with each other, and with the participation of non-public actors, to deliver public services. Indeed, Spain's 17 ACs currently provide citizens with most of the public services they receive. For example, although the decentralization of powers in health and education started at different times and for different reasons in various regions, since 2001 all ACs have primary responsibility for these public services. The central government continues to maintain a role in national security, macroeconomic policies, and services related to redistribution and the protection of individual rights. For example, the central government maintains primary responsibility for old-age pensions and other social security programs.

Some regional nationalist parties, however, have begun to demand more control even over the management of pensions. And other social welfare programs, such as those that support disabled and dependent adults, regulated in 2007 by a new national law, have become a source of debate. Some ACs blocked the implementation of the 2007 law, using the lack of resources coming from the central government as a pretext. In recent years, the public debate on inequality in public spending and services has intensified. ACs have adopted quite different levels of financial support and eligibility for social services and other measures to address poverty. And regional disparities in education and health outcomes have been highlighted in recent years (CES 2000, OECD-2007). This concern about policy divergence and inequality in the State of Autonomies runs parallel to complaints from some of the most prosperous regions, such as Cataluña, about their region's contribution to less favoured ACs.

### **Public Preferences for Devolution of Policy and Management**

The legitimacy of a multilevel system of government is often measured through the perceptions of its citizens (Duchacek 1987, Morata 1997:142; Cole, Kincaid and Rodriguez 2004). A fair amount is known about public preferences for multilevel government in countries like Canada or the US (see for example, Cutler and Meldensohn 2001; Reeves 1987; Jacoby and Schneider 2003; Shaw and Reinhart 2001; Mullin 2007 among others), although often these studies do not look at devolution preferences for specific policy areas or with a public management focus. Some Eurobarometer surveys have asked what level of government should set various public policies, but respondents can only choose between the government of the respondent's country and all Member States of the EU, with no option of expressing a preference for regional government. The European Social Survey in 2003 did ask about preferences for different levels of government, including regions, with respect to deciding public policy in various areas. In the area of "social welfare", for example, the ESS data show that 37 percent of Spaniards preferred the international or European level, 37 percent the national level, and 11 percent the regional or local governments (Fraile 2005). But the 2003 ESS did not ask about either health, pensions or education, and it focused on policy decisions (the

political sphere) rather than implementing or managing public programs and services (the administrative sphere).

In Spanish social surveys, two indicators are often used to assess attitudes toward devolution and the State of Autonomies (Martinez-Herrera 2002). First, citizens have been asked about their support of alternatives for territorial organization of the State. Between 1976 and 1977, for example, Spaniards were divided between supporters of continuing with a centralist system and the idea of autonomy (Montero and Torcal 1991:132). But by the early 1980's, a majority of the population in almost all parts of the country favoured autonomy. This can be seen as a reflection of the success of those regions that opted for more autonomy and disappointment in other regions of being "ACs of the second class" (Montero and Torcal 1991:177). Indeed, the percentage favouring more powers for ACs has gone from being about half of the population in 1984 to almost 78 per cent in 2005 (CIS 2005b).<sup>3</sup>

Second, an indicator of national self-identification has been used often in Spanish social surveys. In 2005, for example, more than 80 percent of citizens report belonging both to their AC and to Spain; they identify with two nationalities, as it were, and tend to express support for the State of Autonomies (Moreno 2008). Indeed, prior studies show that each of Spain's ACs contains more citizens with a dual identity than with a single, national identity (Lancaster 1997). Still, there is variation: In Castilla-León, Madrid and Murcia, between 24 and 18 percent of citizens feel "only Spanish". In País Vasco, inhabitants show the greatest inclination to identify only with their region (24 percent), followed by Cataluña (14 percent) and Navarra (11 percent). It is also in these three ACs, where more respondents report favouring "A State which recognizes the possibility of becoming independent nations to ACs" (between 13 and 29 per cent). At the other extreme, the people of Aragón, Madrid and Castilla-León express the most support for "A State with a single central government without ACs" (between 13 and 18 percent).

But existing literature on Spanish intergovernmental relations has only been able to speculate about public attitudes toward more specific roles and responsibilities of central versus regional government in the era of the Spanish State of Autonomies. As Bañón and

Tamayo (1998:106) have explained, the decentralization process—by diminishing the central government's role—has led to a loss of control over policymaking, regulation, resource collection, service provision, and other key aspects of public management. They argue that the central government is still in search of "functional niches where they establish their presence as necessary and legitimate;" yet they point out that there may be an upside, as citizens come to view the central government more in ideal terms as a guardian of larger social rights and benefits. In Madrid, for example, 46 percent of citizens would prefer that the central government handle more functions, versus another 47 percent who prefer to leave things as they are (Lopez Aranguren 2006:46). In 1990, García Ferrando *et al.* (1994:117) asked Spaniards about public policy making by different levels of government in a number of policy areas. In four of the five cases, citizens believed the central government "should make the final and definitive decision," with most of the remainder preferring the regional government. Attitudes in Spain may have changed significantly in the past 18 years, however. More recently, the Instituto de Estudios Fiscales (2008) asked in a survey about the level of government citizens favoured in eight policy sectors. Although a majority of citizens still preferred central government, around 20 percent chose a shared responsibility among the three level of government.

Finally, survey data suggest that Spaniards view the State of Autonomies positively (almost 68 percent), and more than half say they are satisfied or quite satisfied with how their own regional government performs (CIS 2002). Regarding the efficacy of public policies and services, more than half of Spaniards think that ACs have brought public services closer to citizens, yet more than a 40 percent believe that regional governments have increased public spending without improving the quality of services. The conclusion of the analysis of this and other qualitative data is that citizens recognize both positive and negative features in the State of Autonomies at various levels of government (Del Pino 2004).

Our research contributes to this growing literature on public preferences in Spain, the European Union, and other parts of the world by focusing specifically on health, pensions, and education—and, importantly, but focusing on preferences relating

specifically to the *public management* dimension of devolution. We discuss our more specific analytical hypotheses in the context of discussing our data and measures.

