

Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments

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Chapter 12

Directly Elected Mayors vs. Council Appointed Mayors – Which Effects on Local Government Systems? A Comparison between Italy and Spain

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ABSTRACT

This chapter compares the Italian and the Spanish case discussing the influence of having elected or appointed mayors on local government systems. Five elements of the local government systems are compared: the electoral system and its influences on the political composition of the local government; the local government structure and the distribution of functions and powers between Mayor and council; the role of political parties; scrutiny of executive and accountability; citizen participation. Our comparative analysis highlights that overall directly elected mayors have ensured better efficiency in terms of quicker and faster decision making processes, even if mostly at the expenses of democratic representation. Having direct or appointed mayors also impacted on accountability and legitimacy patterns. However, all these effects depended not only on the way mayor is elected, but mostly on other mechanisms, such as, for example, the strong majority prize provided by the electoral law and the bond of coexistence existing between the mayor and the council.

INTRODUCTION

The debate around directly elected mayors is particularly topical (e.g. Bäck, Heinelt, & Magnier, 2006; Bottom & Reiser, 2014; Eckersley & Timm-Arnold, 2014; Elcock, 2008; Hambleton & Sweeting, 2014; Wollman, 2008), as changes concerning European local governments have been taking place in Europe

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recently. These developments account for changes in local political leadership (Bäck, Heinelt, & Magnier, 2006) and are likely to bring about further change.

In this chapter, we discuss the possible effects that could derive from the shift towards a directly elected mayor system. More specifically, we compare the cases of Italy and Spain, adopting a lesson-drawing perspective (Elcock, 2008; Rose, 1993) in the attempt to shed more light on the influence of mayor election systems on local government systems in terms of transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and efficiency.

An electoral reform in which a directly elected mayor system replaced the system based on council-appointed leaders was implemented in Italy in 1993. The reasons for implementing this electoral system were directly related to an attempt to better meet democratic requirements such as transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and efficiency; this reform is nowadays generally considered a successful one. In Spain, mayors are appointed by the council, even if—as in other European countries such as, for example, England—there is currently an ongoing debate about the opportunity of introducing directly elected mayors.

According to the literature on local government, Italy and Spain can be considered comparable local government systems. Many authors have indeed classified Italy and Spain in the same typology of local government system, even if using different labels, for example: Southern type (Denters & Rose, 2005; Norton, 1994; Page & Goldsmith, 1987); Franco (Napoleonic) model (Bennett, 1993; Hesse & Sharpe, 1991); clientelist/patronage oriented (Goldsmith, 1990, 1992); or strong mayor (Mouritzen & Svava, 2002, pp. 55–56).

To carry out this comparative study, we analyzed several features of the two local government systems. In terms of research methods, we built our arguments from a critical analysis of the literature enriched by the experience that we have gained in working with local government in the respective countries.

The structure of the chapter is the following: in the second section we present our framework of analysis; in the third and fourth sections we highlight the Italian and the Spanish case, while in the last section we discuss the main findings of our study.

BACKGROUND

Comparative research aims to compare different contexts in order to identify and to separate common factors from those that are specific (“embedded”) for each single context (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Ragin, 1994). As a consequence, a comparative analysis requires clearly identifying the variables investigated in the comparison.

Here, we focus our analysis on five specific variables: the local electoral law and its influences on the political composition of the local government; the local government structure and the distribution of functions and powers between the mayor and the council; the role of political parties; the scrutiny and accountability of the local government; and electoral participation.

These dimensions have been chosen both for their connection with the goals that have often triggered the shift towards the introduction of the direct election of the mayor and because they have been considered as relevant by the main literature on local government systems (e.g. Copus & Dadd, 2014; Copus, 2004, 2006; Denters, 2006; Garrard, 2007; Heinelt & Hlepas, 2006; HM Government, 2003). Of course, we could have chosen other relevant variables, but we decided to focus on some specific variables in order to delimitate our analysis; future studies may investigate other variables or compare the selected variables in other contexts.

The Electoral System and Its Influences on the Political Composition of the Local Government

The election of the mayor on the basis of a direct election or a council appointment has different consequences when it comes to defining the local electoral system, which at the same time affects the political composition of the local authority. As an example, a two-ballot system can lead voters to split their vote, so that they can often choose different parties for the executive and the legislative branches. It is part of this study to analyze whether and how the direct election of the mayor increases political pluralism in councils and fosters a different political composition of the legislative and executive branches.

