

Football and Politics in Spain: An Empirical Analysis of the Social Base of the Main Football Clubs

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the hypothesis of political-identity isomorphism between the main Spanish football clubs and their fans. This hypothesis makes it possible to expect a connection between the political orientations that have traditionally characterized FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid and the main traits of the political culture of their fans. The study is empirically supported by the data from a survey carried out in 2014 by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS, 2014). The results show a high convergence between the political and ideological aspects associated with these three clubs and the political culture of their respective fans. Therefore, they confirm the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis. They results also show, however, the need to reject an excessively homogeneous and unitary view of the followers of these clubs because, in all three cases, relevant percentages of fans were found to be in ambivalent positions or diametrically opposed to what would be expected according to the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis.

Key words: Football, politics, Spain, sociology of sport.

Resumen: Este artículo ha tratado de examinar la hipótesis del isomorfismo político-identitario entre los principales clubes de fútbol españoles y sus seguidores. Tal hipótesis permite esperar una conexión entre la orientación política que tradicionalmente ha caracterizado al FC Barcelona, el Athletic de Bilbao y el Real Madrid y los principales rasgos de la cultura política de sus seguidores. El estudio se apoya empíricamente en los datos de una encuesta realizada en 2014 por el Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS, 2014). Los resultados muestran una elevada convergencia entre los aspectos políticos e ideológicos asociados a estos tres clubes y la cultura política de sus respectivos seguidores y, por tanto, confirman la hipótesis del isomorfismo político-identitario. Los resultados también muestran, sin embargo, la necesidad de rechazar una visión excesivamente homogénea y unitaria de los seguidores de estos clubes en la medida que en los tres casos se han identificado proporciones relevantes de seguidores que se sitúan en posiciones ambivalentes o en las antípodas de las que cabría esperar desde la hipótesis del isomorfismo político-identitario.

Palabras clave: Fútbol, política, España, sociología del deporte.

1. Introduction

Football was brought to Spain at the end of the 19th century, following the trajectory of British economic expansion. Records show that it was first played in 1872, with its introduction being attributed to British workers in mining companies in Huelva (Polo; Pujadas and Santacana). In the last decade of the 19th century, football began to be played in Bilbao and San Sebastian. In this context, big clubs, which still exist today, were established through a joint effort between Spaniards and foreigners: Athletic de Bilbao in 1898, FC Barcelona in 1899, and Real Madrid in 1902. These were the first stages of a sport whose competitive context, in little more than a quarter of a century, would be organized at the national level, with the consolidation of the Spanish Championship (1903), the adoption of the First Regulations in professional football (1926), and the creation of the League (1928) (Bahamonde 2011).

To a large degree, part of the rise of football was based on the progressive adoption of regional and socio-political symbolism by the clubs. The clubs became identity referents for a society that saw them as a way to express their feelings of belonging to a community. This tendency was exacerbated by the fact that, in most large Spanish cities, two football clubs emerged, which over time became staunch rivals, intensifying the feelings of identification with each club. The rivalries at the beginning of the 20th century, therefore, did not arise from social stratification processes; instead, they were a reflection of representation and integration mechanisms in the new urban dynamics that were developing in Spanish society at the time (Domínguez 85). However, the high level of symbolism acquired by the clubs provided the matches with a seriousness and sense of transcendence that were previously unimaginable (Llopis-Goig 2015).

Currently, neither time nor the enormous social and economic transformations that have affected the world of football seem to have eliminated the regional symbolism or political connotations associated with clubs such as FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid. This seems obvious if we focus on the declarations of some of the managers and the images and messages circulating about them in the media, social networks, and numerous sport and informative publications. However, can the same thing be said about the fans and people who identify with each of these football clubs? Are they characterized by political and identity orientations that agree with those traditionally attributed to the clubs? In other words, is there political-identity isomorphism between the football clubs and their fans? The confirmation

of this hypothesis would show that the socio-political potential of the Spanish clubs is still active, in spite of the merchandising processes experienced by European football in the past twenty years (Giulianotti), and that their socializing potential has not declined.

Based on this proposal, the main objective of this article is to examine the degree to which the fans of the main Spanish football clubs are characterized by a certain political and nationalist/regionalist orientation. It analyses the degree to which the political orientations of the fans are related to those that have traditionally been projected by or attributed to their clubs. To do so, it is necessary to trace the links these clubs have historically shown with the political sphere and analyse, based on the data from a representative statistical survey of the adult Spanish population, the main opinions and political attitudes of their fans. Therefore, the study has both a historical and a quantitative-sociological purpose, although the latter is its main objective. This objective has not been addressed by any other previous study. It is true that the relationships between football and politics have been studied on many occasions, but always from different approaches, such as the historical perspective (Shaw; Díaz Noci; Bahamonde, "El Real Madrid"; Llopis-Goig, "Identity"; Madrid; Burns, "De Riotinto"; Quiroga) and the qualitative perspective (Crolley and Hand, "Football"; "Spanish"; "Football and European"; Gómez; Vaczi "Their skin"), and by studies that have focused on only one club (Colomé; Unzueta; Walton; Burns "Barça"; MacClancy, "Nationalism"; "Nacionalismo"; Santacana, "El Barça"; Castillo; González Calleja; Miravittas) or on the Spanish national team (González Ramallal; Vaczi, "The Spanish"; Sanz Hoya). Exceptions are the contributions by Llopis-Goig ("Clubes"; "Identificación") and Tuñón and Brey, all of them carried out from a quantitative perspective, although with different objectives and based on data from a survey carried out in 2007.

