

5. DO POLITICAL PARTIES MATTER? DO SPANISH PARTIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CHILD CARE POLICIES?

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Do political parties make a difference is one of the biggest questions in social sciences and the extent to which parties do or do not make a difference has enormous implications for our appreciation of the democratic nature of our polities. Unsurprisingly, many studies have sought to estimate the extent to which political parties impact on policy outputs. Do the policy outputs of social democratic governments differ from the outputs of conservative governments?¹ To what extent does the ideological make up of the government determine the nature of government decision making in terms of measures taken? This is a huge question and the present chapter seeks to make a contribution to the ongoing debate. The chapter focuses on a single policy area (child care policy) and a single country (Spain). I ask: to what extent did the change in 1996 from socialist government to conservative government impact on child care policy outputs? Did the change in ideological disposition of the government make any difference on this policy matter? The chapter is organized as follows. First, I elaborate the main debates in studies of gender and politics and of political economy on the topic of 'do parties make a difference on policy matters?' The debate can be fairly crudely summarized using the following hypotheses 1 and 2: 1/Yes, parties do make a difference and 2/No, parties do not make a difference. Second, I justify the selection of the empirical case study and

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present the sources for research. Third, I describe the main central state child care policies in the post 1975 period in Spain. Drawing on analyses of statistics and policy documents, I argue that there are basic continuities in actual policy making in the area of child care regardless of the party in office. This appears to support, in a small (and with qualifications) but not insignificant way, hypothesis number 2. Fourth, I provide an interpretation of why child care policy outputs were not affected by the change of government from socialists to conservatives.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on gender equality policy making in Western countries has argued that generally speaking conservative parties facilitate the elaboration of gender equality policies to a significantly lower extent than social democratic parties (Bashevkin, 1998; Beckwith, 1987; Gelb, 1989; Katzenstein, 1987; Lovenduski & Norris, 1993; Lovenduski, Norris & Burns, 1994; Mazur, 1995; among others). This is so at least for six reasons. First, feminist activism has been more intense within socialist parties than conservative parties. Social democratic parties have traditionally been much more concerned with class inequalities than with gender differences. Nevertheless, feminist leaders and activists of socialist parties have often succeeded in adding clauses involving women's issues to their party platforms. Feminists from social democratic parties have also become policy makers. In their role of state officials, these socialist feminists have advocated and contributed to the establishment of policies to advance the status of women.

Second, female politicians (more often than male politicians) at times try to direct the attention of the political class to issues that may interest women more than men such as child care or maternity leave (Lovenduski, 1993: 7). The proportion of women (whether self-declared feminists or not) among the political elite is often lower in conservative than in social democratic parties. Thus within conservative political elites, there are less people who would pay attention to issues of interest for women.²

Third, equality of opportunity and equality of outcome are present as aims to varying degrees in social democratic platforms. In contrast, when conservative parties pursue equality objectives, they tend to promote equality of opportunity. Thus socialist parties would in principle be more prone to establish policies in favor of disadvantaged groups of society, including affirmative action, in an attempt to achieve not only that people compete on the same terms but also that citizens obtain the same results (Lovenduski, Norris & Burness, 1994: 612; Squires, 1996: 75). The goal of some gender equality

policies is that women and men have the same access to material and cultural rewards, which is an objective directed to equality of results.

Fourth, conservative parties usually defend that the state intervenes in the economy to a very limited extent, arguing that the free play of market forces is the only device to achieve the best allocation of economic factors, high productivity and wealth. State intervention in society is not necessary either, since order and equilibrium in the economic sphere will translate into the social realm (Bosanquet, 1994; Gamble, 1986; Green, 1987; Krieger, 1986; Ruiz, 1997). Thus conservative parties would favor that the state sets basic anti-discriminatory guidelines, and allows the market and society to play freely.

Fifth, conservative policy makers are at times interested in the promotion of a traditional agenda regarding both sexes (Abbott & Wallace, 1992; David, 1986; Lovenduski, Norris & Burness, 1994: 611, 630–631). A mild variant of this agenda would emphasize that the family is the basic cell of the social fabric. Historically, the family has been the sphere where women dedicate more efforts than men. Some (or many) women may also want (or have to) work for wages. Nevertheless, society has to be organized in a way that permits women to fulfill their family and caring tasks. The main family function of most men (economic provision) and most women (the management of the intimate sphere in combination or not with bread-winning) are different but complementary and of equal worth for the development of society and its weakest members (children). Then, conservative governments would try to facilitate that women perform their family responsibilities. Conservative administrations would be less active making the labor market an equally attractive and rewarding place for women and men.