The Local Government Structure and the Distribution of Functions and Powers between Mayor and Council

It is undeniable that the way in which the mayor is elected has an impact on the internal structure of local governments as well as on the distribution of functions between mayors and councils (e.g. Denters, 2006). Accordingly, one of the goals of this study is to determine the effects of a mayoral election system on the internal structure of local governments in terms of organization and distribution of functions by comparing the structures of local authorities in Italy and Spain. To do so, we also make a comparison between the different roles that councils and mayors play in those two different contexts: this is extremely important, since a reassignment of those roles could change the decision-making process and the way in which decisions are taken and for whom.

The Role of Political Parties

It is also part of this study to determine how the role of political parties can change depending on the electoral system and depending on for whom the mayor is elected. The independence of the mayor and the lack of a direct link with a political party make a difference in the role of political parties regarding the decision-making process. The importance of the political parties in the electoral process has been pointed out by other scholars (e.g. Bottom & Reiser, 2014); however, beyond that, political parties can also have an influence in the decision-making process if the connection between the decision makers and the political parties is close enough to allow such thing to happen. This is especially true when mayors are chosen within the ruling party's apparatus. As a matter of fact, whenever there is a strict relationship between people in local governments and national parties, the latter hold tight control over their representatives in the local council in all matters, including coalition formation and voting.

Scrutiny of the Executive and Accountability

The legal mechanisms established to hold the mayor and the executive branch of the local government to account are closely related to the way in which mayors are elected. There is also a close relationship between the effects of such mechanisms on the executive branch of the local government and its continuity in power. Moreover, as local public services are increasingly delivered through multi-agency arrangements and external providers (e.g. Alford & O'Flynn, 2012; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2009; Grossi & Reichard, 2008), this role is surely to grow in importance.

Electoral Participation

The option between a directly elected mayor and a mayor appointed by the council also has an influence on the participation of citizens in local elections, making them potentially more or less interested in taking part in local elections. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discuss how the shift to directly elected mayors may have an influence on citizen participation and, more broadly, on local governance.

THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE: A DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYOR

The practice of directly electing mayors was introduced in Italy by Law No. 81 in 1993. This reform introduced a majoritarian and presidential local government model (Cassese et al., 2003), replacing the previous models based on a proportional system. This change was considered inevitable by almost all the main opinion leaders at that time. Indeed, local governments were characterized by high levels of political instability, and changes in the majority of the councils were so frequent as to deeply affect the governing capacity of many Italian local governments (Sancino & Castellani, 2016).

The Electoral System and Its Influences on the Political Composition of the Local Government

In Italy, mayors are elected directly by citizens: in municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, this happens by two separate ballots, whereas in municipalities with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, the list receiving a simple majority in the election wins and gets two thirds of the seats, and their leading candidate becomes mayor (“winner takes all” system). The rest of the seats are allocated on a proportional basis to the other lists. In municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, a mayor is elected in the first round if one candidate gets more than 50 percent of the votes. If not, a run-off election is held between the two candidates receiving the highest number of votes. In both cases, the coalition supporting the winning candidate gets 60 percent of the seats in the council, and a proportional majority is thus formed.

The elections are every five years, and the same person cannot be re-elected mayor for more than two consecutive times. Citizens can express two kinds of vote in local elections: one for the council and one for the mayor. In the case of the vote for the council, in municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, citizens choose one list and then they can express their preference for the role of councilors voting for one man and one woman by writing their names beside the list’s symbol; the interesting thing in these municipalities is that one citizen can vote for a list that is part of a different coalition and, at the same time, for a mayor who is not supported by the voted list (the so-called *voto disgiunto*); in other words, they have two different kinds of vote. This is not allowed in municipalities under 15,000 inhabitants.

Summing up, we can argue that the new electoral law created the necessary conditions to ensure the stability of the local government by means of the strong majority prize that allows more cohesive majorities to form. However, this happened at the expense of democratic representation. As a matter of fact, considering the trend towards the proliferation of lists and of mayoral candidates in the Italian local governments, there are many cases where lists in municipalities with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants and coalitions in municipalities with more 15,000 inhabitants may get around one third of the valid votes, but, by means of the strong majority prize, they get 60 percent of the available seats in the city council.

