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“Why do some regional prime ministers stay longer in cabinet? Multilevel political experience and premiership survival”

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Abstract

This article addresses the problem of leadership stability in regional governments. Previous research has proposed several explanations to the survival of (prime) ministers, highlighting the role of institutional and individual factors. Other scholars have suggested that in multilevel political systems, politicians tend to follow multi-layered careers across different levels. Multilevel careers allow ministers to accumulate resources and experience and we hypothesize that it positively contributes to the stability of regional leadership compared to individuals that do not possess such experience. Based on the analysis of political careers from 210 regional prime ministers in Belgium, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, we test whether previous political positions at other levels of government affect decisively the hazard of leaving the premiership. The article concludes that the combination of these previous positions predicts significantly the survival of regional leaders.

Keywords: Prime ministers, survival, decentralization, multilevel politics, political careers, regionalism

1. Introduction

The stability of an executive is important for the legitimacy of the political institutions and for the implementation of public policies. In countries that - such as Spain, France, Belgium and UK - recently witnessed significant steps towards more decentralisation or regionalisation, the stability of the regional executive may even become a question of credibility of the sub-national institutions. In this framework of creation and development of regional institutions and even of a regional political class (Stolz, 2001, 2013), the position of the regional prime minister (RPM) is a central one. As stated by Alda et al. (2005: 30), “we observe the importance of the President within a collegiate body of Government, not acting as a mere ‘primus inter pares’ but with important powers such as unilaterally deciding the quantity and appointment of Ministers and important political management functions and Community representation”. In this vein, the stability at the head of the regional executive is related to the ability and the willingness of these individuals to stay in office, i.e. their political longevity. Consequently, the extent of time these regional leaders remain in power delivers a certain degree of policy potential, as it have been observed for the national prime ministers (Müller and Philipp, 1991). However, leaving or staying in office is not simply a question of individual choice, but it is rather a complex process where a large number of actors and issues are at play. It is therefore interesting to analyse the length in office of the RPM in order to grasp how these factors collude to explain political survival at the top of regional executives.

According to this concern, this article intends to explain how long and why some RPMs stay longer in the office than others. While previous research has given increasing attention to the duration of cabinet ministers, the tenure of chief executives has remained particularly out of this scope. The few studies assessing premiership survival employed a wide scope that only allowed testing macro-systemic factors, like the type of regime or the institutional setting (Blondel, 1980; Bienen and Van den Walle, 1991). As for the ministerial duration, several explanations have been tested in order to shed light in the different patterns of duration within cabinets and their effect on cabinet stability. These factors may be linked to the type of regime, the constitutional constraints, the political context and the individual features of the political tenants (Fischer *et al.*, 2012). Amongst the last, some scholars have outlined the influence of political careers as a relevant

explanation of ministerial survival, particularly for those with strong parliamentary careers (Bäck et al., 2009; Kerby, 2010; Fischer and Kaiser, 2011).

This article intends to contribute to this increasingly rich literature by focusing on the impact of multilevel politics on the recruitment and survival of executive members. By comparing all the RPMs that lead the regional governments in four European countries, we will attempt to explain this longevity by using indicators of political experience and by controlling for systemic and individual variables. Particularly, we aim at outlining the relevance of the accumulation of political experience across levels, since this is, in our view, an important way of understanding how an individual manages to stay in a politically important and visible office for a long period. RPMs are often subject of pressures from within their cabinet (struggles between ministers or between coalition parties, responsibility for bad policy performance, etc.), within their party (change of party leadership or strategy, ambitions from internal competitors, etc.), from other institutions (vote of non-confidence in the parliament, judiciary destitution, etc.) or from the society in general (elections, demonstrations, dropping confidence rates, weak media visibility, etc.). The way the RPM is able to manage these pressures and challenges is partly related to her previous political experience, her reputation and the skills she managed to develop alongside her political career. The state structure and the institutional career opportunities have *de facto* an impact on the characteristics of these experiences. In this sense, we regard multilevel political experience as a key variable in the capacity for the RPM to stay at the head of the regional executive.

Supposedly, the recruitment process of the RPM and/or her electoral performance somehow guarantees her legitimacy and her capacity to survive at least one term as RPM. Nonetheless, there is a huge variation in the longevity in regional cabinets in Europe. Some RPMs manage to stay in office for decades while some others leave after a few months. This article investigates whether this (in)capacity to stay in office could be explained by previous political positions at other policy levels. In the first section, we will review the micro and macro explanations for the longevity of the RPMs in office, particularly focusing on the potential impact of previous political experience in multilevel settings. In the second section, we will briefly present our data and our models, before testing the hypothesis that multilevel careers, as a combination of political experiences at different levels, increases the chances to remain as RPM.

2. Theoretical framework

Macro and micro explanations of leaders and ministers survival

Different factors have been used to explain the durability of an individual in a political position, either at the individual (micro) or systemic (macro) level. The analysis of the survival of the RPMs in office cannot be distinguished from larger political, institutional or even contextual variables. Hence, previous research on presidents and prime ministers' duration at the national level was initially focused on macro-explanations, distinguishing amongst parliamentary, presidential and semi-presidential systems (Blondel, 1980; Bienen and Van den Walle, 1991; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2004; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2010). Studies on ministerial survival have confirmed more specifically the impact of constitutional rules on the probability of resigning and being fired from the cabinet (Verzichelli, 2009; Dowding and Dumont, 2009; 2015). Beside constitutional and regime explanations, other relevant macro factors are linked to the political environment, such as the type of government, party politics, policy competences or electoral performance (Fischer *et al.*, 2012). For instance, different type of coalition governments triggers different extent of ministerial durability (Quiroz-Flores, 2010). As observed by Alda et al. (2005) for the Spanish case, the resignations occurring during a legislature took place mainly with minority governments made of different parties, although at times with absolute majorities too. Internal coalition dynamics have also been positively associated to ministerial survival (Quiroz-Flores, 2009).