Sixth, conservative parties are supposed to avoid policies that increase public spending. Ultimately, public spending is financed by detracting wealth from citizens. Conservatives defend that this wealth belong to individuals, and that it is better allocated when citizens spend it in the solution of their problems or the satisfaction of their needs in the market. Many (although not all) gender equality programmes are measures that increase authorities' spending, since these programmes impose extra costs to the state.³

Studies on gender and politics have also acknowledged that conservative parties have at times responded to the demands of the women's movement (Byrne, 1996: 67; Lovenduski, 1993: 6–7, 13; 1996: 9; Lovenduski, Norris & Burns, 1994: 611–612; Skjeie, 1993). Thus conservative parties have to a limited extent converge towards socialist parties. Women within conservative parties have pressed claims to be fairly treated as party members, activists and leaders. Conservative parties have included women's issues in their agendas and made some efforts to present a higher number of female candidates in

elections. Once in office, conservative parties have been more willing than in the past to appoint women to governing positions, establish some gender equality policies (especially those that do not contradict the free market logic), and set up or maintain institutions with the explicit purpose of advancing women's rights and status (the so-called 'state feminist institutions' – Stetson & Mazur, 1995). Nevertheless, the general conclusion of most pieces of the literature on gender and politics defend that parties matter and that social democratic parties are much more active than conservative parties in search for gender equality.

The comparative study of policy making by social democratic and conservative parties have been undertaken regarding other areas of public policy different than gender equality. This social science research has reached nuanced findings. To grasp the subtlety of these conclusions, it is useful to refer for instance to political economy studies. While many analyses of gender equality policy making tend to emphasize the differences between policy making by socialist and conservative governments, the conclusions of political economy research are more varied. Some of these studies have found mainly differences in economic policy making by socialist and conservative administrations. Studying the industrial world since World War II, scholarly research has argued that unemployment disproportionately affects workers, who are the main electoral constituency of social democratic parties. When in power, these parties tend to promote anti-unemployment policies. In contrast, more affluent social groups and the business community are chiefly concerned with inflation. Since these people are the principal constituency of conservative parties, while in office these parties usually develop anti-inflation policies (Alt, 1985; Hibbs, 1977, 1987a, b).

Other political economy studies have documented more similarities than differences between economic policies established by socialist and conservative governments, or have identified differences that are not very significant (Hicks, 1984; Williams, 1990). Deep changes in industrial economies have taken place since the oil crises of the 1970s such as high mobility of capital flows, fixed rates, and a pronounced degree of openness of some national economies to international trade. These dimensions of an increasing economic interdependence at the international level substantially reduce the room for manoeuvring in economic policy making at the national level. Thus economic policies undertaken by social democratic administrations tend to converge towards those defended by conservative parties. Economic policy makers from both types of parties have pursued a similar objective (price stability) and have attempted to reduce the degree of intervention of the state

in the economy allowing market forces to play a bigger role (Moses, 1994; Notermans, 1993).

Still, other studies of political economy have documented some differences in policy making between socialist and conservative parties but not other divergences. Analyzing countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development since the 1970s, Rueda (2000) found that social democratic parties have tended to be more active maintaining the employment protection of workers with protected jobs. Nevertheless, Rueda did not identify significant disparities among the two types of governments regarding anti-inflation and anti-unemployment policies. On the other hand, it is commonly accepted that the globalization of the economy has produced the convergence of macroeconomic policies made by social democratic administrations towards those policies defended by conservative parties. Nevertheless, this has not been the case of supply-side economic policies. To increase fixed and human capital (factors of production), some socialist governments have extensively used the public sector, spending on infrastructure, education and, sometimes, creating or fostering a public business sector (Boix, 1998; Garrett & Lange, 1991).