The Local Government Structure and the Distribution of Functions and Powers between Mayor and Council

In Italy, the mayor is the body that represents the municipality both politically and legally and acts as the official of government in the functions delegated by the state to the municipality. Basically, the mayor performs three independent functions: head of the municipality, head of political majority, and official of government (Vaciago, 1999). In municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants, the mayor appoints the cabinet (*giunta*), and may choose as members (*assessori*) persons not already elected as councilors. Italian legislation gave the mayor of bigger municipalities the option of choosing members of the cabinet from outside the council on the basis of the idea of separating the administration of the municipality from the representation. With this distinction in place, the mayors had potentially the opportunity of appointing as members of the cabinet people with professional backgrounds not necessarily involved in local politics. However, this option has rarely and partially been used by Italian mayors. Besides that, the mayor appoints the heads of offices and services and representatives of the town in local quangos and municipal corporations.

The personalization of the power of the mayor is made even more evident by the fact that those people are directly appointed by the mayor and almost freely dismissible by him or her. Summing up, the mayor is the central figure of the municipality with very strong powers. The resignation of the mayor implies the automatic forfeiture of the city council, since the two bodies are connected by a bond of coexistence. Thus, the majority of the council has interest in supporting the mayor, as the eventual fall of the mayor would lead to the immediate dissolution of the board. This presidential system leads to the weakening of the local council and its members, even if they are formally in charge of the approval of very important administrative actions, such as the budget and the main town planning acts. However, beyond that, the councilors are actually merely intended to pursue a function of scrutiny and overview of the main political and administrative activities performed by the mayor and the cabinet.

The Role of Political Parties

The reform of the mayoral elections changed profoundly the political system of the local councils and in particular the role of political parties in local government. The reform has resulted in four effects: the weakening of the influence exercised by parties; the emergence of new political movements locally which then exported the electoral success at the national level; the boom in civic lists; and the increasing influence of the mayors of large cities on national policy.

The weakening of parties' influence stems from two main factors: on the one hand, the possibility for the voters to express a vote of preference for the role of councilor and, on the other hand, the directly elected mayors' personalization of the political and administrative stage (Vandelli, 1997). This has resulted in a more direct relationship between voters, elected councilors, and the mayor that has greatly diminished the influence of political parties at the local level. This personalization of the political representation has projected many mayors successfully onto the national scene. This has happened especially for the center-left coalition, where mayors like Mr Rutelli (Mayor of Rome), Mr Veltroni (Mayor of Rome), and Mr Renzi (Mayor of Florence and current Prime Minister) ran in the general election as the candidate for Prime Minister leading the center-left coalition.

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These dynamics have led to the overcoming of traditional forms of representation such as political parties and trade unions by imposing a relationship of control and direct accountability between the political actions of the cabinet and the citizens. It has emerged an “ask-the-mayor” model as regards all the political issues that fall within the municipal area. Moreover, as previously stated, the introduction of directly elected mayors has resulted in another important phenomenon, that is, the emergence of civic lists centered on the political message of the candidates as mayors; in many cases, those lists have obtained very relevant electoral results. To give you one of the most relevant examples of this trend, consider that, in the case of the local elections for the municipality of Verona (260,000 inhabitants) that were held in 2012, the civic list labelled just with the name of the current mayor obtained 37 percent of all the valid votes and was the most voted list among the 23 lists that were presented at that election.

Scrutiny of the Executive and Accountability

In Italy, overview and scrutiny functions have been assigned to local councils. As a matter of fact, the premise of the reform introducing directly elected mayors was that the executive powers would have been fully delegated to the mayor and the cabinet, leaving the city council with decision-making powers limited to some strategic matters, like budget approval and land planning. However, the reality of Italian municipalities is that the administrative support of civil servants is mostly concentrated on assisting the activity of the cabinet, with a more marginal amount of support given to city councilors for pursuing their role.

