
Introduction

CARMEN NAVARRO

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

JAUME MAGRE

Universitat de Barcelona

Cómo citar/Citation

Navarro, C. and Magre, J. (2018). Introduction: Mayors and local government in Spain. *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, 46, 13-20. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.46.01>

There are reasons for celebrating the recent expansion of comparative studies on local government. The last few years have seen this research strengthen both in scope (with an increasing number of countries studied) and in analytical consistency; thanks, in part, to the consolidation of international networks of scholars conducting empirical investigations in this field (Back *et al.*, 2006; Egner *et al.*, 2013; Kuhlmann and Bouckaert, 2016; Wollmann *et al.*, 2016; Schwab *et al.*, 2017; Teles and Swianiewicz, 2017; Heinel *et al.*, 2018; Koprivic and Wollmann, 2018).

This monographic section reflects this trend. The analysis of Spanish mayors and local government explored in the following articles have been possible thanks to the involvement of the authors in one of the aforementioned networks¹, specifically the so-called POLLEADER II project, which has gathered specialists from 20 countries to apply a survey to mayors of European municipalities with more than 10 000 inhabitants. The project is the fourth in a series of surveys on local actors such as mayors, councillors and top administrators (for more information see in this monographic section Hubert and Magnier) with the aim of shedding light on issues like institutional dynamics, decision-making processes, relations with private actors of local governance, the profile of these actors, notions of democracy and attitudes towards political and administrative reforms, among others.

Exploring the figure of the Spanish mayor and analyzing their perceptions on the functioning of local government seems particularly pertinent given that we are close to celebrating the 40th anniversary since the first local democratic elections. In

1. This research has been financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness: «Una nueva arquitectura local: eficiencia, dimensión y democracia» (CSO213-48641-C2-1-R).

addition, in the 10 years following the implementation of the first survey on mayors (POLLEADER I) the 'local world' has gone through significant changes. From the legal framework perspective, the period coincides with two of the most important reforms of the national Law on Local Government, namely the implementation of Act 57/2003 on Measures for the Modernization of Local Government and, more recently, the adoption of Act 27/2013 on the Rationalization and Sustainability of Local Government. From the political point of view, it is worth noting that this POLLEADER II survey was conducted immediately after the emergence of new political forces that have significantly disrupted the Spanish party system.

However, research on mayors is not new in our academic community. It is part of a tradition of studying local political elites that, in Spain, has had a significant presence in the social sciences. Indeed, beyond the numerous monographs that take a legal-historical approach, a line of research targeting mayors from a political science perspective has been in development for some time. The earliest works date from the late eighties and early nineties. Much influenced by the tradition of local studies in France, these studies focused first on councillors (Baras *et al.*, 1988) and, later, on mayors (Márquez, 1992; Magre, 1999). Years later, several works were published on local political leadership, among which the role of the mayor was also explored (Nátera, 2001; Alba and Navarro, 2006).

Generally, the theoretical apparatus of these study traditions highlights, firstly, the sociological dimension, i.e. the origins of the elites, and secondly, the mayors' values and attitudes as an explanation of their behaviour. Each of these investigations undoubtedly opened up new avenues of research, but the methodology was limited, as were the results themselves. The methodological limitations emerged from the fact that most studies were conducted at Autonomous Community level, which reduced the possibility of obtaining an overview of local politicians in Spain. The results of this series of investigations also failed to make the transition from describing the elite to understanding the institution.

Probably for this reason, research slowly shifted towards studying the functioning of the institutions and more specifically municipal councils, taking as the centre of analysis municipal political stability and the figure of the mayor. Research on the durability of the mayors in office, votes of no confidence, or the morphology of municipal governments were popular themes in the late nineties (Márquez Cruz, 1994; Magre, 1995; Martínez-Alonso and Magre, 2000). Overall, the effort focused on the relationship between the design of the institutions and their effectiveness.