In sum, an important part (but nonetheless a part) of the literature on political economy documents a pronounced erosion of the differences in actual policy making by social democratic and conservative parties. This conclusion is in line with studies on party change which propose that in democracies the requirements of political competition put pressure on parties to look alike rather than diverge. Political parties tend to converge on the center of the ideological spectrum in order to win elections by capturing the median voter (Downs, 1957). Conversely, a relevant part of the literature on gender equality policy making tends to highlight differences between conservative and socialist parties in this area of public policy. Putting the two literatures together, one can ask: has convergence between the two parties also taken place regarding gender equality? If so, why?

SELECTION OF THE EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY AND SOURCES

This chapter attempts to contribute to the knowledge of gender equality policy making by socialist and conservative parties with an empirical study on child care policies developed by the central state in Spain under socialist administrations (1982–1996) and conservative governments (from 1996 to date). In principle, child care may benefit fathers and mothers. Nevertheless, given the division of labor between men and women within most families, child care usually affects the availability of mothers for paid work much more than

that of fathers (Randall, 1996: 178; Skjeie, 1993: 238). It can be argued that economic independence is a necessary ingredient for women's emancipation. Economic autonomy very often means participation in the labor market, since the majority of the population of active age acquires economic autonomy through paid work. Then, child care programmes can be considered a policy that promotes gender equality, since these services facilitate that mothers work for wages.

According to Arend Lijphart (1971: 691), the best research design to study social reality is the comparison of two or more cases. Therefore, I compare policies elaborated by conservative and socialist administrations. Nevertheless, a single case may also be useful. The strength of a single case study 'is that by focusing on a single case, that case can be intensively examined even when the research resources at the investigator's disposal are relatively limited'. Then, I study only Spain, although the comparison of Spain with other national cases would be highly advisable for future research. In addition, a single case can be chosen if it is interesting in itself. Spain is a case in point to analyze policy making by conservative governments, because it is the only European Union (EU) member state (together with Austria) governed by a conservative party. In landmark pieces of research, Ruiz (1999a, b: 449) has convincingly argued that most analyses on gender and conservative administrations examine the United States and the United Kingdom, where conservative parties were in office in the 1980s and early 1990s. Conclusions of research on these anglo-saxon conservative governments are then extended to other polities. This extension may be wrong, since conservative parties may or may not be similar in different countries. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze conservative governments in countries different than the United States and the United Kingdom.

It is important to note that in Spain, child care measures have been understood by policy makers mainly as a part of the education policy but not so much as a part of gender equality programmes (see below). In other countries some social and political actors (mainly feminists active in the women's movement, gender equality state institutions and trade unions) have advanced the demand for more extensive child care policies in order to help mothers to combine professional and family obligations. In Spain, the aforementioned three actors have scarcely advanced this demand (Valiente, 1995: 254–259). Nevertheless, Spanish child care policies are an adequate empirical case to test hypotheses generated by the literature on political parties and gender equality measures. This is true for two reasons. Child care policies de facto influence the degree of equality or inequality between women and men, irrespectively of whether political parties consider child care a gender equality programme or not. On the other hand, the literature on gender and

politics to which this chapter refers is based on case studies on other countries different from Spain. Some of these case studies are on child care.

The sources for this chapter include published government documents, legislative pieces, political party documents, press articles, secondary bibliography, and personal interviews with social and political actors in the policy area of child care.

CENTRAL STATE CHILD CARE POLICIES

There have been mainly continuities in the policy area of child care at the central state level in the last two decades. Under both Socialist and Conservative governments parents have been receiving the following aid from the state for the care of children under six: a relatively generous supply of (free-of-charge) public pre-school services for three-, four- and five-year-old children; hardly any public child care service for children aged two or under; and (up till 1999) low tax exemptions for child care expenses.

In the last two decades, the main central state child care policy has been an ever increasing supply of public preschool programmes for children aged three or over administered chiefly by the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Ministerio de Educación y Cultura*, MEC; before 1996, it was called the Ministry of Education and Science – *Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia*). In academic year 1996–1997, the proportion of children who attended public preschool centers was: 70% of children aged 4 and 5, and 43% of those aged 3. The scope of these programmes is quite high in comparative terms. Since the private sector also provides pre-school places, school attendance rates of 3, 4 and 5 years old children are high in Spain in comparative terms (83%, 100%, and 100% respectively in academic year 1999–2000; provisional data). In contrast, the percentage of Spanish children aged 2 or under cared for in public centers (in academic year 1996–1997) is one of the lowest in the EU: 2.5%. The proportion of children aged 2 or under cared for in private centers is also very small: 3.5% – calculated by Celia Valiente from data contained in: *Ministerio de Educación y Cultura* (1999: 79, 132–134); and data available on 17 July 2000 at http://www.mec.es/estadistica/Cifras/NAC_04.html.⁴