To a great extent, the political context is shaped by political parties. The individual fate of the RPM is indeed closely linked to the one of her party. Best (2003) found out that East-German regional MPs have a higher survival rate if they belong to one of the three largest parties. As expressed by Borchert & Stolz (2002: 4), "the performance of one's own party is an essential precondition for individual success", although an electoral success does not guarantee that a former RPM will remain in or regain the office. Indeed, on at least 24 occasions a change of the RPM took place when the same party returned to power in French and Spanish regional executives. Thereafter, cabinet performance becomes relevant. The effect of popularity and political performance on individual tenures has been tested at the ministerial level (Berlinski, Dewan and Dowding, 2010). Similarly, some studies demonstrate the impact of the economy on chief executives ratings (Hansen, 1999), even if Chiozza and Goemans (2011) have found little evidence

of a link general between performance in international crises and leaders' ability to retain office. Similarly, the decline of the popularity of prime minister affects negatively the survival of cabinet ministers (Kam and Indridasson, 2009) and public calls for resignation reduce the durability of a cabinet minister (Dowding and Kang, 1998; Kerby, 2009; Dewan and Myatt, 2010).

Amongst institutional variables, the state structure is particularly relevant for RPM stability. The institutional context concerns the amount of policy levels, their organisation, their relative power and their mutual relationships. While multi-layered systems were already present in several federal states, the increase of decentralization in former centralized countries in Western Europe has led to the rise of multilevel governance (Keating, 1998, 2001; Hooghe and Marks, 2001, 2012; Moreno 2001; Swenden, 2006). The structural effects of multi-level governance in political actors and the political process have been widely studied, but their consequences are still subject to controversy and discussion (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Erk and Swenden, 2010; Benz and Broschek, 2013) for it might still be seen as a 'Faustian bargain' (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

Multilevel governance and the strengthening of the regional tier in Western Europe, even when organised around a strong central structure, has a direct impact on the career patterns of the political elite (Borchert and Stolz, 2011; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2011; Dodeigne, 2015), as it had been shown for American state governors (Schlesinger, 1957; Sabato, 1983). Hence, the regional institutions may foster professionalization, because of their authority and prestige (Carter and Pasquier, 2010; Hooghe, Marks and Schakel, 2008). The regional level may constitute for individual politicians at the same time an opportunity (for example as more positions and points of entry are available) and a challenge (for example as the number of competitors is increasing). And differences according to the degree of autonomy obtained by regions might also be observed, as a region with more powers and competencies would constitute a more interesting career opportunity than the same position in poorly autonomous regions (Dodeigne, 2015). Still, most of these potential impacts need to be tested.

For the purposes of this article, we argue that the state structure and the way the different policy levels are organised have an impact on ministerial selection in three different ways. First of all, multi-layered political systems enlarge the career opportunities for office-seeking politicians (Schlesinger, 1966; Borchert, 2011; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2011).

Secondly, the empowerment of a regional level fosters the regionalisation of national politics. This process affects ministerial selection at the national level, since it not only expands the pool of recruitment for the ministerial selection but also constitutes new career opportunities. Indeed, it may lead to a better representation of some regions and to a more balanced multilevel equilibrium (involving the regional level in the calculation of the equilibrium between political parties, cabinets, gender, etc.). In this context, the question of congruency in coalition-building at both national and regional levels complexifies the model (Stefuriuc, 2013). In sum, the creation of regional institutions might have a direct impact on the profile of national elites and therefore triggers the emergence of multilevel careers (Rodríguez, 2011; Botella *et al.*, 2010).

Finally, individual (micro-level) variables are often included in explanatory models of cabinet members' stability. Indeed, controlling for 'classic' socio-demographic variables allows for observing their structural role in political survival (Best, 2003; Berlinski *et al.*, 2007). The other relevant individual factor refers to the political career. However, while some scholars have proved the negative influence of national parliamentary experience on ministerial durability (Berlinski *et al.*, 2007; Jerez and Real-Dato, 2005), with some exceptions (Bäck *et al.*, 2009), others suggest that regional experience may have a different effect (Kerby, 2010; Fischer and Kaiser, 2011). Yet the lack of systematic and comparative analysis leaves the question of the impact of multilevel experience unclear.

The influence of political experience

This article argues that, in multilevel political systems, political experience is a precondition for political survival. Indeed, political experience has often been identified as an important variable in the explanation of the electoral success of individual MPs. According to Norris and Lovenduski (1993: 399), "political experience may be another vital resource. Members who have already held public office can be expected to have developed political expertise, speaking skills, practical knowledge of government and social contacts, which will be useful in gaining a seat". Numerous empirical studies analyse the impact of various political experiences in different legislative contexts. There is a relative consensus on the fact that experience – together with other individual and contextual variables – explains electoral success. But these studies are mainly focused on MPs and moreover at the national level (see for example Shabad and Slomczynski, 2002).

One of the very few examples of such analysis at the regional level is to be found in the work of Borchert and Stolz (2002). These authors aim at identifying the career patterns of the German regional MPs since 1948, underlining the importance of previous political experiences for today's position. Assuming that specific career patterns reflect consolidated and reinforced experiences with regard to the positions that are helpful in pursuing a political career, they conclude their analysis by arguing that "it is functional that deputies bring along political experiences from other political institutions". They state further that "the whole career represents a kind of on-the-job occupational training and it is during their career paths that politicians acquire the necessary skills and qualifications" (Borchert and Stolz, 2002: 24).