Studies of voting behaviour in municipal elections have also been present in research (Riera *et al.*, 2016). However, the vast majority of them have been regional in character. Irene Delgado was one of the first academics to comprehensively approach the whole landscape of Spanish municipal elections (Delgado, 1997). The difficulty caused by the number of municipalities (8123), regional disparity and population size has probably discouraged their study. Nevertheless, studies on political and electoral behaviour have failed to narrow the issues that are typical of these types of elections and, in essence, to define them. Municipal elections have generally

been studied using indicators specific to general elections, and that has blurred their singular and unique profile.

The work done for the various contributions for this special issue of the *Spanish Journal of Political Science* represents a revisiting of certain subject areas that have built up over the years but with a significantly wider sample of mayors and the empirical knowledge that has been consolidated after the first studies on the role of the mayor in Spain, which were undertaken almost 25 years ago.

The fieldwork for this second edition of the POLLEADER survey started in September 2015 and ended in January 2016. The universe of study included the 752 municipalities with more than 10 000 inhabitants that existed in 2014. The questionnaire used was the translation of the one jointly drafted in English by the members of the academic network, with some minor national adaptations. As mentioned above, its content refers to matters such as mayors' perceptions of their tasks, priorities, the influence of the actors in municipal governance and patterns of interaction among them, the local administration, the position of local government in the political system, the relationship with citizens, the notions of democracy, etc. Moreover, it included a set of sociodemographic variables characteristic of studies on political elitism.

The questionnaire was made available on the internet, addressed directly to the mayor's email, via snapsurvey, after a process of personal calls to municipalities and mayoral cabinets to ensure information reliability and present the aim and characteristics of the project. Before contacting the mayoral offices, a database of all municipalities was built with political and socio-demographical information gathered through open sources (political party, years as mayor, sex, age and governmental composition of the municipality, among others).

The outcome was considered a success, as over 40% of the mayors of cities in Spain with more than 10 000 inhabitants responded to the survey. The response rate was almost 20% points higher than the previous round of the project. Compared to the other 23 European countries that took part in the project, Spain was among the countries with highest response rate (in eighth place) and the fifth in total number of responses (303). Therefore, this study on the figure of the mayor is based on the largest sample to date.

The fieldwork, however, took a long time, and was occasionally difficult. After the first month of sending emails, and up to six reminder emails, several rounds of personal phone calls were organized to those mayors who had not answered the questionnaire within the first weeks. It is interesting to note that, to reach these 303 mayors within the four months allotted for the fieldwork, 61.5 days were needed, on average, from the first email with the questionnaire, plus around four emails and two personal calls to get a positive response to the request. In January, a decision was made to establish an internal quota system to try to reach a minimum of 40% response rate within each province. Our sample covers 36.85% of each province on average (almost 39% if we exclude Ceuta and Melilla), and 37.5% at regional level (almost 42% if we exclude these two City-Autonomous Communities). The resulting picture of the final database with 303 mayors, is regionally distributed as follows:

TABLE 1.
ANSWERS BY AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY

Region	Answer	Response rate	Total units
Andalusia	44	28.6	154
Aragon	6	46.1	13
Balearic Islands	13	56.5	23
Canary Islands	17	40.5	42
Cantabria	4	40.0	10
Castile and Leon	7	29.2	24
Castile-La Mancha	9	22.5	40
Catalonia	70	58.3	120
Ceuta	0	0.0	1
Community of Madrid	19	38.8	49
Community of Valencia	47	47.5	99
Extremadura	5	35.7	14
Galicia	16	28.6	56
La Rioja	2	50.0	4
Melilla	0	0.0	1
Navarre	8	80.0	10
Basque Country	18	43.9	41
Principality of Asturias	5	23.8	21
Region of Murcia	13	43.3	30
Overall Total	303	37.54	752

As already mentioned, the results grouped by Autonomous Communities show that in 10 out of the 17 Autonomous Communities over 40 % of the mayors answered the questionnaire. The biggest shortfalls were in the regions of Andalusia and the two Castiles. Conversely, among the rest, Navarre and Catalonia provided the highest response rate. However, although it is not strictly a sample, the number of mayors interviewed and the territorial representation of the whole set of interviews, provide a reasonable basis for reliable statistical analysis.