The absolute number and proportion of children who attend pre-school programmes in public centers has been increasing since 1975. While this type of center was attended by 347,026 children younger than 6 in academic year 1975–1976, this figure was more than double (758,458 children) in academic year 1999–2000. Seen from another perspective, in academic year 1975–1976, above a third (38%) of children enrolled in pre-school education attended public centers. In academic year 1999–2000, this proportion was around

two-thirds (68%). The expansion of the supply of places in public child care centers has happened in a context of a reduction of the supply of child care in private centers. In academic year 1975–1976, the number of children enrolled in pre-school education who attended private centers was 573,310, while in academic year 1999–2000 the figure was 361,282 – calculated by Celia Valiente from data contained in: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (1977: 101–103; 1981: 12); and data available on 17 July 2000 at http://www.mec.es/estadistica/Cifras/NAS_01.html.

Public pre-school programmes cannot be used by mothers (or parents) as perfect substitutes for child care, since pre-school hours are shorter than working hours (and sometimes much shorter and interrupted by a break). Similarly, pre-school holidays in public centers are much longer than working holidays. It is important to note that even if the percentage of women in employment is lower in Spain than in most EU member states, most Spanish women who work for wages have full-time jobs. In 1998, the Spanish female employment rate (35%) was the lowest in the EU, and much lower than the EU average (51%).⁵ However, 83% of female workers worked on a full-time basis in Spain. This figure (together with that of Portugal and Finland) was the third highest in the EU, after that of Greece (89%) and Italy (86%), and sixteen points above the EU average (67%) (Franco, 1999: 8–9).

Besides the pronounced expansion of the supply of public pre-school programmes, the other most important development in the policy area of child care under both socialist and conservative administrations has been territorial de-centralization. From the mid-1930s to 1975 Spain was governed by a right-wing authoritarian regime headed by General Francisco Franco. During the Francoist dictatorship, the state was highly centralized. During the transition to democracy, a broad process of devolution of powers from the central state to the regions (not so much to localities) was set in motion. Since the early 1980s, some regional governments have been acquiring responsibilities which had previously belonged to the central state (for instance, education). The process of devolution of full responsibilities on education to all regions was completed in year 2000.⁶

Other child care policies (such as state regulation of private centers, or tax exemptions for child care expenses) are much less important than the supply of preschool places in public centers. Regarding the regulation of private centers, the state established in 1990 that the minimum conditions required of public preschool centers (for instance, in terms of space per child or the number of children per carer) also apply to the private sector. Nevertheless, private centers opened before 1990 were given until year 2002 to adapt to this regulation. In contrast with other countries, paid care provided for children under six in

private homes (by babysitters, child-minders, etc.) is not regulated by the state in Spain (regarding, for instance, the qualifications of carers, the maximum number of children who can be cared for by a person, or the characteristics of the home where care is provided).

With respect to tax reliefs, between 1991 and 1998, payers of the personal income tax could benefit from tax deductions for child care expenses (of the under-threes) of a maximum of 25,000 pesetas per year (around 93 Pounds Sterling) or the equivalent of 15% of the child care expenses. The income of the tax payer could not exceed a given level, and both parents had to work for wages outside the home. In fiscal year 1997 (corresponding to income generated in 1996), 116,371 tax payers benefitted from tax reliefs for child care. The average tax deduction for each tax payer was 12,073 pesetas (approximately 45 Pounds Sterling) (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda, *Memoria de la Administración Tributaria 1997*, page 119; data from the whole Spain except the Basque country and Navarre; data available on 21 April 2000 at <http://www.meh.es/INSPGRAL/MT97/cap2.pdf>).