In this regard, several dimensions are to be considered when dealing with political experience. The first dimension refers to the definition of political experience and presupposes that different positions have to be distinguished. Indeed a political career may cover many different meanings as, for example being candidate (a mere participation) in elections, holding a seat in elected assemblies, holding a seat in executives, holding a key position in party structures, in labour unions, community works, private companies or even in public service. Analyses can even go further by, for example, taking into account the importance and prestige of the occupied portfolio (in the case of a minister) or of the committee (in the case of a MP). This distinction is essential, not only to limit the scope of the research¹, but also to analyse the incentives of any career move. For example, the Belgian national ministers move - or agree to move - to the regional level when they can get some kind of a promotion, i.e. a better status within the regional cabinet, such as a position of regional vice-prime minister or RPM (Dandoy, Dumont and Fiers, 2010).

As the present study focuses on the RPMs, we will operationalize political experience as the accumulation of public positions over time across different policy levels, ranging from local to regional, national or supranational (the European institutions). The positions occupied at these different levels have to be taken jointly in consideration as political careers are more and more made of moves, not only between institutions, but also between policy levels. Indeed, there is a huge variety of possible patterns of political careers between different positions, institutions and levels. One cannot apprehend the full complexity of a political experience if the analysis occurs at solely one level. Therefore we argue that any analysis of political experience is *de facto*

a multilevel analysis, i.e. taking into consideration the experiences made at other policy levels. Previous empirical studies considered political experience at different levels (Marrel and Payre, 2006; Nay, 1997; Alda et al., 2005). In Spain, political recruitment at the national gives increasingly preference for individuals that acquired a regional experience rather than none or only a local one since a previous regional experience has become a key criterion for parliamentary and ministerial recruitment at the national level ((Botella *et al.* 2010; Rodríguez-Teruel, 2011). Yet, institutions and positions have to be taken into account as Fiers (2001: 25) observed the opposite for the Belgian case that – with the exception of executive positions – “one cannot consider the position of regional MP to serve as a stepping stone to the federal level”.

Hence, in European multilayered systems, the acquisition of political experience is a non-linear process where cross-cutting and sometimes conflicting multilevel and multi-position paths are intertwined, in contrast to the national-oriented American model of political career (Deschouwer, 2001; Borchert and Stolz, 2011; Francis and Kenny, 2000). Indeed, political experience is usually not a straightforward movement but often made of ups and downs, of successes and defeats. In countries like France, the practice of ‘*cumul des mandats*’ shapes decisively French political careers and constitutes a key to the functioning of the whole political system, helping to preserve the influence of local politics at the national arena (Knapp, 1991; François and Navarro, 2013).

This dimension again complicates any attempt to fully empirically grasp one’s political experience. In addition, political experience may consist in the combination of simultaneous positions (in the cases where the accumulation is not limited by law) as, for example combining legislative with executive positions at different levels, or together with positions in a labour union or in the public service.

Finally, the time dimension is of prime importance. Even if experience has to be distinguished from seniorityⁱⁱ (see mainly Marrel and Payre, 2006), political experience is not only a matter of the amount of positions, levels and successes a politician could gain but it is also directly related to the amount of time he or she spends in such positions. The experience of somebody staying in office for 20 years is assessed differently from somebody in the same position for two months (even if very successful). In both cases, an informal threshold exists, i.e. a minimum amount of time so that the experience is recognised as valuable and a maximum amount of time so that the politician’s profile is not solely associated to this position and would prevent him/her to move to another office.

In addition, some aspects of one's political experience, such as credibility and legitimacy, are often associated with the time they (successfully) stay in a position.ⁱⁱⁱ

In sum, political experience is a relevant factor for premiership survival, and this must be particularly important in multilevel systems. In regional governments, it means that the previous positions at other policy levels or the accumulation of experience across different political jobs will prepare RPMs for dealing better with problems and crises within the cabinet and the party during their mandate. As a consequence, we should expect *a positive influence of this multilevel political experience in the extent of the tenure of the regional chief executives*.

Hypotheses

Our main hypothesis is that, *ceteris paribus*, the durability in office of the regional prime ministers is explained by their political experience, defined as previous positions as representatives or cabinet members in local, regional, national and/or European institutions. A better knowledge of how political institutions and politics work leads to stronger political abilities to survive. In particular, previous experience at the regional or local level, particularly as mayor, strengthens personal ties with communities and gives political tools to deal with territorial issues. On the other hand, previous positions in national institutions are not just about political experience but also political visibility as a decision-maker that might reinforce the profile of these individuals as regional leaders. Moreover, previous experience reduces adverse selection since politicians have already shown their qualities and political skills and become more predictable in their political style (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo, 2004; Berlinski et al, 2012; Dowding and Dumont, 2015).

Following these considerations, our first hypothesis states that experience at every policy level will help RPMs to stay longer in their positions, which can be formulated separately as follows:

Political experience at the *local level* will increase the durability of a regional prime minister in office (Hypothesis 1a).

Political experience in the *regional parliament or cabinet* will increase the durability of a regional prime minister in office (Hypothesis 1b).

Political experience in the *national parliament or cabinet* will increase the durability of a regional prime minister in office (Hypothesis 1c).

An alternative hypothesis presupposes that multilevel experiences are preferred to solely local, regional or national ones when explaining durability in office. So it is not just about having some prior political experience at one level, but the accumulation of experience across policy levels that influences the durability of the regional leader. From this perspective, multilevel carers give political leaders notability and resources in a way that it becomes a critical factor for leadership survival at the regional level.