### ***III. Data, measures, and univariate results***

For our analysis, we use data from a February 2005 survey by the Spanish Center for Sociological Research (CIS), conducted in collaboration with the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) with funding from the Spanish National Research Plan. The survey involved in-person household interviews of 2,490 randomly selected adult residents of the 17 regions of Spain. The regional samples are proportionate to the population and range from a low of  $n=16$  for La Rioja to a high of  $n=444$  for Andalucía, with a median of  $n=106$ . The questions in the survey focused on attitudes toward social policy and administration in Spain, as well as tracking questions asked regularly by the CIS. (For complete questionnaire and frequencies, see CIS 2005a).

#### **Dependent variables**

**Table 1** shows the question wording and response frequencies for our three dependent variables, which measure citizen preferences for the level of government that should have responsibility for managing (*gestionar*) the provision of *health*, *pensions*, and *education*. For all three services, Spaniards in general tend to prefer management by central government—especially in the case of pensions—followed fairly closely by Autonomous Communities, with very small percentages preferring the European Union or municipalities. These basic descriptive results suggest that the strength of devolution preferences does vary by policy area, as suggested by Cantril and Cantril (1999). These results may also be seen as reflecting a functional theory of federalism, in which the central government is perceived as better able to implement redistributive policies such as old-age pensions (Peterson, 1995; Lowry, 2000).

For purposes of multivariate analysis, we dichotomize these dependent variables by combining ACs with municipalities (coded 1) and the central government with the European Union (coded 0). As noted, most respondents chose either the central government or the ACs, so that our dichotomous measures primarily reflect this

distinction, with 1 representing a preference for regional (or local) control—that is, devolution. To avoid the problem of missing data in our multivariate analyses, we chose to code the “don’t know” respondents as 0 also, under the assumption that they did not express a clear preference *for* devolution. The “no answer” responses are coded as missing values in later analyses. The descriptive statistics for the recoded dependent variables are presented later in **Table 2**, along with the statistics for the other variables in our analysis, which will be discussed shortly.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here.]

### **Regional differences**

We expect that the different regions of Spain vary in the aggregate strength of their preferences for devolution of public management, for various historical and cultural reasons mentioned earlier. In particular, we expect the historical ACs—Andalucía, Cataluña, Galicia, País Vasco—and perhaps those who soon after attained a similar level autonomy—Navarra, Valencia and Canarias—to express more favourable attitudes toward devolution of public management. Basic descriptive results from the survey largely support these expectations. **Figure 1** shows the strength of preferences for devolution of health across the 17 ACs, **Figure 2** for pensions, and **Figure 3** for education. These figures reveal very large regional differences—and even for pensions substantial proportions of citizens in Cataluña and the País Vasco favor devolution. Galicia and Asturias also stand out in terms of their strength of preferences for devolution, particularly in education. This regional variation in devolution preferences is important and something that we attempt to explain in our multivariate analyses later on.

[Figures 1, 2 and 3 about here.]

To include region-specific effects in our multivariate analyses, we created dummy variables representing each of the 17 ACs. In order to form a reference group of regions to exclude from the regression equations, we ran a cluster analysis of the 17 regions using the means for the three dependent variables.<sup>7</sup> This produced a three-cluster solution of essentially high, medium, and low regions in terms of their strength of devolution

preferences across policy areas. We chose the low-preference group to exclude, which is composed of the following seven regions: Baleares, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla-León, Castilla-La-Mancha, Murcia and La Rioja. We also excluded Navarra because of the very small sample size for this region. The remaining nine regions, as shown in **Table 2**, are included as individual dummy variables in the regression analysis.

## **Demographics**

Preferences for devolution may well reflect basic demographic and socioeconomic factors such as age, gender, education, religion, employment status, and social class. For example, older people in Spain were more likely to be raised in an era of centralization under Franco and may feel less comfortable with the relatively recent and rapid expansion of regional autonomy. Similarly, practicing Catholics in Spain have tended to favor national authority over regional independence, although the relationship between religion and nationalism is complex and varies a great deal by region. In contrast, more educated Spaniards may be more aware of history as well as intellectual currents supportive of devolution. Their support could be explained in a more self-interested way also, as the result of the creation of a regional bureaucracy especially among more educated people. Social class identification and employment status may influence devolution preferences as well, in part because of the redistributive role of the central government. The socio-demographic variables available in the survey and included in our analysis are: sex, age, university-educated, practicing Catholic, employed, and subjective social class (on a scale from 1=very low to 5=very high). The descriptive statistics for these variables can be found in **Table 2**.

## **Political ideology and culture**

Previous research suggests that preferences for devolution may also be motivated by political ideology or political culture, which some have called “affect-driven reasoning” (Schneider y Jacoby (2000) using Sniderman, Brody y Tetlock (1991)). From the survey, we were able to use or construct a number of variables that capture political identification and culture, including a direct self-reported scale of political ideology (from 1=far left to 10=far right). Historically, centralism in Spanish has been associated with the national

political right, while regionalism tends to be more favored by the national left and especially regional parties of both right and left. The survey also asked about past voting behavior, and so we hypothesized that those who voted for one of the three major national parties (on the left or right) would tend to prefer central government while those who voted for another (regional) party (on the left or right) would favor devolution. Thus, we constructed an indicator of having voted for one of the three major national parties (the PSOE, PP, and IU) and a separate indicator of having voted for one of the other smaller parties, most of which are regional. Both of these dummy variables can be included in the regression because approximately 20 percent of the respondents did not vote at all and thus can serve as the reference group.

We constructed a dichotomous indicator of belief in a statist-universalist notion of social equity from a question that asked respondents if their view was closest to one of the following three options: “The state should be responsible for the wellbeing of all citizens and should help them solve their problems” (coded 1); “The state should only be responsible for the welfare of the most unfortunate citizens and should help them solve their problems” (coded 0); and “Citizens should be responsible for their own wellbeing and should solve their own problems” (only 5.5 per cent of respondents chose this category, also coded 0). We created another dichotomous measure of low-tax preference from a question that asked: “It is better to lower taxes, even if this means fewer social benefits and public services” (coded 1); “It is better to spend more on social benefits and public services, even if this means paying more in taxes” (coded 0). Both our statist-universalist measure and our low-tax preference variable capture a person’s belief in the role and scope of government. In a US a context, people preferring “small government” tend to favor a limited role for the federal government, with more responsibilities devolved to the states (Hetherington & Nugent 2001). But in Spain, historically and institutionally, the national government is often viewed as more conservative and fiscally retrained. The current redistributive role of the Spanish central government, however, complicates the picture.