As a consequence, the main effect of the allocation of executive powers to the cabinet and overview and scrutiny powers to the council has been the disempowerment of the role of the councilors, who are in most of the cases not equipped to play the new role of overview and scrutiny that the law has assigned to them. This has had relevant impacts on the quality of local governance in two main ways: on one hand, councilors have tried to engage inappropriately in daily executive issues; on the other hand, cabinets have exercised their executive role without a proper counterbalance of powers owing to the general ineffectiveness of councilors in exercising overview and scrutiny functions.

Electoral Participation

Italian directly elected mayors have played a great role in revitalizing local democracy through their more direct and engaging style of dialoguing with the constituency. According to the last survey on the level of trust Italians have in public institutions (DEMOS, 2014), the municipality is the level of government Italians have the most trust in. Mayors and members of the cabinets have become the key gatekeepers of citizens’ and civic groups’ interests and issues: in other words, individuals have substantially replaced parties in their traditional role of mediation and representation of civic interests and issues. This personalization of local power has been pointed out also by Magnier (2004, p. 181), who described its consequences for both the decision-making process and the representative process. In terms of the effects on the electoral turnout, Italy is also experiencing, like many other European countries, a trend towards a decreasing electoral participation, but it should be pointed out that local elections together with general elections are the two kinds of elections where Italian citizens tend to participate more.

THE SPANISH EXPERIENCE: A COUNCIL-APPOINTED MAYOR

The Electoral System and Its Influences on the Political Composition of the Local Government

Generally speaking, it can be said that the local electoral system in Spain is based on a model according to which mayors are appointed by the council (Martínez Marín, 1989). Directly elected mayors are an exception that the Spanish Constitution specifies for small municipalities (those with fewer than 100 inhabitants) in which the residents (who have the right to make their vote) happen to rule the council based on the principle of direct democracy (Martín Retortillo, 1982). Contrary to what happens in other countries, such as the UK, where local councils hold referendums on the question of whether or not to introduce an elected mayor, in Spain authorities are not obliged to consult local residents on their governance arrangements in order to ascertain demand for a directly elected mayoral system.

The Spanish Constitution does not state which system is to be adopted by other municipalities (Jiménez Asensio, 2001), as the parliament has the power to pass statutory legislation (Parejo Alfonso, 1987) to establish a directly elected mayor system or a council-appointed mayor system. In that situation, the Regimen Electoral General Act establishes a council-appointed mayor system, except in those small municipalities in which a directly elected mayor is provided by the Constitution (Vallés, 1986).

According to the Regimen Electoral General Act, the electorate vote for the election of councilors by choosing from an ordered list of candidates that have been put forward by their political parties, so voters' choice has mainly to do with the election of the political party that they would like to rule the council (Sánchez Morón, 1992). In adopting this electoral system, citizens vote for political parties rather than for individuals. The number of seats that each political party obtains in the council is based on a system of proportional representation. The benefits of proportional representation have been highlighted by several authors (Coscolluela Montaner, 1988; Muñoz Machado & Coscolluela Montaner, 1979).

The Spanish system is a council-appointed mayor system, although, if the required number of votes is not obtained, then there is an automatic election, as stated by the Local Government Act (García García, 2011). However, the system implies that the largest party in the local government is successful in forming a coalition or getting the majority of seats, so that it appoints the mayor. In practice, the mayor is always the leader of the party with the greatest number of seats. The majority of councils are controlled by one of the main political parties or by some coalition of political parties. The general practice is that the largest political party or a coalition of parties forms a majority group which controls the council. The next largest group forms the opposition. The political party that captures the greatest number of seats dominates the decision-making process.

The election of the council on the basis of a proportional representation system fosters a plurality of political parties (Mouritzen & Svara, 2002), which makes it difficult to reach agreements between the different political parties that happen to have a seat in the council. In contests where three or more parties stand, the winning candidate frequently receives less than 50 percent of the votes cast. The electoral system often delivers hung councils that are councils in which no single party holds more than half the seats.

The Local Government Structure and the Distribution of Functions and Powers between Mayor and Council

In Spain, there are several local government systems, depending mainly on the number of inhabitants, but also on other factors. The structure of local authorities may vary from one municipality to another. In the case of municipalities with a small number of inhabitants (fewer than 100) or municipalities that historically have had that way of government, the power lies in all the residents who are entitled to make their vote. They gather in an assembly that has the power to make decisions. This assembly is presided over by a mayor who has been elected by the members of the assembly (García Fernández, 2001; Parejo Alfonso, 2004).