The combination of political experience at different policy levels will increase the durability of a regional prime minister in office (Hypothesis 2).

3. Data and method

The empirical test of our hypotheses consists in observing the influence of political experience on the survival of RPMs. In order to compare their durability in office, we have collected the individual characteristics of all 210 regional leaders between 1980 and June 2013 in all forty-nine regions from four Western European countries, i.e. the twenty-six French regions, the seventeen Spanish autonomous communities, Scotland and Wales in the UK, and two regions and two communities in Belgium^{iv} (see Table 1). Out of the 210 individuals in our database, forty-nine are still in office.

Table 1. Data collection per country

	Regions	RPMs	1st year for the data	1st direct election
France	26 ¹	94	1986	1986
Spain	17	85	1980	1980 ³
Belgium	4 ²	24	1981	1974
UK	2	7	1999	1999

1. For France, we include the 22 metropolitan regions and the 4 DOM-TOM. 2. For Belgium, we include two regions (Brussels and Wallonia) and two communities (Flemish and German-speaking). 3. Spanish regions held their first regional elections at different dates (between 1980 and 1983).

Although we are comparing individuals in different regions, regions are clustered in countries, which display national particularities. The four selected countries are some of the most relevant cases of traditional unitarian states in Western Europe that have undergone a process of decentralization. Compared to traditional federal systems, our

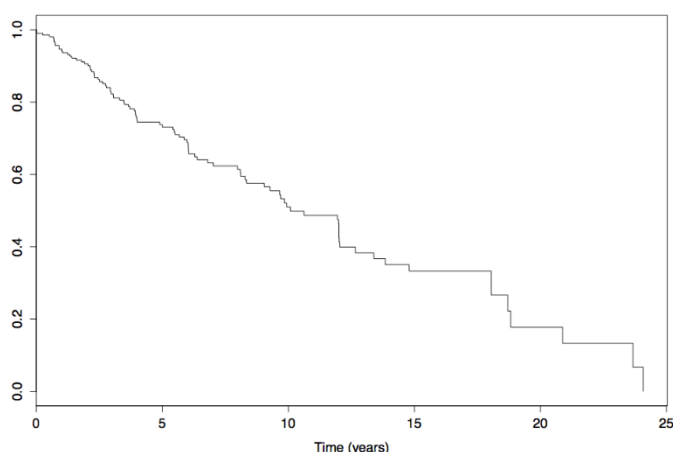
cases have created evolving territorial systems of governance, since all of them are subject to changes over time, due to party and social pressures for more or less decentralization. The creation of the State of the Autonomies in Spain, the '*régionalisation*' in France and the federalization of Belgium were relevant processes of transfer of powers from the centre to the periphery during the 80s and beginning of the 90s. Few years later, the British devolution created a new meso-level of government in the UK (the Scottish and Welsh governments and the City of London). These cases experienced relevant differences amongst them and along time^v. While Belgium evolved in the 1990s towards a complex federal system, the extent of federalization of the Spanish system has been more controverted (Deschouwer, 2013; Moreno, 2001; Morata 2013). The British devolution built an asymmetrical system with strong powers for the devolved institutions (Jeffery, 2013). On the contrary, France has implemented an administrative rather than political decentralization process, where powers transferred to the regional level are substantially much more modest and dependent on the national government than in the other three countries (Loughlin 2013). However, these differences in levels of powers and political evolution do not prevent us to perform a comparative analysis, since the regional layer – with elected parliaments – has become politically relevant for the political system, and the position of RPM, one of the more influential and valuable political positions in each country.

Beyond the level of powers, other institutional differences must be highlighted. Broadly speaking, Spain, Belgium, the UK (using AMS) and France (until 2004) have proportional systems at the regional level, with different levels of proportionality in their results (Dandoy and Schakel, 2013). Since 2004, France moved to a two-round majoritarian system where the winning party gets a majority bonus. This system prevents coalition governments and is therefore a relevant factor to reinforce cabinet stability. However, in all four cases, regional chief executives are formally elected by the regional assemblies and remain subject to parliamentary confidence. This mechanism has led to dismissals and changes of RPMs between elections in France, Spain and Belgium. Even more important, the extent of the mandate varies in the Belgian and French case. While in the other two countries the regional premiership lasts four years until the next regional election, in France the mandate's length is six years, and in Belgium it varied between four, five or six years^{vi}. Obviously, it would mean a serious problem when trying to compare the duration between countries. However, our hypothesis (testing the effect of

political background prior to the first entry as RPM) and our technique of analysis (event history analysis) render possible the comparison of premiers' survival. Our model will include a country variable to control for these specific features.

For the empirical testing of your hypotheses, we will use an event history analysis. This technique is appropriate for our study since the research question focuses on the moment of leaving the position of RPM. More precisely, the event history analysis allows calculating the effect of the independent factors on the probability of leaving the position at any time, given that the individual has survived until that time. The hazard rate will show the risk that the event (the final exit as RPM) will occur. Amongst the different models based on event history analysis, we will apply a semi-parametric Cox-model, since we do not have information a priori on the functional form of the baseline hazard.