## **Regional capacity and government performance**

Citizen preferences for devolution may depend on the economic and institutional capacity of their region. We measure regional capacity by the per-capita regional GDP as a percentage of the national per-capita GDP as well as by the total regional government budget per capita, both obviously regional-level variables. We assume that in wealthier regions with greater regional government resources citizens will have more confidence in the region's capacity to provide and manage public services. However, it could also be that people living in poorer regions may seek higher levels of regional government spending to redistribute income and provide services (see Hetherington and Nugent 2001).

Preferences for devolution may depend also on how people view the economic and political health of the country as a whole (see Mullin 2007; Uslander 2001). Pessimism about national politics or economic conditions might lead citizens to turn inward, toward their region, as the preferred locus of public policy and management. Thus, we include individual-level measures of the perceived economic situation of the country and the perceived political situation of the country (both using a scale from 1=very bad to 5=very good).

The survey asked how effectively (a lot, somewhat, little, not at all) various public services actually function, including health services (in hospitals), the management of pensions, and teaching in public schools. We use these performance perceptions as potential predictors of devolution preferences, under the assumption that public preferences for a given level of government as the main provider of a service depend on the public's evaluation of the service. If people are satisfied with the current level of government responsible for the service, they will prefer continuity (Roeder 1994; Arceneaux 2005). If unsatisfied with the current service as provided, they will prefer that another level of government take charge in hopes of service improvement.

## ***V. Multivariate results***

Our multivariate analysis begins with a model of simple regional effects only. We then include the blocks of variables described in the previous section: demographic characteristics, political ideology and culture, and government capacity and performance. We consider each block of independent variables separately, as well as a model that includes all of the blocks combined. Of particular interest is the way the regional effects change, or remain stable, as we add blocks of variables to the model.

As **Figure 4** illustrates, the regional effects may be direct but also could be mediated (at least to some extent) by demographic, political, or capacity/performance differences across regions. In other words, these other variables in the model—in addition to being viewed as direct predictors of devolution preferences in their own right—can be seen as potential intervening variables that may help explain *why* the regions of Spain differ as much as they do in their preferences for devolution. For example, if demographic differences across regions in income or education lay behind the regional variation in devolution preferences, then entering these variables in the model should attenuate the magnitude of the regional direct effects. We use logistic regression for estimation and report the coefficients in the form of odds ratios.

***Health.*** **Table 3** presents the logistic regression of devolution preferences for health services (*la sanidad*). Model 1 includes the 9 regional dummy variables only, with the 8 excluded regions mentioned earlier serving as the reference group. Paralleling the graphical results, in Figure 1, the largest devolution preferences for health come from País Vasco and Cataluña.

[Table 3 about here.]

Model 2 adds the demographic factors, and it is evident that more educated respondents and those of higher social class tend to support devolution of health services. Practicing Catholics tend to oppose devolution, although the effect is small and only marginally significant. With these demographic factors controlled, the regional effects appear mostly the same, although the magnitude of the coefficients on a number of the

regions diminishes slightly, suggesting that some of the preference for devolution of health in these regions can be attributed to their population demographics.

Model 3 includes the political identification and political culture variables, three of which exhibit significant effects. The farther right ideologically, the lower the devolution preference is for health services. Similarly, those who prefer lower taxes also tend not to favor devolution of health. Past voting for one of the non-national parties, most of which are regional parties in Spain, is associated with an increase in expressed preference for devolution of health. Interestingly, these political culture factors do not seem to mediate, or explain, the initial regional differences, judging by the similarity of the regional coefficients in Model 3 compared with Model 1.

Model 4 includes the measures of regional capacity and government performance, two of which are statistically significant. Regional GDP and the regional government's budget per capita both increase citizen preferences for devolution. In addition, the inclusion of these variables diminishes the regional effects somewhat. The effects for Aragón, Cataluña, Madrid, and especially País Vasco are all diminished. These are all regions with relatively high GDPs and large government budgets, compared with the average for Spain, suggesting that some part of their preference for the devolution of health services may be related to the strength of their regional economies and governments.

Model 5 includes all of the variables, and most of the demographic and political effects remain as before. Controlling for demographics, political culture, and capacity/performance, some of the regional effects appear diminished, most notably Cataluña and the País Vasco. Other regional effects remain, in particular Asturias, Galicia, and Valencia.

***Pensions.*** Table 4 presents the logistic regression analysis of devolution preferences for pensions (*las pensiones*), again showing in Model 1 the regional effects only. Cataluña and País Vasco clearly have the strongest devolution preferences for pensions, followed by Galicia and Asturias.

[Table 4 about here.]

Model 2 includes the demographic factors. Only age emerges as a clearly significant predictor, with older citizens against devolution of pensions. Education is marginally significant, with more educated people favouring devolution. Controlling for age, education and the other demographic factors does not change the regional effects much, suggesting that differences in devolution preference for pensions across regions have little to do with demographics.

Model 3 includes the political ideology and culture factors, and again voting for an other (regional) party emerges as a significant predictor. A low tax preference marginally matters, reducing the preference for devolution. Controlling for these factors slightly diminishes the regional effect of Cataluña and País Vasco, although these regional effects remain strong.

Model 4 includes the capacity and government performance factors, and again regional GDP and especially regional budget capacity are statistically significant. And as in the findings for health, these capacity/performance variables do seem to mediate the regional effects on devolution preferences for pensions, especially in Cataluña and País Vasco.

Finally, Model 5 includes all of the blocks together, and the results remain much the same. Age, voting for a regional party, and regional fiscal capacity are the most important individual predictors. And the separate regional effects are somewhat attenuated, especially for Cataluna and País Vasco, suggesting some degree of mediation.

***Education.*** Table 5 shows the regression analysis of devolution preference for education (*la educacion*). País Vasco and especially Cataluña are the regions mostly strongly in favour of devolution of education, followed by Asturias, and Galicia.

