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Caroline Gray, Territorial politics and the party system in Spain: Continuity and change since the financial crisis. London: Routledge, 2020

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With the growth of secessionist mobilization in Catalonia in recent years, there has been a parallel expansion in the scholarly work that has sought to document and explain this trend. This is also the starting point of Caroline Gray's book, *Territorial Politics and the Party System in Spain: Continuity and Change since the Financial Crisis*. The book's introduction thus begins by noting the centrality of the Catalan independence drive to the campaigning for the April 2019 Spanish general election, and asks the following question: "How had Spain reached the stage where national politics and party campaigns for a general election... were so heavily dominated by political developments in one part of the state?" (p. 2).

In posing such a question, Gray seeks to locate the Catalan question in the broader context of territorial politics in Spain. This in itself is an important contribution to an academic literature that has too often neglected the broader multi-level political context in which the issue of Catalan independence has evolved. Gray's work is also, however, broader in its ambition than this, in two key respects. Firstly, whilst recent developments in Catalonia are inevitably a key focus, so too are territorial dynamics and tensions elsewhere in Spain (specifically in the Basque Country, as well as in relation to left- and right-wing Spanish state-wide parties). This is, then, a study of the complex multi-level dynamics of territorial politics in the Spanish pluri-national state. Secondly, these territorial dynamics and tensions are explored in relation to the financial crisis that hit Spain hard from 2008 onwards; in this respect, the book aims to "investigate in what ways, and to what extent, the territorial dimension of politics has impacted on the dynamics of party system continuity and change in Spain in the decade following the financial crisis, with a particular focus on party behavior" (p. 3). Such a focus is very welcome given the paucity of scholarly work to date that has considered the impact of the financial crisis on territorial politics in pluri-national states.

The book starts, in Chapter One, by summarizing the nature of the Spanish party system and governance in Spain from the first pro-Franco democratic elections in 1977 until the 2015 Spanish general election. The latter is presented as a critical election in this narrative, resulting in a major transformation in the Spanish political and party system due to the electoral success of new challenger parties. Specifically, the chapter argues that the emergence of *Podemos* ("We Can") on the left, and *Ciudadanos* (Citizens) on the

right, can be attributed to the economic and political consequences of the 2008 financial crisis. This paves the way, in Chapter Two, for an analysis of this Spanish experience from a broader European (and especially South European) perspective. Doing so reveals both the similarities and differences of political and party system transformation in Spain, and Gray's central argument here is that the territorial dimension is a distinctive feature of how the impact of the financial crisis played out in this case: "Spain... stands out from its Southern European neighbors due to the salience of the territorial dimension in the period of post-crisis party restructuring" (37).

The following four empirical chapters document this territorial dimension to multi-level politics in Spain in the post-crisis period. These consider, respectively, the regional level of politics in Catalonia and then the Basque Country, followed by an analysis of left- and right-wing state-wide parties. One of the most impressive features of this analysis is the masterful way in which Gray presents the complexity of the party dynamics within the two regions under consideration, between different state-wide parties, as well as across different territorial levels. The argument developed from these different perspectives has several strands to it. Firstly, it is shown convincingly that the financial crisis coincided with, and aggravated, territorial tensions that were already there. Secondly, it is argued that the extent to which the financial crisis impacted on multi-level politics also depended on the agency of political actors, and the extent to which they framed the crisis's economic and political consequences in territorial terms. Thirdly, political parties' responses are shown to reflect, in turn, the different regional and state-wide political and electoral contexts in which they operated.

In developing these arguments through an in-depth empirical analysis of regional and state-wide political actors, Gray accounts for the different ways in which territorial politics has intersected with left-right and other issue cleavages in post-crisis Spain. The result is a compelling account of why Basque and Catalan nationalist parties have pursued different territorial strategies in the last decades, and why different state-wide parties have adopted different positions on and paid varying degrees of attention to territorial issues.

If there are limitations to this analysis, they are 2-fold. Firstly, the empirical work presented here is underpinned by an impressive number of in-depth interviews, over 50 with politicians and other relevant actors in Madrid Basque Country and Catalonia. However, references to these interviews in the text itself are few and far between; doing so would have enhanced the richness of the discussion through the direct testimony of those involved. Secondly, the book arguably does not fully capture the "territorial dimension" to Spanish politics in all

its manifestations. Despite stating at the outset its intention to explore "all aspects related to Spain's decentralized territorial model" (p. 3), the focus on the main political parties in two regions and at the state level misses out on other important dynamics (for example, the role of civil society organizations in Catalonia, and the regional branches of state-wide parties in other parts of Spain). One might reasonably respond that the account presented in Gray's book is already complicated enough; and yet, the fact remains that in practice territorial dynamics are indeed very complicated and involve a broader range of actors across the state's territory (and not just in the regions where territorial tensions have been most salient). Reflecting this reality remains a challenge for scholars of territorial politics in Spain and beyond. Our understanding of territorial dynamics in pluri-national and multi-level contexts will inevitably be limited until a more comprehensive conceptual and empirical approach is adopted.

These limitations do not detract from the overall quality and importance of Gray's study. The book is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the politics of contemporary Spain, as well as for scholars of territorial politics, political parties and party system change. The book successfully provides important new insights into the intersection between economic, political and territorial dynamics in pluri-national states. In doing so, it sets the research agenda for future work to further explore the complex ways in which these issues play out within and across territorial levels, in Spain and elsewhere.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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