In brief, since 1975, under governments of different ideological colors, a substantial extension of the supply of public pre-school programmes (the main child care policy) has happened in Spain. This expansion has occurred in a context of continuously diminishing fertility rates (the synthetic index of fertility in Spain continuously decreased from 2.79 in 1975 to 1.15 in 1998; the data of 1998 is provisional – European Commission, 1999: 102). The process of devolution of powers to the regions has also taken place under both social democratic and conservative administrations. Thus basic continuities have characterized child care policies in the last two decades. The Conservative party has introduced only minor modifications in the policy area of child care. The conservative government increased (modestly) tax exemptions for child care expenses in 1998, but abolished them altogether in 1999, in a general and substantial reform of the personal income tax system.

SIMILAR POLICIES OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENTS: AN INTERPRETATION

This section shows that until year 2000 child care policies promoted by the conservative party have been similar to those implemented by the socialist party for two reasons: strong electoral competition between both parties; and in the late 1990s the successful mobilization of left-wing parties and organizations of civil society in defense of the status quo in the policy area of child care.

Studying party positions is a complex and difficult but a feasible task (Mair, 1999; Ramiro, 1999). Party points of view and commitments on specific issues are reflected in electoral programmes and in the resolutions of party congresses. Electoral programmes and resolutions of federal congresses of the social democratic party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) contain the commitment to develop programmes for the under-sixes, conceptualized as educational policies (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 1979a: política sectorial 90, política municipal 8; 1981: 91, 277–279; 1982: 23–24; 1984: 66; 1986: 61, 63; 1988: 44; 1989: 29–30; 1990: 109; 1993: 29; 1996: 51–53). PSOE documents also include some references to child care in the sections related to ‘gender equality’ (although far fewer than in the sections on ‘education’) (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 1976: 19; 1979a: política sectorial 19–20; 1979b: 22; 1981: 233; 1982: 29; 1989: 66; 1990: 61, 109; 1993: 59; 1996: 66–67; 2000: 17).

In its electoral programmes and party congress resolutions, the PSOE had proposed that preschool programmes can be used as tools to achieve a higher degree of class equality. According to this view, children from underprivileged social classes should be enrolled in public preschool programmes. This enrollment would provide them with the educational skills necessary to be successful students in elementary school. This enrollment would also diminish the cultural differences that exist among children of different socio-economic backgrounds. All these ideas reflect the PSOE leaders’ opinion that the educational system might work as an efficient mechanism against social inequalities (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, 1979a: política sectorial 90, política municipal 8; 1981: 91, 277–279; 1982: 23–24; 1984: 66; 1986: 61, 63; 1988: 44; 1989: 29–30; 1990: 109; 1993: 29; 1996: 51–53).

While in office, the socialist party significantly increased the supply of places in public centers, in order to reverse the past trend of unequal access to pre-school educational services. In the 1970s and 1980s educational services for the under-sixes were mainly provided by the private sector. Therefore, chiefly families who could afford to pay the fees charged by private centers provided their children with preschool education. Proportionally less families from more modest socio-economic strata enrolled their children in these centers (De Puellas, 1986: 448–449; González-Anleo, 1985: 74; Medina, 1976: 123; Muñoz-Repiso et al., 1992: 21–22).

If preschool programmes are defined as an education service for pupils, one might ask: at what age should children start to attend education centers? Historically this age was fixed around 6 years (De Puellas, 1986: 447–448). Three decades ago, this age was supposed to be 4 or 5 years (Instituto de la Mujer, 1990; Medina, 1976: 115). Now, numerous political and social actors

have agreed with the view that this age is approximately 3 years. In practice, this idea has been reflected in the provision of numerous places in public centers for children aged 3 or over, and hardly any for the under-threes. Significant sectors of the population have also agreed with these views about the advantages of the preschool experiences described above and the age at which children should start attending preschool activities (Instituto de la Mujer, 1990: 50–54; McNair, 1984: 41–42).

This is the background against which conservative policy makers had to clarify their positions in the area of child care while in opposition and promote policies while in office (since June 1996). In its electoral programmes, the conservative party (under the names of *Alianza Popular*, *Coalición Democrática*, *Coalición Popular* and *Partido Popular*, PP, the last one, the PP, being used in the rest of the chapter) has also understood preschool programmes chiefly as education policies (*Alianza Popular*, 1977: 31; 1982: 104–105; *Coalición Democrática*, 1979: 45; *Coalición Popular*, 1986: 9; *Partido Popular*, 1989: 10; 1993: 56–58; 1996: 98–99; 2000: 29), and to a much lesser extent as gender equality measures, and/or family policies (*Coalición Democrática*, 1979: 37; *Alianza Popular*, 1982: 135; *Partido Popular*, 1989: 29; 1993: 81; 1996: 181–182, 187–189; 2000: 18, 58).