[Table 5 about here.]

Model 2 incorporates the demographic variables, several of which have significant effects. Spanish women tend not to want devolution of education, and older citizens also lean against devolution, although both variables are only marginally significant. More educated citizens, in contrast, favour devolution of education as do those of higher social class. Controlling for these demographic effects only very slightly reduces a few of the regional effects.

Model 3 includes the political ideology and culture factors, and again voting for an other (regional) party appears to be the most important political predictor. Interestingly, those with lower tax preferences are against devolution of education. Political ideology (being more on the right) also leads to less support for devolution, although the effect is smaller. Controlling for these political factors very slightly reduces a few of the regional effects, but again not by much.

Model 4 includes the regional capacity and government performance variables, and again the regional government's budget per capita has a significant positive effect on preferences for devolution of education. Controlling for this and other capacity variables, however, does little to attenuate the individual regional effects, in contrast to the previous two policy areas.

Finally, Model 5 includes all the blocks of variables. Sex, age, subjective social class and especially education are still significant individual predictors. Lower tax preference, voting for a regional party, and regional government fiscal capacity are also remain significant. But the regional effects mostly remain large and statistically significant, even controlling for all these factors.

## ***VI. Discussion***

The results of our empirical analysis provide several contributions to the state of knowledge about public preferences for the management of essential public programs in the increasingly complex, multilevel system of government that is appearing across the globe. To begin with, we have found marked differences in the strength of public preferences for devolution of the management of health, pensions and education across

Spain's 17 regions (ACs). Several regions—Cataluña, País Vasco, and Navarra—emerge as having populations with the strongest devolution preferences in all three of these key social programs, especially in health and education. Asturias and Galicia exhibit strong devolution preferences as well, particularly in education. These results demonstrate how varied public management preferences can be across regions within a nation.

We then tried to explain these regional differences using various predictors of devolution preferences, including socio-demographic characteristics, political identification and culture, capacity of the regional government and performance perceptions (judgments about how good a job government is currently doing in providing these services). Although many of the regional differences in citizen preferences for devolution of public management largely persist, even after controlling for these factors, regional capacity—regional GDP and the regional government budget per capita—does appear to mediate regional differences somewhat. This mediation effect is especially evident in the areas of pensions and health and for the ACs of Cataluña and País Vasco—two especially significant regions historically and in terms of contemporary Spanish politics. This suggests that strength of regional preferences for devolution, at least in these policy areas and regions of Spain, is enhanced by the economic and fiscal power of the region. It would be useful to know if regional capacity mediates devolution preferences in other countries, like Germany, Belgium, Canada, and the US where regions (states) have both substantial autonomy and wide variation in economic and fiscal power.

Still, much of the regional pattern in devolution preferences remains, even after controlling for various factors. This finding suggests that the tendency to favor devolution of public management in Spain stems from other sources—most likely cultural or historical influences not easily captured in social surveys. Or at least, it suggests that additional variables need to be included in future surveys. In particular, it would be helpful to have a measure of regional/national self-identification in future surveys. Perhaps this pattern of strong devolution preferences unmediated by demographics, political culture, or capacity/performance would also describe other regions in Europe with strong cultural and historical identities, such as Scotland in the

UK or the Flemish Region of Belgium, on similar regions in other parts of the world, like Quebec in Canada.

Surprisingly, political ideology and culture variables account for little if any of the regional differences across Spain in preferences for devolution of public management. Perhaps the variables available to us are not the right political measures needed to explain regional differences in Spain. Still, it remains a noteworthy finding that the regional differences in preferences for devolution of public management in Spain are not mediated by left-right ideology, statist-universalist beliefs, low-tax preferences, or even voting for a regional party. This suggests that, in future studies of devolution preferences in Spain as well as other countries with strong regionalism, surveys perhaps should include political ideology and culture variables that more directly capture regional politics and identity.

Apart from being potential mediators of regional effects, a number of specific variables in each group remain important predictors of citizen preferences for devolution of public management.

Beginning with demographic and socioeconomic factors, our results suggest that women prefer more centralized public management of education. Women in Spain historically have been more involved than men in their children's education. This preference by women for a more centralized policy may also be motivated by a desire to address recent educational problems in Spain, such as the struggle over requiring instruction in regional languages (such as Catalan or Basque), varying coverage of historical and other topics in the curriculum, or inequality across regions in student achievement (see OCDE 2007). On the matter of public education, in other words, perhaps women care more about educational outcomes while men care more about maintaining regional autonomy. It would be interesting to discover if this anti-devolution tendency among women with regard to education policy holds in other countries with strong historical and cultural regions.

Our results suggest that age also matters, particularly in pensions and education, with older respondents preferring centralization in both these policy areas. With regard to

pensions, the Spanish elderly are likely sensitive to the stability and maintenance of their major source of income (Arriba *et al.* 2006), which is likely to be true in many other countries as well. We also know that older people (and retired people) in Spain generally favor a centralized state (CIS 2005b). And with regard to education, perhaps the fact that older people themselves were educated under the highly centralized system of the Franco regime helps explain their views. This possible cohort effect may be somewhat unique to Spain because of its relatively recent transition to democracy and regional autonomy.

Finally, our data suggest that the role of education and social class in contemporary political attitudes about devolution should be explored. Education and to a lesser extent social class emerged as an important predictors in our results. We know that more educated people in Spain tend to prefer devolution when asked about reforms of the state (CISb, 2005). Moreover, consistent with the functional hypothesis and the current distribution of power in Spain, more educated people seem to value decentralization of health and education—although not pensions. Perhaps more educated people know more about the presumed advantages of managerial devolution, but it is also possible they have some self interest in the matter. As we explained before, devolution has favored the consolidation of bureaucracies in the regions and the uneven distribution of government spending and services. It would be worth exploring this association of education and social class with devolution preferences in other national contexts.