Among the various lines of research that the Spanish mayors' responses to the survey opens up, the contributions in this monographic section focus on those of special relevance for a better understanding of the mayoral office position and functioning.

The issue opens with an article by Navarro and Sanz on the social base and political career of Spanish mayors. It analyses the extent to which there is a standard profile in this elite group and the patterns of their political career. In line with the literature's main findings on this topic, the authors confirm an overrepresentation of certain

groups of populations among these individuals. Specifically, the mayors tend to be male, middle-class and middle-aged, but younger than their counterparts in other European countries. The study also acknowledges the strong presence of national and regional political parties in local politics and points to patterns of political professionalization of this elite. The data show that mayors typically have political ambitions to continue in office, and the analysis identifies several factors that explain the difference between those who want to remain in politics and those who want to return to their previous profession.

A second contribution explores these leaders' notions of democracy, in relation to the participatory-representative dimension. Building on the theory that assumes that both local institutions and individual characteristics have an impact on the way mayors perceive democracy and behave, Vallbé and Iglesias add to this literature by exploring the influence of mayors' political experience on their actual beliefs on this topic. Their investigation concludes that ideology is a good predictor for variation in views on democracy; mayors in leftist positions tend to be more closely identified with a participatory model of democracy. However political experience also has an effect and mayors' notions of democracy tend to adjust with political experience. The support for participatory democracy erodes as years in office increase. When both factors are compared, it is found that the effect of ideology is stronger than that of political experience.

Molins and Medina's article on mayors' perceptions of the power held by local actors in urban governance follows in this monographic section. It deals with the degree of influence interest groups enjoy in local governance and starts from the classic question in political science of 'who governs?'; in this case, who governs in the city. The authors first focus on the classic theories that have inspired this field (i.e. elitism, pluralism and urban regime) and continue reflecting on the 'North American flavour' of some of these propositions that tend to put economic interest groups at the centre of decision-making processes. In contrast with these approaches, Spanish mayors seem to dismiss the idea of local businesses being the most influential group in the local arena. Instead, data show that these political leaders are at the centre of the governance network and act as gatekeepers in the promotion of certain interests, depending on political priorities and ideological affinities.

The fourth contribution focuses on local administrative reforms and how mayors have faced them. Traditionally, local government has appeared to be a fertile field for innovation in public management and administration. These new ways of functioning go from substantial changes in internal organization to intensive implementation of contracting-out schemes, or the inclusion of participatory tools to involve citizens in public decisions. The work by Salvador and Pano analyzes various reform strategies and provides evidence on the Spanish mayors' favourable position towards most of these changes. In addition, it highlights the support by a significant part of this group to a certain remunicipalization of service delivery, and several factors behind this preference. Spanish mayors also support organizational arrangements of inter-municipal cooperation rather than the merger of municipalities, showing in this respect Spain's traditional resistance to amalgamations.

The last article assesses mayors' perceptions regarding decentralization strategies, particularly regarding rescaling reforms, mergers and metropolitan governance. In order to put them in context, Magre, Medir and Tomàs first analyze the various waves of devolution that have taken place in the country, whose main beneficiary has been the regional tier at the expense of the local level of government. The research identifies differences among regions on mayors' perceptions about potential reforms. Mayors in the so-called "fast-track" regions (those that acquired their autonomy status earlier in the process of decentralization) support greater decentralization to the autonomous communities (regions) and, for these mayors, this level of government emerges as key within a system of multilevel governance.

The monographic section ends with a special contribution by the international coordinators of the POLLEADER II project. Here, Heinelt and Magnier describe the work done by this academic network over 20 years, highlight the advantages and challenges of conducting comparative surveys at local level, and summarize the main findings of this common work. This piece provides a sense of the scope of this joint task and places all the previous articles in context.