Ruiz (1999a, b) has persuasively argued that it is reasonable to defend that since the late 1980s the conservative party changed its discourses regarding women's issues due to strong electoral competition against the PSOE. In the same line, I now defend that possibly the conservative party also changed its discourses on some topics related to social class (such as child care) while electorally competing with the socialist party. Moreover, once in office, the conservative party promoted public policy in line with these modified discourses.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the conservative party was identified by an important sector of the electorate as a party which defended the interests of affluent citizens (Montero, 1988: 154–157). This identification was extremely negative, since it impeded the PP to win the majority of the vote. After losing several elections, the conservative party started to change its discourse regarding child care. It is an issue that the population and the political class could perceive as related to socio-economic inequalities. The PP electoral programmes between 1977 and 1986 insistently argued in favor of the private sector as provider of child care services. This idea was presented in terms of the freedom of families to choose the type of center that they prefer for their children (*Alianza Popular*, 1977: 31; 1982: 103–104; *Coalición Democrática*, 1979: 45–46; *Coalición Popular*, 1986: 8–10). This discourse resembles the discourses of conservative parties in other countries, for instance, that of the

United Kingdom (Peele, 1988: 27–28; Randall, 1996: 181–183, 190). However, since the 1989 electoral programme, the PP softened its pro-private sector position. Paragraphs on the matter started to appear less frequently in PP's electoral programmes. Electoral platforms began to contain (very few) lines on the importance of the public sector and the need to erode socio-economic inequalities in the access to education. The PP also committed itself to increase the quality of public education if in government (Partido Popular, 1989: 10–12; 1993: 56–58; 1996: 96–98; 2000, 28). Thus in the last decade there has been a convergence of positions by the PP and the PSOE (as reflected in electoral programmes) regarding education.

However, in spite of the aforementioned alteration of the discourse in PP electoral programmes since the late 1980s, in year 2000 the PP's position in education is still different from that of the PSOE. Generally speaking, PSOE electoral programmes have traditionally defended that the state should be the major actor in education, while the PP still defends (although less insistently than in the past) that the state has to play a subsidiary role in this policy area. PSOE programmes continuously refer to equality among social classes as an objective in the policy area of education, while PP programmes emphasize the freedom of individuals and organizations to set up education centers, and the freedom of parents to choose education centers for their children in a scenario of plural supply. Depending on the election, PP programmes also defend that the state provides generous subsidies to private child care centers and/or to families.

Since the conservative party reached government (June 1996), the socialist party, the electoral coalition the United Left (*Izquierda Unida* ideologically to the Left of the PSOE and the third electoral force in most national elections) and organizations of civil society (mainly associations of parents of pupils who attend public education centers, unions of teachers and workers of public centers, and students' organizations) have carefully watched governmental actions in the policy area of education. These left-wing parties and associations have mobilized endlessly against any governmental move in the direction of curtailing the public sector and fostering the private sector as provider of child care services, attempts to increase the tiny subsidies to private centers or to families who send their children there, and diminish the number of pre-school public places or public expenditure on public child care services. This mobilization by the left-wing parties and voluntary organizations has been amply covered by some mass media including *El País*, which is the main national newspaper.⁷ Mobilizations in defense of the preservation of parts of the welfare state have also taken place in other areas of social policy (Guillén &

Matsaganis, 2000). This visible mobilization probably prevented that the PP elaborated more policies in favor of private child care provision.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the predictions of an important part of the literature on political parties and gender equality policy, in Spain the conservative party in power since June 1996 has promoted central state child care policies similar to those put in place by previous socialist governments. In the last two decades the main child care policy has been the increasing supply of pre-school services in public centers for children aged 3 to 6. Possibly, this continuity in policy making can be explained in terms of the strong electoral competition between the socialist and the conservative parties and the successful mobilization of left-wing parties and organizations of civic society in favor of the preservation of the policies established before 1996.