Spanish citizens who prefer lower taxes tend to prefer a more centralized system—a finding that contrasts with what is often found in the US (Hetherington & Nugent 2001), where central government is more often seen as the big spender. This same relationship also appears in our models for health and education and to some extent with pensions. Probably this reflects the fact that, in Spain and perhaps other European countries as well, many people consider a decentralized system to be less efficient and more expansive. It also should be pointed out that the devolution process in Spain has occurred at the same time as the development of a modern welfare state, with its concomitant increases in public service provision, government spending, and taxation.

As might be expected, voting for a regional party is an important predictor of support for devolution of health, pensions and education, with those citizens who voted for a regional party preferring devolution. Indeed, this is the most important political variable in our models. In contrast, and somewhat surprisingly, political ideology is only relevant as a predictor of devolution preferences for health, with right-leaning citizens preferring more central control. Again, it would be interesting to examine the extent to which party affiliation and political ideology explain devolution preferences in other national contexts.

Finally, regional capacity—as measured by regional GDP and government budget—emerges an important determinant in citizens’ expressed preferences for the devolution of public management. Thus, economic growth and expanding government fiscal capacity at the regional level, characteristics that describe prosperous regions of Spain such as Cataluña and Pais Vasco, would appear to heighten public support for devolution within regions. It would be interesting to see if economic wealth and government capacity correlate with public preferences for devolution in other countries with strong regions and varied regional economic capacity.

Taken together, these results help shed light on the regional differences in citizen preferences for devolution of public management across Spain and some of the factors that help explain these preferences. Future research on Spain and other countries with strong regions should consider other possible variables—particularly measures of regional politics and identification—that might help better explain the very large regional differences that are so evident in our findings. Regionalism and the desire for devolution of public management may be growing, curiously, apace with Europeanization itself, with perhaps diminished public attention to the traditional nation-state. To the extent this is happening, it is especially important to continue investigating public preferences for devolution of public policy and management across the globe and to better understand its determinants and motivations.

\* \* \*

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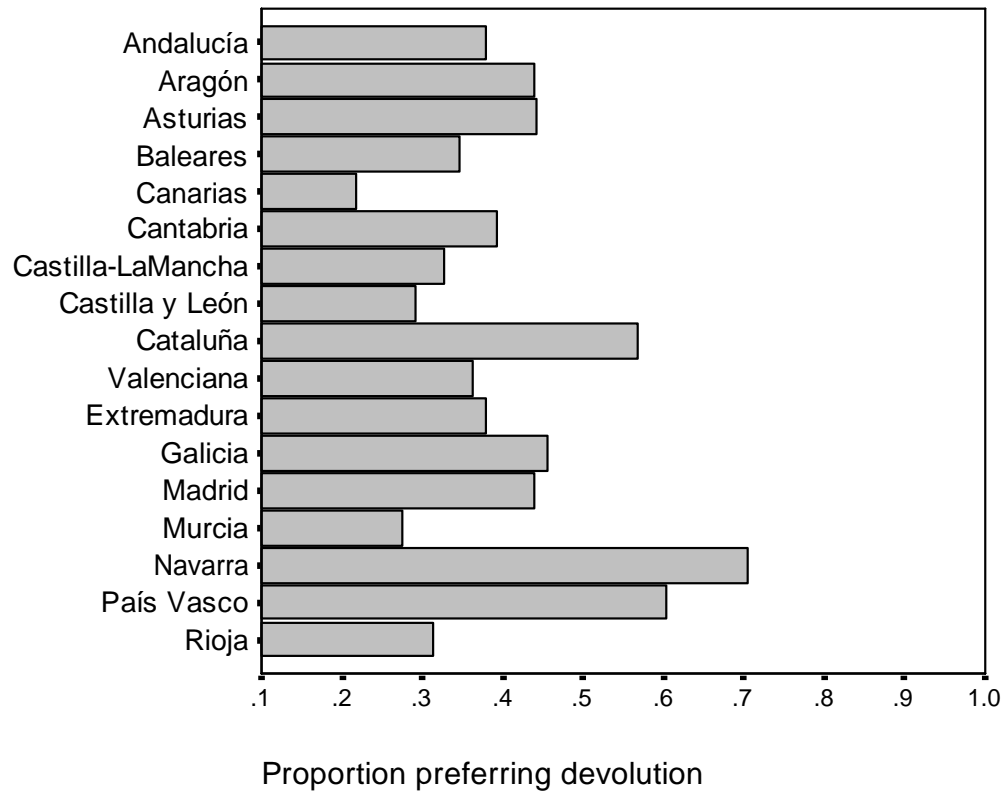
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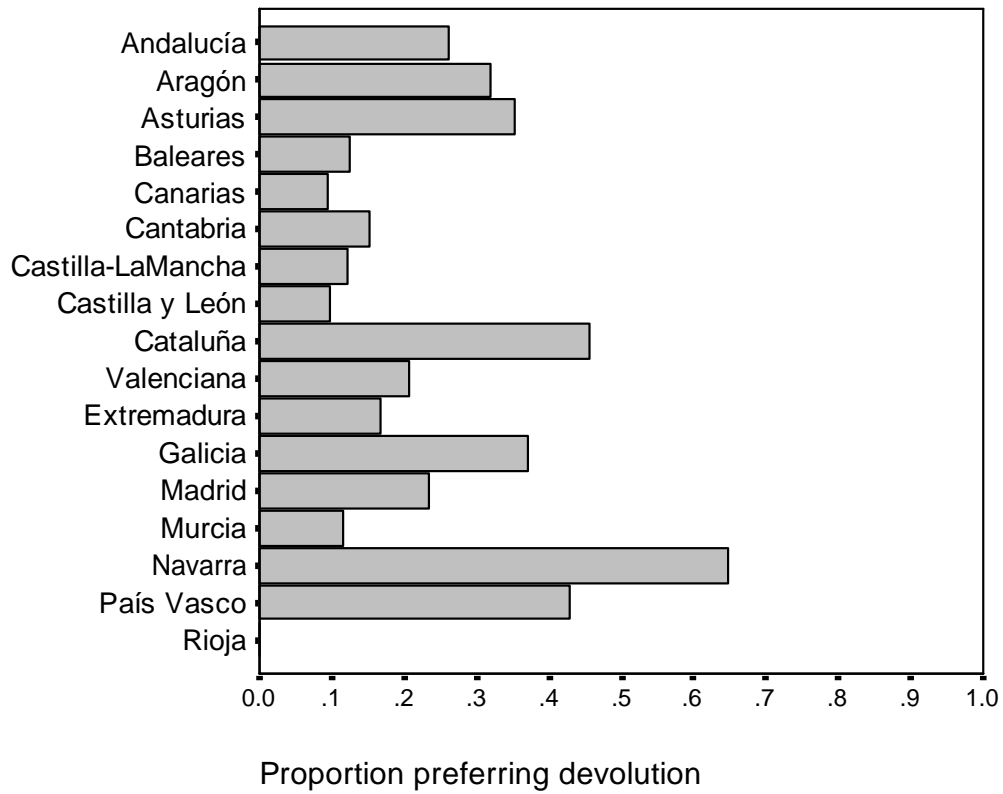
**Figure 1. Preferences for devolution of HEALTH**