Nevertheless, the system described above is an exception, since the majority of the municipalities adopt a different structure Mercadal Vidal, 1988; Morell Ocaña, 1988). The structure is as follows:

1. A mayor and a committee have executive functions, the committee being chosen by the mayor (Ortega, 1991), that is, the mayor forms a cabinet from among the councilors. The mayor and committee hold most of the executive powers. The committee consists of councilors, each with responsibility for a key area of the authority's functions. However, there are still meetings of the full council, presided over by the mayor or chairman, which all members of the authority attend. Committee members have responsibility for particular areas of policy, and the mayor can delegate executive powers to such members, individually or collectively. This committee is not required to be politically balanced, since it can consist of members of just one party. The executive can, thus, formally be filled by a single political party (or a coalition of parties).
2. The council or backbench councilors represent their electorate, share in the policy and budget decisions of the full council, suggest policy improvements, scrutinize the executive, and pass secondary legislation. The legislative power is held by the council, which is empowered to pass bye-laws. Councilors also have competences to adopt executive decisions, in particular those that imply a great amount of public money. So, sometimes laws draw a line to distribute the functions between the council or the mayor and the committee, based on the amount of money involved (Calonge Velázquez, 2004-2005).

The relationship between the institutional design of local government and democratic accountability has been pointed out by some researchers (Baena del Alcazar, 2000; Aliende, 1996; Hambleton & Sweeting, 2014). This structure does not feature a complete separation of roles between the executive and the council. The system can make it difficult for the cabinet to reach agreements, since the decision-making process requires a quorum, and this is not always easy to reach (Muñoz Machado, 2009). The latest reforms have tried to amend this situation by shifting power from the council to the mayor and committee. At some point, it was thought that more executive powers should be transferred to the mayor and committee, which was done at the expense of the council, with the purpose of making it easier for local authorities to make decisions in a quicker and more effective way, according to the needs and local interests. This resulted in a redistribution of power between both institutions, which increased the power of the mayor and committee, even though they are not elected on the basis of a direct election of the mayor by the electorate.

To compensate for the powers that have been transferred to the executive branch, and also to prevent councilors from feeling excluded from the decision-making process, they have another role: some of

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them sit on an overview and scrutiny committee, of which there must be at least one in each council (Parejo Alfonso, 2005). Their membership cannot include executive members of the council, and they must be politically balanced. The role of such committees is to review, scrutinize, make reports on, and issue recommendations concerning matters related to the council's executive functions. The role of overview and scrutiny committees has been enhanced by requiring councils to respond publicly to such committees' recommendations within two months.

This is the reason why the Local Government Act has been amended several times, in particular in 2003 as an attempt to redistribute the power between the mayor and the committee and the council (Muñoz Machado, 2011). In particular, the local government system that has been affected the most by this reform is that of largest cities. The reform implied transferring greater power to the mayor and the committee, as an executive branch of the local government, so that they can set up the policy framework and implement policies within the agreed framework. This redistribution of power gives the executive branch of the local government more power to bypass an uncooperative local council. Under these reforms, the role of the full council has been reasserted, particularly with regard to passing key strategies by setting the policy framework (the array of annual performance plans and strategies relating to such issues as community safety, libraries, and sports), passing the budget, and appointing key officers. Furthermore, a key duty of local councilors is that of overview and scrutiny.

The reforms shifting power from the council to the mayor and the committee mean a change in the roles of the council and the mayor. The backbench councilors (or council) are in charge of passing secondary legislation (bye-laws) and controlling the executive. But even so, the separation of power is not complete. The reform means shifting power from the local council to the mayors, and, as a result, it has changed the decision-making process and the way in which decisions are taken and for whom. The decision-making power has been increased at the expense of the council. In any case, this shift or move to a new distribution of power does not represent a change in the power available to the local authority. There has been a redistribution of power, so that the mayor and the committee take over most of the executive power of the council.

The Role of Political Parties

Political parties have an important influence in local government in Spain. The influence is arguably greater than it should be in local governments, since they have a role not only in the electoral process (Coscolluela Montaner, 1988; Muñoz Machado & Coscolluela Montaner 1979), but also once the elections have already been held, as it will be explained later on.