All the research presented in the following pages has been possible thanks to the academic collaboration among local government scholars, whose outcomes over two decades of surveys targeting the local political elite have allowed concepts, typologies and empirical knowledge to emerge, inspiring senior and young researchers. Indeed, we have many reasons to celebrate.

References

- Alba, Carlos and Carmen Navarro, 2006. "Mayors and local administrators: a puzzling relationship", in Henry Bäck, Hubert Heinelt and Annick Magnier, (eds.), *The European Mayor: Political Leaders in the Changing Context of Local Democracy*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90005-6_13.
- Bäck, Henry, Hubert Heinelt and Annick Magnier (eds.). 2006. *The European Mayor: Political Leaders in the Changing Context of Local Democracy*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90005-6>.
- Baras, Montserrat, Gabriel Colomé, Joan Botella and Jordi Capó. 1988. "La formación de una élite política local", *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 59: 199-224.
- Bojrn Egner, David Sweeting and Pieter-Jan Klok (eds.). 2013. *Local councillors in Europe*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-01857-3>.
- Delgado, Irene. 1997. *El comportamiento electoral municipal español, 1979-1995*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Heinelt, Hubert, Annick Magnier, Marcello Cabria and Herwirt Reynaer (eds.). 2018. *Political Leaders and Changing Local Democracy: The European Mayor*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67410-0>.

- Koprić, Ivan and Hellmut Wollmann (eds.). 2018 *Evaluating Reforms of Local Public and Social Services in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61091-7>.
- Kuhlmann, Sabine and Geert Bouckaert (eds.). 2016. *Local Public Sector Reforms in Times of Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52548-2>.
- Magre, Jaume. 1995. *Les mocions de censura a l'alcalde a Catalunya:(1979-1994)*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- Magre, Jaume. 1999. *El alcalde en Cataluña*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- Márquez Cruz, Guillermo. 1992. *Movilidad política y lealtad partidista en Andalucía*. Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.
- Márquez Cruz, Guillermo. 1994. "Bases para el estudio de la inestabilidad política en los Gobiernos locales". *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 86: 261-312.
- Martínez-Alonso, José Luís and Jaume Magre. 2000. Reflexiones sobre la moción de censura al alcalde: evolución, comportamientos y regulación actual. Barcelona: Fundació Carles Pi i Sunyer.
- Nátera, Antonio. 2001. *El liderazgo político en la sociedad democrática*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales.
- Riera, Pedro, Raúl Gómez, Pablo Barberá, Juan Antonio Mayoral and José Ramón Montero. 2016. "Elecciones municipales en España: un análisis multinivel de los determinantes individuales y contextuales del voto", *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 172: 47-82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18042/cepc/rep.172.02>.
- Schwab, Christian, Geert Bouckaert and Sabine Kuhlmann, (eds.). 2017. *The Future of Local Government in Europe. Lessons from Research and Practice in 31 Countries*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Teles, Filipe and Pawel Swianiewicz (eds.). 2017. *Inter-municipal cooperation in Europe: institutions and governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wollmann, Hellmut, Ivan Koprić and Gerard Marcou (eds.). 2016. *Public and social services in Europe: From public and municipal to private sector provision*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57499-2>.

CARMEN NAVARRO

c.navarro@uam.es

Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, University Autónoma of Madrid, where she focuses her research and teaching activities on local government and public policy. Recently, she has been Principle Investigator in the research project "Efficiency, scale and democracy in local government" ("Una nueva arquitectura local: eficiencia, dimensión y democracia") financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (2014-2017) analysing changes in local institutions, political leadership and service provision in Spanish and European municipalities. She is a

member of the Institute of Local Law at the UAM, where she is in charge of the series Annual Reports on Local Public Policies in the Region of Madrid.

JAUME MAGRE

jmagre@ub.edu

Lecturer in political science at the Department of Political Science, Constitutional Law and Philosophy of Law of the University of Barcelona. He is principal investigator of GREL (www.ub.edu/grel) and Director of *Fundació Carles Pi i Sunyer* (www.pisunyer.org). His research interests are focused on local institutions, territorial governance and democracy.