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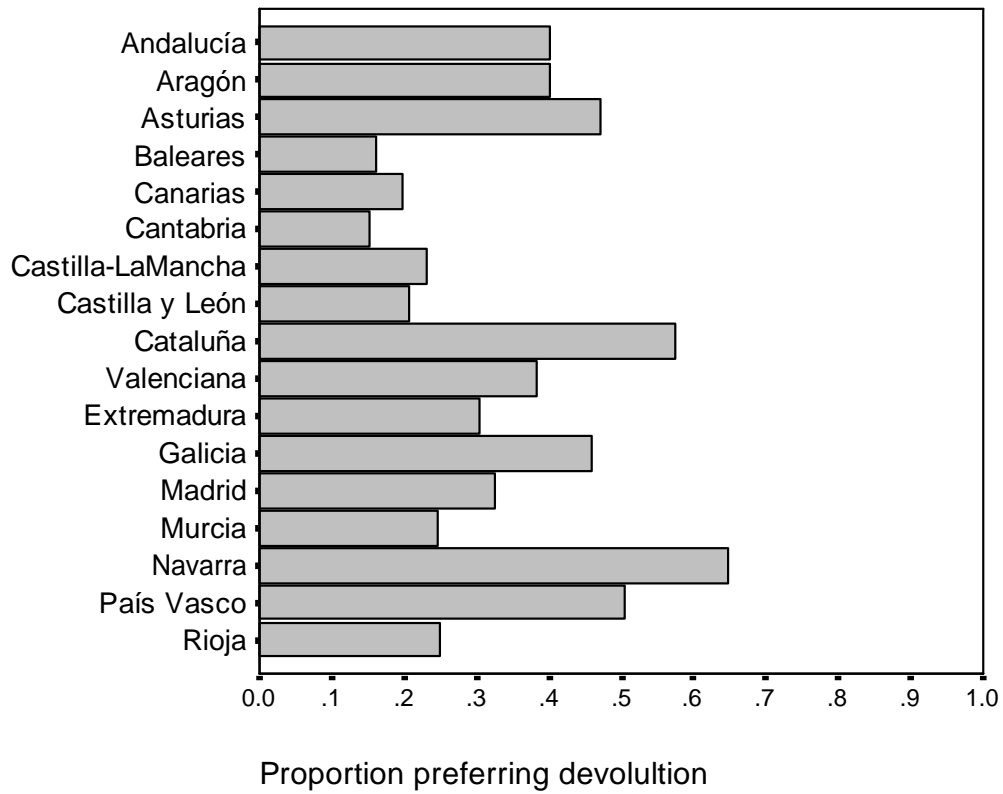
**Figure 2. Preferences for devolution of PENSIONS**

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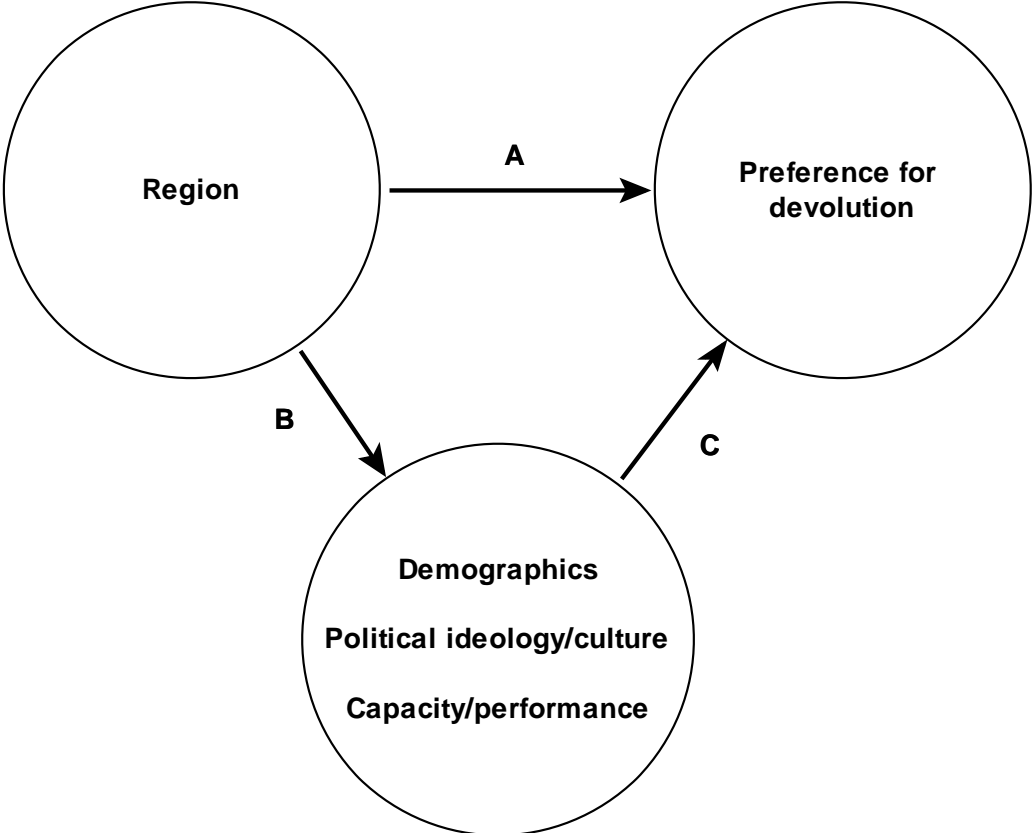
**Figure 3. Preferences for devolution of EDUCATION**