All councilors are elected as members of political parties. Council candidates contest elections on behalf of registered political parties. Once elected to the council, councilors sit in party groups. It is a legal requirement for those standing as candidates for local authorities to be members of a party. Political parties decide who is going to run for local elections. In most local authorities, councilors are elected on the basis of the political party that they represent.

Political parties also have an important role when it comes to the election of the mayor, since the person who ranks top on the electoral list is the most likely to be elected mayor. Mayors are dependent on their political parties because they owe their position to the party. Their principal loyalty is therefore to the party.

However, political parties have an influence not only on the electoral process, but also after the election has taken place. This is because political parties meet on a regular basis to make policy decisions.

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The policy decisions of majority parties usually become council decisions in due course after being approved by the council and committee meetings. This is a way to enforce party discipline that has an effect on the smooth running of the authority.

What has been mentioned above also has an effect on relations between Spanish central and local governments. In Spain, the recent history of local government is one of excessive central government intervention. Local governments are often subject to constant reforms directed from the center. Policy direction over local government tends to reflect a party's national standing in relation to its results at general elections rather than local polls.

Scrutiny of the Executive and Accountability

In addition to passing laws and making budget-related decisions, the council is also concerned with the efficiency and efficacy of the day-to-day workings of the process of administration. To this end and through a variety of procedures, the council seeks to scrutinize the activities of those who are responsible for making decisions and implementing local government policy (Sánchez Blanco, 1982). The council is responsible not only for legislating, but also for holding the mayor and the committee to account.

The principal procedures used for this purpose are political accountability mechanisms:

- **Questions for Oral Answers:** Oral questions provide the council with the opportunity to question the mayor and members of the cabinet. Three days' notice must be given.
- **Select Committee:** They consist of a number of members, with the various parties being represented according to their proportion of seats in the council. There is a regular or permanent select committee that controls the actions of the executive, whose creation was due to the shift of power from the council to the mayor and cabinet at the expense of the council. It was a way to compensate for the shift of power and the greater power that was transferred to the executive branch of the government. This is the system of check and balance. Ad hoc select committees are also possible. They are appointed to investigate and report on specific topics.

These mechanisms are used, respectively, to extract information and explanations from government, to debate government policy and administration, and to undertake detailed inquiries into government operations.

- **Vote of No Confidence:** The drastic sanction of a vote of no confidence is the only method by which the council can enforce collective responsibility (González Trevijano, 1996; Rebollo Puig, 1985; Santolaya Machetti, 1985). It requires the mayor and the cabinet to resign if defeated by a vote of no confidence. The mayor and the committee will be forced to resign after losing a no-confidence motion. This situation forces the mayor and the cabinet to resign because it means that they are no longer in effective control of the local government's affairs.

When the executive is defeated by a vote of no confidence, there is no need to hold elections in advance, but a new mayor has to be elected. In the first case, the promotion of a no-confidence motion by a certain number of councilors requires the proposal of a new candidate who will automatically be appointed if the no-confidence motion is successful.

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There is no legal requirement for the councilors to remain in the same party once elected. Defections between parties on issues of principle and party discipline happen from time to time. Those councilors who leave their parties can join another party and can thereby cause the mayor to resign from his/her post by this means.

When the vote of no confidence is linked with executive proposals, the procedure for appointing the new mayor is the same as the usual procedure for appointing a mayor (López Pellicer, 1990).

The reason for the law to state this system is to prevent an impasse in decision making. The lack of agreement about important issues could hamper the local authority in adopting important decisions that are essential for the community, such as those that have to do with the budget.

Electoral Participation

The turnout for local elections in Spain as an indicator of public interest and health of local democracy has recently been a cause for concern, since it is significantly lower than it used to be. However, the reason for this situation has nothing to do with the mayor election system. In fact, the local turnout is very similar to that in general elections. The reason why the number of votes cast has decreased lately in Spain has to do with the feeling of dissatisfaction towards politics and politicians owing to the recent scandals related to corruption. The requirement according to which it is necessary to be ranked first on the electoral list to become a mayor makes people identify the candidate who runs for elections. Therefore, they have a perception of proximity and representativeness that has an influence on voting behavior, making voters more interested in taking part in the electoral process (Sánchez Morón, 1992).