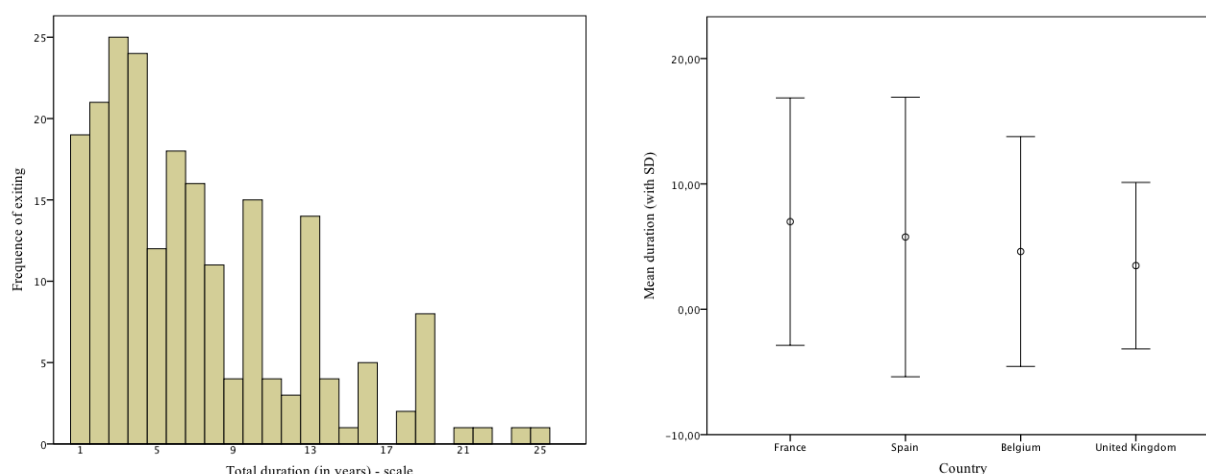
Figure 1. Survivor function for regional primer ministers.



The dependent variable is the total length an individual stay as head of the regional executive, measured in days. In Figure 1 we present the Kaplan-Meier survivor function based upon all the spells in our dataset. For the ten individuals that came back to the position after having left it for some years due to different reasons, we have not considered the time out of office between the first exit and the second election as RPM. When analysing duration with event history analysis, one critical point is censoring for those cases where the event did not occur yet (i.e. the 49 incumbent RPMs) and for those whose exit reasons can hardly be affected by our independent variables. According to this criteria, we have censored those cases that are still in office, those who left for purely non-political reasons (death or illness) and the 49 individuals that left the executive after being electorally defeat (since the electoral defeat of an incumbent RPM cannot be

theoretically linked as a direct consequence of previous political experience; in any case, this link would be totally spurious). These censored individuals are mainly present in France and Spain where there is a large amount of sub-national entities.

Figure 2. Exit frequency per year and mean duration by countries



The length of the position of RPMs is highly variable across countries and regions (Figures 2 and 3). In some extreme cases, the regional chief executives stay for 15 or even 20 years at the head of the regional executive as, for example, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in Auvergne (1986-2004), Charles Picqué in Brussels (almost 19 years in two divided tenures), José Bono in Castilla la Mancha (1983-2004), Jordi Pujol in Catalonia (1980-2003) or Juan Carlos Rodríguez Ibarra in Extremadura, whose 24 years as 'Presidente' is the longest tenure of our data. However, these long mandates are actually very rare, since 90,5 per cent of all RPM lasted less than 13 years, and only 20 per cent stay in power more than 10 years (most of them are French RPMs that remained two complete terms). It is no wonder that France has a higher mean than the other countries, given its six-years term. On the other extreme, it is surprising to find a relevant amount of leaders (almost 40 per cent) that could not complete one term, or even their first year as regional chief executives (9 per cent). All the countries have outstanding examples of such one-year regional leaders, but we find much turnover in Belgian and British regions, as in the case of the Brussels region that witnessed no less than four different minister-presidents in two years time (2003 and 2004). However the extreme cases are represented by French RPM Jean-Paul Gauzès (Haute Normandie) and Bernard Harang (Centre), who stood as chief executives only one week after the 1998 regional election^{vii}. This also accounts for a high interregional variability (as Figure 3 shows). Between the longest tenures (Limousin,

We originally included a variable for the directly elected supra-local governments existing in some of our countries (like Basque provincial or Canary and Balearic insular institutions in Spain or the provincial councils in Belgium), although we finally decided to keep the variable only for the French General Councils. This variable is only employed in the model for France.

Two factors are controlled in the model. On the one hand, we have already mentioned the strong effect produced by national features, notably in the French case. Initially, we employed this control variable as a factorial predictor, which confirmed a differential *beta* for each country. Since these different effects between subsequent countries were approximately the same, we decided to treat the country variable as a continuous covariate, ordering each country by their hazards^{viii}, in order to avoid the problem presented by small groups in Belgium and UK.

On the other hand, we also include age in order to control for the effect of time over political experience. If it is the case that political experience positively covariates with duration, it could be argued that this could be a consequence of simply accumulating political maturity instead of the multilevel effect we are addressing. It could also be argued the opposite rationale: the political experience may be relevant as long as it does not take too much time to be accumulated. If a multilevel career requires too much time, it will end by decreasing the chances of remaining in power (if the RPM becomes too old). In order to clearly assess the impact of political experience, we should expect age not to have any positive or negative effect. If this is so, political experience will be independent from the time it takes to build up a political career. Finally, we do not include gender as control variable. Only 11 women became chief executives of regional governments in the four countries. Other potential control variables (related to some of the factors presented in the theoretical framework) cannot be included in the model because they vary over time, such as type of majority, coalition status and other factors that may change between different cabinets with the same prime minister.