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**Figure 4. Conceptual model**

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**Table 1. Dependent variables**

*Of the following institutions, which do you believe should be principally responsible for managing . . . ?  
(De las siguientes instituciones, ¿cuál cree Ud. debe ser la principal responsable de gestionar . . . ?)*

	<i>Health services (la sanidad)</i>		<i>Pensions (las pensiones)</i>		<i>Education (la educacion)</i>	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<i>European Union</i>	113	4.5	109	4.4	137	5.5
<i>Central government</i>	1067	42.9	1448	58.2	1129	45.3
<i>Autonomous Communities</i>	950	38.2	623	25.0	879	35.3
<i>Municipalities</i>	94	3.8	52	2.1	79	3.2
<i>Don't know</i>	255	10.2	245	9.8	251	10.1
<i>No answer</i>	11	0.4	13	0.5	15	0.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	2490	100.0	2490	100.0	2490	100.0

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics**

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<b>Dependent variables</b>				
Health (1=prefers devolution, 0=does not)	0	1	0.42	0.49
Pensions (1=prefers devolution, 0=does not)	0	1	0.27	0.45
Education (1=prefers devolution, 0=does not)	0	1	0.39	0.49
<b>Regions</b> (selected for analysis, see text for explanation)				
Andalucia	0	1	0.18	0.38
Aragon	0	1	0.03	0.17
Asturias	0	1	0.03	0.16
Cataluna	0	1	0.16	0.36
Extremadura	0	1	0.03	0.16
Galicia	0	1	0.07	0.25
Madrid	0	1	0.13	0.33
Pais Vasco	0	1	0.05	0.22
Valencia	0	1	0.10	0.30
<b>Demographics</b>				
Sex (1=female, 0=male)	0	1	0.51	0.50
Age (in years)	18	94	45.93	17.89
University educated (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.18	0.39
Practicing catholic (1=yes, 0=not)	0	1	0.39	0.49
Employed (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.47	0.50
Subjective social class (1=very low to 5=very high)	1	5	2.61	0.71
<b>Political ideology and culture</b>				
Political ideology (1=far left to 10=far right)	1	10	4.79	1.36
Statist-universalist (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.70	0.46
Lower tax preference (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.26	0.44
Voted for national party (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.58	0.49
Voted for other party (1=yes, 0=no)	0	1	0.07	0.25
<b>Capacity and performance</b>				
Regional GDP as a percent of national GDP	67.5	129.1	99.7	19.7
CA budget per capita (in thousands of Euros)	2.75	6.50	3.61	0.59
Current economic situation (1=very bad to 5=very good)	1	5	3.10	0.73
Current political situation (1=very bad to 5=very good)	1	5	2.99	0.81
Efficacy of education (1=not at all to 4=very)	1	4	2.61	0.59
Efficacy of health (1=not at all to 4=very)	1	4	2.59	0.68
Efficacy of pensions (1=not at all to 4=very)	1	4	2.53	0.48

Listwise N=2028

**Table 3. Logistic regression analysis of devolution preferences for HEALTH**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b>1) Region</b>					
Andalucia	1.310 *	1.198	1.252	1.889 ***	1.526 **
Aragon	1.684 *	1.593 *	2.024 ***	1.215	1.536
Asturias	1.692 *	1.889 **	1.859 **	1.881 **	2.121 **
Cataluna	2.828 ***	2.487 ***	2.364 ***	1.699 **	1.545
Extremadura	1.307	1.357	1.498	1.593	1.598
Galicia	1.802 ***	1.782 ***	1.639 ***	2.126 ***	1.729 **
Madrid	1.674 ***	1.429 **	1.752 ***	1.058	1.267
Pais Vasco	3.279 ***	3.052 ***	2.813 ***	1.398	1.479
Valencia	1.217	1.045	1.161	1.826 ***	1.569 *
<b>2) Demographics</b>					
Sex (female)	----	0.893	----	----	0.905
Age	----	0.996	----	----	0.994 *
Education	----	1.633 ***	----	----	1.537 ***
Practicing catholic	----	0.837 *	----	----	0.869
Employed	----	1.104	----	----	1.042
Subjective social class	----	1.184 **	----	----	1.170 **
<b>3) Political ideology and culture</b>					
Political ideology	----	----	0.926 **	----	0.942 *
Statist-universalist	----	----	0.929	----	0.935
Lower tax preference	----	----	0.615 ***	----	0.642 ***
Voted for national party	----	----	1.032	----	1.098
Voted for other party	----	----	2.164 ***	----	2.140 ***
<b>4) Capacity and performance</b>					
Regional GDP	----	----	----	1.021 **	1.014
Regional government budget	----	----	----	1.416 ***	1.420 **
Current economic situation	----	----	----	1.092	1.046
Current political situation	----	----	----	0.931	0.933
Efficacy of health	----	----	----	1.027	1.114
Constant	0.466 ***	0.393 ***	0.794	0.016 ***	0.039 ***
Nagelkerke R Square	0.046	0.072	0.073	0.059	0.105