This chapter confirms the conclusions reached by Ruiz (1999a, b) while studying the position of the Spanish conservative party regarding women's issues. Ruiz demonstrated that the ideas defended by the conservative party converged towards the position of the socialist party, probably because the conservative party is an electorally motivated party, which in the late 1980s attempted to convert itself into a catch-all party to reach power. Contrary to the conservative parties of the United Kingdom and the United States in office in the 1980s and early 1990s, the Spanish conservative party moderated its traditional views on women's roles. This chapter shows that since the late 1980s the Spanish conservative party has softened its defense of the private sector as the provider of education in general and pre-school programmes in particular. While Ruiz exhaustively analyzed party positions, this chapter also studies actual policy making. Once in power, the conservative party acted in accordance with the aforementioned renewed ideas in the policy area of child care.

From the conclusions of research made by Ruiz and this chapter, one can infer that more research is needed on electoral competition as a causal factor of changes in party positions and actual policy making. In the late 1980s the Spanish conservative party had lost several elections and started to modify its points of view in order to reach government. However, it is still unknown how the conservative party decided that the positions to be changed were those related to women's roles and child care (among others). Nor is it known which concrete mechanisms made possible the change in party positions (for instance, a modification of the party leadership, or the necessity to comply with the

requirements of membership of supra-national institutions such as the European Union).

It is important to note that the socialist party was in power for fourteen years, while by the time of this writing the conservative party has been in office for four years. Thus the policy continuity regarding child care has to be interpreted with caution. This policy continuity may be a signal that party politics did not really matter in this policy area. Alternatively, it can be defended that the socialist party had been in power for a period long enough to set the agenda in government with respect to child care. Social democrats were able to set targets and values in government departments and civil service, and this remains in place despite a new and ideological different party arriving into power.

Since 1996, the Spanish conservative party continued to develop a part of the education policy (child care programmes) along the same lines of its predecessor in government, the socialist party. This policy continuity raises new questions. Why the socialist governments did not emphasize more the dimension of gender equality policy of child care programmes? Had the socialist party emphasized more the gender dimension of child care, would the conservative party have encountered more difficulties maintaining social democratic child care policies? These new questions go beyond the scope of this chapter but would require further research.

The policy continuity in the area of child care under socialist and conservative governments leads us to the question of policy innovation and preservation. Social democratic governments significantly expanded the supply of pre-school places in public centers and devolved education responsibilities to the regions. The conservative government preserved existing policies established by precedent administrations. Research in other measures different than child care may perhaps confirm that socialist governments innovate in the policy area of gender equality while conservative administrations maintain what is already in place without innovating further. Perhaps dismantling existing programmes requires too high an electoral cost for any party to pay.

Conservative parties are very different among each other. While some promote very traditional agendas regarding gender roles, others do not. Generally speaking, left-wing parties were historically the first to incorporate gender equality objectives in their platforms and actual policy making partly due to successful feminist activism within these parties. Afterwards, some conservative parties (in some cases with considerable delay) have followed suit preserving policies initiated by social democrats while others have not. More research is needed in the future in order to understand which conservative parties have converged towards social democratic positions, regarding which issues, and under what circumstances.

NOTES

1. In this chapter, the expressions 'social democratic' and 'socialist' are used as synonymous. The same applies to 'government/s' and 'administration/s'.

2. This argument has to be taken with caution, since the proportion of female members in conservative parties is usually higher than in socialist parties. Conservative female members can put pressure on activists and leaders of their party to include women's issues among their priorities. Nevertheless, it is not always the case that this pressure is exercised and that activists and leaders of (all) political parties know and bear in mind the demands of the rank-and-file.

3. It is important to note that economic costs are not the only or the most important costs that may preclude conservative parties from establishing gender equality policies. Perhaps the most costly policies for these parties are those which include not economic but ideological costs, such as the regulation of abortion or divorce, because of the moral and religious connotations of these issues.

4. For pre-school attendance rates in Spain and other industrial countries see: European Commission (1998: 76); and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2000: 135).

5. The female employment rate is the proportion of employed women out of the female population of working age.

6. As a result of the process of devolution, programmes formulated by the MEC have affected a decreasing number of regions. Then, the data provided in this chapter for the 1990s (for example, the percentage of children younger than six who attended public pre-school programmes) are the result of public policies elaborated by the central state and regional governments with responsibility on education.

7. In order to document the coverage of this mobilization, I have exhaustively examined the daily edition of *El País* since June 1996 up to the writing of this chapter (Summer 2000).

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