4. Empirical analysis

Our analysis aims at verifying whether political experience fosters the length of regional chief executives. Table 4 presents the results of the Cox proportional hazards model in ‘hazard ratios’ where 1 means no impact at all, a coefficient below 1 indicates

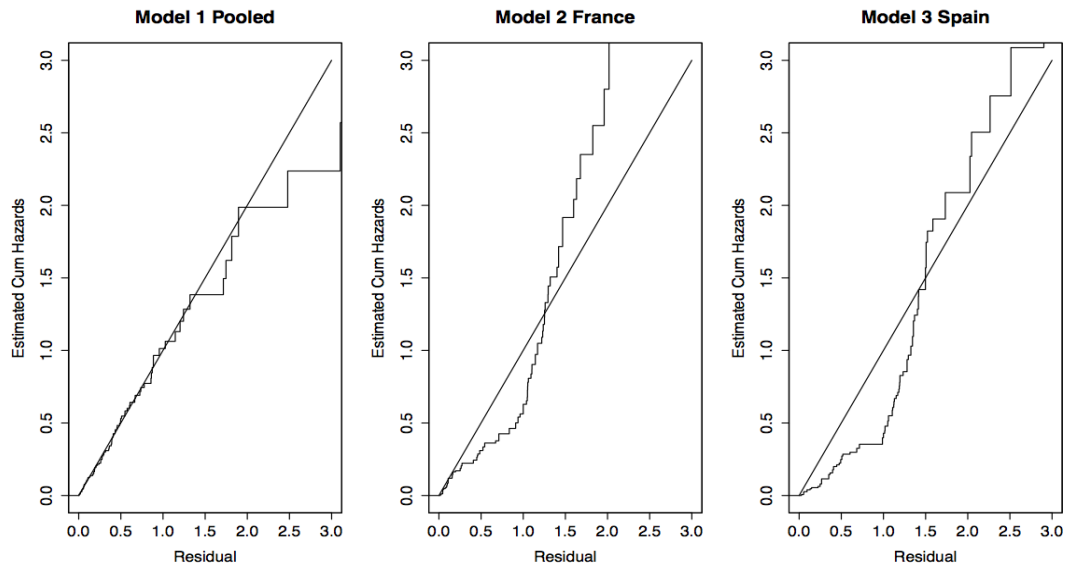
a negative impact (i.e. the reduction of the hazard of leaving the position) and above 1, an increase of the hazard (i.e. more chances to leave the position). The Wald test indicates that the estimated model 1 is an improvement over the intercept-only model. Cox-Snell residuals analysis confirms that the overall model 1 fits very well on the 45-degree line (Figure 4), except for very large values of time, which is not unusual for models with censored data. Conversely, models 2 and 3 present serious deviation from the line, suggesting we have omitted key covariates or that the functional form for one of the covariates is incorrect (Mills, 22011: 151). We tested the proportional hazard assumptions by analysing Schoenfeld residuals and the results also confirmed our findings.

Table 4. Cox-model regression

	<i>Model 1</i> <i>Pooled</i>	<i>Model 3</i> <i>France</i>	<i>Model 4</i> <i>Spain</i>
Multilevel experience	-0.287 ** (0.14)	-0.109 (0.30)	-0.590 * (0.31)
Local experience	0.162 (0.25)	-1.013* (0.62)	0.506 * (0.42)
<i>Conseil Général</i>	-	-0.093 (0.47)	-
Regional experience	0.582*** (0.21)	0.180 (0.43)	1.253 *** (0.40)
National experience	0.366 (0.26)	-0.234 (0.64)	0.885 ** (0.45)
Exit: electoral defeat	0.627*** (0.18)	0.375 (0.28)	0.615** (0.28)
Women	0.109 (0.43)	0.078 (0.51)	0.170 (1.05)
Age	0.014 (0.01)	0.020 (0.02)	0.023 (0.02)
Country	0.282*** (0.09)	-	-
<i>Cases</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Events</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Chi square</i>	<i>0.061**</i>	<i>0.631 **</i>	<i>0.632 **</i>

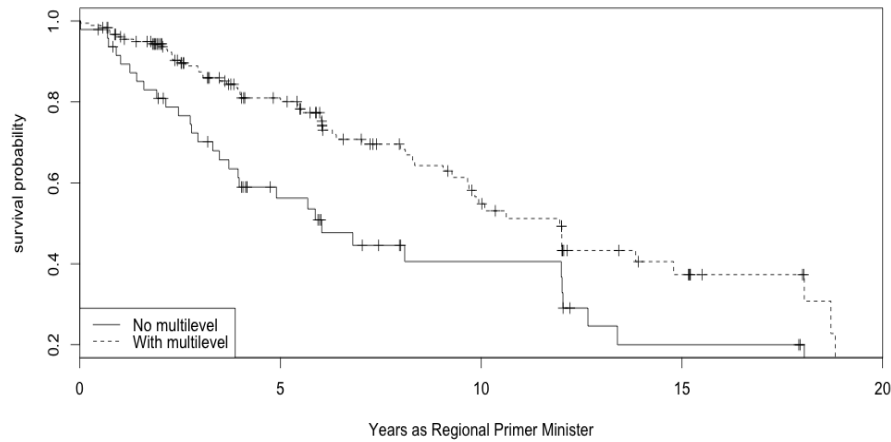
* < 0.1 ** <0.05 *** <0.01

Figure 4. Cox-snell residuals



The first column shows the model for the total set of RPMs. We hypothesized that multilevel political experience should be positively related to the longevity of regional leaders. Indeed, the results reveal a negative impact on the hazard of having political experiences at different policy levels. For each experience at a different level before becoming RPM, the hazard of quitting the position is reduced by 30 per cent. This result confirms our hypothesis 2. Based on Model 1, Figure 5 shows the estimated survival probability for those with multilevel careers (merging those with experience in two or more levels) compared to those without this pattern. The deviation starts a few months after the first entry and increases steadily until the eighth year. In year 12, it seems that multilevel careers no longer have an influence on longevity. This effect is produced by the high renewal rate of French RPM at the end of the second mandate. However, after this particular point in time, the multilevel career continues to increase the chances of surviving in the position compared to those who do not have this type of career.