Note: Coefficients shown are odds ratios. \*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 4. Logistic regression analysis of devolution preferences for PENSIONS**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b>1) Region</b>					
Andalucia	2.200 ***	1.938 ***	2.106 ***	3.857 ***	2.864 ***
Aragon	2.919 ***	2.844 ***	3.281 ***	2.245 **	2.691 ***
Asturias	3.383 ***	3.991 ***	3.743 ***	4.802 ***	5.834 ***
Cataluna	5.223 ***	4.897 ***	4.100 ***	3.642 ***	3.779 ***
Extremadura	1.241	1.370	1.337	1.436	1.214
Galicia	3.642 ***	3.714 ***	3.291 ***	4.735 ***	3.738 ***
Madrid	1.889 ***	1.707 ***	1.938 ***	1.802	2.788
Pais Vasco	4.673 ***	4.652 ***	3.529 ***	2.112	2.500 *
Valencia	1.605 *	1.427 *	1.555 **	3.780 ***	3.875 ***
<b>2) Demographics</b>					
Sex (female)	----	0.924	----	----	0.925
Age	----	0.988 ***	----	----	0.987 ***
Education	----	1.273 *	----	----	1.224
Practicing catholic	----	0.903	----	----	0.928
Employed	----	1.069	----	----	1.047
Subjective social class	----	1.058	----	----	0.979
<b>3) Political ideology and culture</b>					
Political ideology	----	----	0.953	----	0.991
Statist-universalist	----	----	1.050	----	1.060
Lower tax preference	----	----	0.807 *	----	0.804 *
Voted for national party	----	----	0.921	----	1.001
Voted for other party	----	----	2.336 ***	----	2.243 ***
<b>4) Capacity and performance</b>					
Regional GDP	----	----	----	1.020 *	1.009
Regional government budget	----	----	----	1.947 ***	2.125 ***
Current economic situation	----	----	----	1.013	0.997
Current political situation	----	----	----	0.956	0.959
Efficacy of pensions	----	----	----	0.867	0.890
Constant	0.161 ***	0.252 ***	0.223 ***	0.003 ***	0.011 ***
Nagelkerke R Square	0.089	0.108	0.105	0.116	0.143

Note: Coefficients shown are odds ratios. \*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 5. Logistic regression analysis of devolution preferences for EDUCATION**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<b>1) Region</b>					
Andalucia	2.199 ***	2.034 ***	2.185 ***	2.738 ***	2.088 ***
Aragon	2.174 ***	2.114 ***	2.527 ***	2.104 ***	2.879 ***
Asturias	2.899 ***	3.657 ***	3.194 ***	3.115 ***	4.079 ***
Cataluna	4.395 ***	3.982 ***	3.571 ***	3.883 ***	4.198 ***
Extremadura	1.418	1.523	1.586	1.187	0.926
Galicia	2.770 ***	2.764 ***	2.636 ***	2.992 ***	2.334 ***
Madrid	1.577 ***	1.389 *	1.541 ***	2.048	3.295 *
Pais Vasco	3.313 ***	3.210 ***	2.808 ***	2.374 *	3.295 ***
Valencia	2.028 ***	1.829 ***	1.870 ***	3.724 ***	3.655 ***
<b>2) Demographics</b>					
Sex (female)	----	0.809 *	----	----	0.808 *
Age	----	0.992 *	----	----	0.992 *
Education	----	1.492 ***	----	----	1.505 ***
Practicing catholic	----	0.849	----	----	0.858
Employed	----	1.077	----	----	1.071
Subjective social class	----	1.174 *	----	----	1.136 *
<b>3) Political ideology and culture</b>					
Political ideology	----	----	0.945 *	----	0.972
Statist-universalist	----	----	0.940	----	0.937
Lower tax preference	----	----	0.639 ***	----	0.676 ***
Voted for national party	----	----	1.049	----	1.066
Voted for other party	----	----	2.573 ***	----	2.476 ***
<b>4) Capacity and performance</b>					
Regional GDP	----	----	----	1.007	0.992
Regional government budget	----	----	----	1.679 ***	1.857 ***
Current economic situation	----	----	----	1.005	0.935
Current political situation	----	----	----	1.042	1.056
Efficacy of education	----	----	----	1.094	1.156 *
Constant	0.307 ***	0.330 ***	0.462 ***	0.015 ***	0.062 ***
Nagelkerke R Square	0.072	0.098	0.099	0.087	0.135

Note: Coefficients shown are odds ratios. \*  $p < .10$  \*\*  $p < .05$  \*\*\*  $p < .01$

## Notes

1. This research was supported by the Spanish National Research Plan, in particular, two projects: Welfare State Reforms: Stakeholders and Citizen Support (SEC2002-0907) and New Social Risks: Welfare Policies Trajectories (SEJ2005-06599).
2. With regard to education, País Vasco and Cataluña obtained this power in 1981, Galicia, 1982; Andalucía, Canarias and Comunidad Valenciana in 1983, Navarra 1990, Baleares, 1998, Aragon, Cantabria, Madrid, Murcia and La Rioja, 1999; finally, Asturias, Castilas- León, Castila- La Mancha and Extremadura in 2000. Cataluña was the first region to get control of health in 1981; Andalucía, 1984; País Vasco and Comunidad Valenciana in 1988; Galicia and Navarra 1991; Canaries in 1994. The 10 remaining ACs got the power for health in 2001.
3. In turn, this reflected a downward trend in the views of the extremes. In 2005 only 8.7 per cent of citizens were in favour of "a State with a single central government without ACs" and an even smaller per centage, 6.6 per cent, was in favour of a "State in which they recognize the ACs possibility of becoming independent nations "(CIS 2005).
4. García Ferrando, López Aranguren and Beltrán (1994:117) in 1990 asked people about their opinion on who should take the final decision on a number of issues. In four of the five cases, citizens believed the central government who "should make the final and definitive decision" and the remaining issue, the regional government. Finally, some Eurobarometers have included the question of who should decide, the government of the country or all Member States together on various public policies. Of the seventeen public policies surveyed in 1995, for ten of them more than half of Spaniards felt that decisions should be taken together. The first places are occupied by foreign policy, the fight against drugs, environmental policy, immigration policy and monetary policy. Citizens are supporters of the Europeanization of issues and public policies that respond to global problems or requiring coordination (Barreiro and Sánchez Cuenca 2001). Others, like agricultural policy, health and welfare should remain under the jurisdiction of the States. Lopez Aranguren et al. 2005 also discuss some of these issues in AC of Madrid.
5. Pensions, health and education are the three main policies that citizens would never accept a spending cut. These policies are also the main three policies over which citizens think it would be necessary to increase public spending. Moreover, these policies are chosen as the most "important" policies (CIS 2005a).
6. We ran a hierarchical, agglomerative cluster analysis of the 17 ACs using the means (proportions) favoring devolution of health, pensions, and education in each AC (in other words, clustering the ACs on these three variables). We selected Ward's method of clustering with a Euclidean squared measure of distance.