CONCLUSION

One of the main drivers for establishing a directly elected mayor was to improve local democracy in terms of transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and efficiency. However, we have to point out that the achievement of those aims depends not only on how the mayor is elected, but also on other factors, such as the local electoral law and how the power is divided between mayor and council. Institutions matter, and the choice of political–administrative structures makes a difference. In particular, according to our analysis of the Italian and Spanish case, we observed that the option of a directly elected mayor implies a redistribution of power between the executive branch of the local government and the council. Thus, this kind of reform strengthens the separation between executive and representative roles and functions; this involves a shift of power in the sense that the mayor and the cabinet are able to make decisions without the council taking part in them. Summing up, the first main effect that the authors can highlight from their comparative analysis is that the decision-making process and the policy implementation may benefit from the introduction of directly elected mayors in terms of efficiency, since decisions are made more quickly because it is easier to reach agreements.

Nevertheless, to stabilize the local government, it is also necessary to establish an electoral system according to which the mayor is supported by the majority of the members in the council. In this perspective, a directly elected mayor system must be supported by an electoral system that assures the smoothness of the decision making. This is the reason why a first-past-the-post electoral system has been established in Italy. This electoral system guarantees that the majority of seats go to the party or coalition of which the mayor is member, even at the expense of the representativeness of citizens, who can

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be better represented when the electoral system is that of proportional representation. This system can lead to a situation in which a political party dominates the council, but this position is not the result of an overwhelming advantage in votes cast. From this point of view, legitimacy is based on policymakers providing local services efficiently rather than on the idea of policymakers representing the electorate; in other words, local government action is orientated towards output legitimacy.

The separation of roles between the cabinet and the backbench councilors is said to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability. However, the direct election of the mayor is not a requirement in terms of separation of roles and functions and reinforcement of the executive branch of local authorities. Similar effects can be met in the context of an indirect election system, which is the case of Spain. In the Spanish case, the same separation of roles and functions in order to make the decision-making process easier has been possible without having a directly elected mayor. To compensate for the loss of executive functions, the legislative branch of the executive is given more powers to control and supervise the actions of the executive.

It has also been argued that the democratic requirements are best met in those cases in which the mayor is directly elected by residents, since in these cases it is understood that the mayors are more legitimated in their role because of the fact that the citizens have elected them directly. At the same time, it is thought that citizens become more involved in elections, because they are voting directly for the person of their choice. The Spanish system shows that similar results could be met even with other systems, like that in Spain where the person who runs first in the list is likely to be elected mayor, so, although this is not a directly elected mayor system, citizens behave and make their vote following a pattern that is very similar to that of Italy, where the system means citizens vote for the mayor directly.

Political parties play a greater role in those cases in which the election of the mayor follows an indirect election system, like in Spain. Parties are responsible for appointing the candidates who will run for elections, and, in the case of mayors, the candidate who ranks first in the list is the most likely to become mayor, so the power of political parties to decide on this matter is particularly relevant. Candidates stand for elections on the basis of party positions. This arrangement also plays a decisive role after the elections, since political parties often tend to make known their presence in the decision-making process by leading councilors or even mayors to make those decisions that best fit in with their general policy rather than the local interests. This system promotes party discipline among the members of the council, so policy decisions of majority parties usually become council decisions. In contrast, in those political systems in which mayors are directly elected by citizens, the connection between political parties and mayors seems to be less strong. This system also separates mayors from council politics and reduces the power of parties in policymaking.

In terms of accountability, the option of a directly elected mayor or a council-appointed mayor determines the way in which the mayor is held to account. In the case of a council-appointed mayor, the local leader is held to account by the full council through a vote of confidence, which is directly related to the way in which they are appointed. Moreover, the shift of power between the mayor and the full council has prompted the reinforcement of those functions of control and scrutiny as a mechanism to compensate for the loss of executive power. In the case of directly elected mayors, they are primarily accountable to the electorate. This matter also raises a problem regarding the capability and legitimacy of the council to remove the mayor from his or her office, since mayors have been elected by voters, not the council, and it stands to reason that those who have the option to choose the mayor must be also those who hold the power to remove the mayor from his or her post.

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