Figure 5. Estimated impact of multilevel careers on regional prime ministers survival.

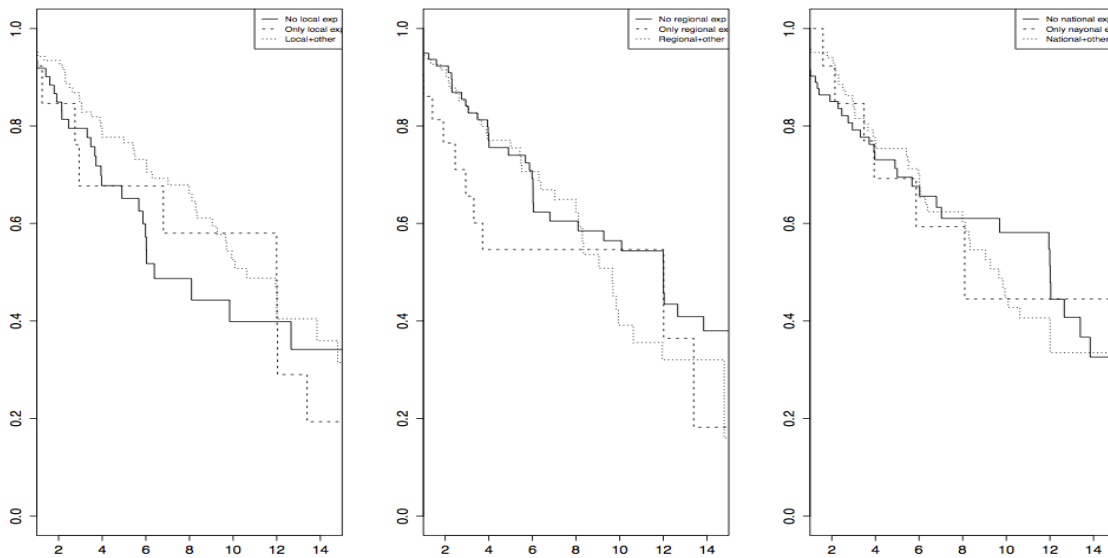


Conversely, a political experience at only one policy level not only is statically insignificant (which must not prevent us of interpreting it, since we have the total population of cases) but the trends are opposite to what we expected: local experience increases the hazard by 27,5 per cent, regional experience increases it by 48,5 per cent and national doubles the hazard of quitting the position compared to those who do not have been in the national parliament or national cabinet. The non-significance of the factors of regional and national experience may be related to the effect of the national context. Indeed, when we exclude country variables from the model, the positive trends remain in the same direction but both predictors become more acceptable from a statistically significance point of view ($p < 0.1$) From these results, our hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c should be rejected.

To what extent is this rejection contradictory to the results of our hypothesis 2? In recently decentralized countries, the relevance of political experience might be conditioned by the multilevel nature of the political system, so that it might depends on *how much* political experience and *where* it has been produced. In this sense, political experience at only one policy level might not be enough if this is not combined with tenures in other levels. Figure 6 suggests that this is what might be really happening. From the Kaplan-Meier survivor functions, we observe that - at least for the local and regional levels - the survival of RPMs having experience at only one level is different compared to those who combine experience in more than one level. Although we must be cautious

with this interpretation (due to the small amount of cases for each subcategory), we may conclude that the rejection of hypothesis 1a to 1c is congruent with the acceptance of hypothesis 2. Hence, in multilevel systems, political survival does rely on political experience given that it may have been developed in different political arenas and not only in one of them.

Figure 6. Kaplan-Meier survivor function for types of career at each institutional level.



Interestingly, there is almost no impact of age (the outcome is statistically significant). It means that the chances of remaining as a regional chief executive are independent from the age to which an individual arrives to this position. More importantly are the country effects. The country coefficient must be read this way: Spain increases the hazard by 47,3 per cent compared to France, the same for UK compared to Spain, and for Belgium compared to UK. Although the differences amongst countries are slightly different (see above), the predictor captures significantly the differential impact produced by each national context.

The second column of Table 4 shows the model for French RPMs only (*Président du Conseil Régional*). Although the lack of significance and the problems of the model adequacy may weaken the interpretation, it is however interesting to highlight some differences compared to Model 1. While the multilevel experience has the same impact for the French cases as Model 1 predicted for all the cases, the effect of local and regional experiences becomes negative (decreasing the hazard of leaving the position). This

change is less meaningful for the local predictor than for the regional, since almost 90 per cent of RPMs had previous local tenures. Finally, Model 3 presents the results for the Spanish cases. Interestingly, the four predictors become significant and reinforce the trend observed in Model 1. The multilevel background of RPMs becomes even more influential (each new experience at a different policy level decreases the hazard by 62,7 per cent), as well as each level separately: the local experience increases the hazard by 163 per cent, national experience by 183 per cent and regional experience by 216 per cent.

5. Conclusion

This article aimed at explaining why some regional prime ministers (RPMs) stayed longer in office than others. Comparing the cases of all RPMs for 49 sub-national entities from Spain, France, Belgium and the UK, this research assessed the importance of the previous political experiences in explaining the longevity of the RPMs. We can draw some original conclusions from the significant results of our model.

First, political experience plays a role in explaining survival in office as long as it is cumulated across different policy levels. Political experience is a complex phenomenon and the indicators have to be decomposed in different types of positions and levels. While local, regional or national experiences seem to play a marginal role taken separately, the combination of experiences at the local, regional, national or even European levels is supposed to have a positive impact on the longevity of the RPM.

This original finding sheds new light on the understanding of political experience and political careers in multilevel systems. While there have been several fruitful attempts to identify the rise of multilevel careers in federal and decentralized systems, the effect of this new patterns of recruitment was unclear so far. We have shown that even if national political features influence decisively the longevity of regional leaders, it does not necessarily neutralize the impact of political careers. Even if the conclusions of our study are limited to the performance of the regional leaders as chief executives, the effect of their previous political position suggest that, in multilevel political systems, multilevel experiences make a difference compared to those individuals who do not have them. This may for example be enlarged to other types of positions such as local mayors or national ministers.

In addition, multilevel experience has an impact not only on longevity, but may also affect the authority of these leaders within the executive and in their interaction with

other political actors. This type of experience may play a role in explaining government performance as the RPM may appeal to its previous knowledge of other policy levels. For example, the implementation of policies that require multilevel coordination or cooperation with actors from other policy levels may be positively affected by the previous experience of the RPM at these levels. In addition, a stable and successful regional political leader may help her party to become stronger in this specific region, with obvious positive consequences for the performance of the party in other types of elections that take place in this territory. Finally, political seniority may manage the claims for decentralization without threatening national integration, while RPMs without a longstanding career may become more politically vulnerable and, consequently, likely to make stronger claims for greater decentralization as a way of reinforcing their political position.

Yet, in order to obtain a better understanding of how regional leaders are successful in their positions, and how this affects the stability of regional governments, different strategies can be implemented. First, future models explaining longevity could include individual socio-demographic variables such as marital status, social background, education, etc. These variables may have interacting effects with political careers. Other political variables could be considered, such as (in-)congruent government formulas or electoral results in other policy levels. For example, when a party enters the national government, the existing RPMs will become an attractive pool of potential national ministers. On the contrary, when a party leaves the national government, some of the resigning ministers would probably move to the regional level to contest for the regional premiership.

Second, the variables measuring the political experience could be refined or enlarged to other forms of experience. The reasons why RPMs leave previous positions could be included in the models and would probably allow a better understanding of an individual's experience. The importance of occupied portfolios could also be included as well as more information on the previous experiences. In addition, other forms of experience could be added, such as positions in labour unions, interest groups, associations, NGOs, media, private companies, public services, etc. Finally, adding new cases from traditional federal countries or less regionalised countries would help to observe the interaction between different political experience and differences in the level of powers.

Appendix

TABLE 3
VARIABLES AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	Definition	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Duration	Regional prime minister tenure measured in years. Failure is defined as an exit of the cabinet, excluding reasons of death, illness and electoral defeat (considered censored cases).	7.04	5.2	0.01	24.07
Multilevel experience	Amount of different policy levels where the individual had previous experience. There are six potential levels: local, supra-local (see below), regional, national parliament, national executive and European institutions.	2.40	1.3	0	6
Local experience	Previous political experience as a mayor or as a local representative. Dummy variable.	0.69	0.5	0	1
‘Conséil Général’ experience	Only for France. Previous political experience as elected in a French General Councils. Dummy variable.	0.53	0.5	0	1
Regional experience	Previous political experience as a regional parliamentarian or regional cabinet minister. Dummy variable.	0.61	0.5	0	1
National experience	Previous political experience as MP (low or high chamber), as a cabinet minister or as a junior minister. Dummy variable.	0.57	0.5	0	1
Age	Age of the individual in the first year of election as regional primer minister.	51.00	9.2	32	78
Country	France (1), Spain (2), UK (3) and Belgium (4).	-	-	-	-
Individuals/events			210 / 94		

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ⁱ Even if Norris and Lovenduski (1993) managed to compare the political experience by measuring a range of different types of activism according to various positions (and even election participation), all these items were added for a summary scale, weighted according to the level of office.

ⁱⁱ Compared to experience, seniority is a much more quantitative indicator of the previous career. It supposes that the individual gained a significant amount of experience in a relatively long period of time in similar positions at different levels or even different positions but at the same level.

ⁱⁱⁱ In this regard, the political experience can also be associated with the electoral experience, i.e. the number of times a candidate participated in elections.

^{iv} Belgium is constitutionally composed of three regions and three communities, but the Flemish community was merged with the Flemish region and we leave aside the French-speaking community as there are not direct elections organised for this institution.

^v According to the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al, 2015), the level of powers in 2010 for the regions included in our research ranges from 25,5 (Navarre, Spain) to 12,5 (Corse, France). Overall, the national RAI values for the regional powers are 34,26 (Spain), 33,09 (Belgium), 20,01 (France) and 11,24 (United Kingdom).

^{vi} The German-speaking community followed a four-year term until 1999, the Brussels region had one six-year term in 1989 and the three other regions and communities had one four-year term in 1995. Since 1999, all regional MPs are directly elected for a five-year fixed term.

^{vii} Both individuals were members of the RPR and were elected heads of the regional government with the parliamentary support of the Front National (FN) against the approval of their national headquarters. Nevertheless, the national office forced them to step down only some days later the vote. In order to prevent such minority parliaments that may open the door to alliances with the FN, the electoral law was modified in 1999 and 2003 and regional elections moved from PR to majority

^{viii} A survival analysis where the country was employed as a factor covariate delivered these coefficients, taking France as a reference category: Spain=0.384; UK=0.814; Belgium=0.998 (the model being significant). Based on these results, we consider that it makes sense to treat them as a continuous covariate, assuming the same difference between country/category.