This article is dedicated to the football clubs that have historically had the greatest political connotations, FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao, and the one that has had the highest degree of identification in Spanish society (and has not been exempt from political ties throughout its history), Real Madrid, with 37.9% of the total number of fans. FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao are second and fourth, respectively, in this regard, representing 25.4% and 3.3% of the population that follows a football club. Thus, these three clubs make up 66.6% of all the identification with football clubs in Spain. It should be taken into account that identification with football clubs reached more than

two-thirds of the adult population in Spain: in 2007 it reached 66.8%, and in 2014, 67.1% (own processing based on CIS, 2014).

When talking about political culture, three elements are used that largely synthesize its main dimensions in Spanish society (Botella): national identity (degree to which the population feels Spanish or from the region to which they belong), preferred type of state, in terms of the degree of territorial decentralization considered appropriate for Spain, and ideological orientation (self-positioning on the left-right axis). The data used in this study come from the June 2014 Barometer conducted by the Sociological Research Centre (CIS 2014). This survey was carried out from the second to the twelfth of June 2014 in 239 towns from 46 provinces in Spain. During the survey, 2485 people of both sexes over the age of 18 were interviewed in their homes. A multi-stage sample with stratified clusters and primary sampling units (municipalities) and secondary sampling units (sections) was randomly and proportionally chosen. The final units (individuals) were found according to random assignment and sex and age quotas. The sampling error for a confidence level of 95.5 per cent (two sigma), a $p = q$, and based on a simple random sample was $\pm 2.01\%$.

The article is made up of four sections. The first one includes the historical background for the study. Then, three other sections examine: first, the national/regional identification; second, the type of state preferred in terms of the degree of territorial decentralization; and third, the ideological self-positioning of the followers of the main football clubs. The article ends with a section that summarizes the main findings and formulates some conclusions.

2. Politics and Collective Identities in the History of Spanish Football

Athletic de Bilbao dominated Spanish football during the first decade of the 20th century and in the years prior to the Civil War. From its origins, the image of Athletic de Bilbao was based on the idea of a club that represented the city and its surrounding area. This image was strengthened by the executive committee's decision in 1919 to hire only Basque players (Shaw 21). Not in vain, from its foundation in 1899, the club had managers and players linked to the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). During the Second Republic, the identification between Athletic de Bilbao and Basque nationalism increased, and the club supported the campaign led by PNV in favour of Basque autonomy.

Athletic de Bilbao, along with other Basque clubs, supported Basque autonomy. With the outbreak of the Civil War, it became a member of the Euzkadi national team, making its first appearance in Paris in April and playing matches in Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Norway. Later, when the Basque country had been invaded by the *nacionales* (rebel military), the team moved to Mexico where it played in the National League before dissolving (Shaw 22). However, the identification between Athletic de Bilbao and Basque nationalism had some nuances that should be mentioned because certain sectors of the PNV were against football and preferred Basque pelota. Furthermore, in the 1920s and 1930s, many Basques frequently expressed both Spanish and Basque identities with no apparent problems, as demonstrated by the acceptance of the Spanish national team in various Basque cities during that time (Quiroga 50).

In Catalonia, in spite of having been founded by a Swiss man, Hans Gamper, FC Barcelona soon became a symbol of Catalanism, unlike its city rival, RCD Espanyol, which was regarded by most Barça supporters as a centralist team. With these identity characteristics, it is not surprising that matches between these two teams have been real local battles since the beginning of the 20th century. Nonetheless, the greatest clashes were produced by the centralist bias of some political decisions and policies. The symbolism of FC Barcelona increased during the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, who came to power in 1923, marking the beginning of a military dictatorship that would foreshadow the later Francoist period. Previously, in 1919, FC Barcelona had supported the pro-autonomy campaign organized by the leader of the Regionalist League, Francesc Cambó, who had adopted Catalan as the official language of the club and raised the *senyera*—the Catalan flag—in the stadium of Les Corts (Quiroga 48). Primo de Rivera eliminated Catalan from the public sphere and prohibited the *senyera*. The *senyera* was replaced during public demonstrations by the Barça flag, thus generating a symbolic fusion of the two flags that would be repeated during the dictatorship of General Franco. The persecution of Catalan symbols by the Primo de Rivera regime clashed with the social reality of an entity that found itself in a golden age (Pujadas and Santacana 1999, 36). This could be seen in the club's 25th anniversary celebration in 1924, an occasion that the club took advantage of by publicly declaring its relationship with Catalanism. An incident that had a strong impact during this period occurred in June 1925 when, after some whistling and booing by fans

during the Spanish national anthem, the military governor closed the old FC Barcelona stadium, Les Corts, for six months (Colomé 172). After the fall of Primo de Rivera, FC Barcelona supported the campaign in favour of the Catalan autonomy statute and maintained its link to the Catalan movement during the Second Republic (Quiroga 48). At the beginning of the Civil War, the president of FC Barcelona and deputy in the Spanish Courts for Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (the Republican Left of Catalonia), Josep Sunyol, was shot by a group of Francoists after the vehicle he was traveling in entered an enemy zone by mistake. This assassination caused great upheaval in Catalonia. As in the case of Athletic de Bilbao, many FC Barcelona players joined the fight against the insurgent military in 1936, and in April 1937 the club went on tour around Mexico (Shaw 23).

After the end of the Civil War, sport became part of the state's machinery in Franco's dictatorship. For the first time, there was a radical shift in the conception of sport, which became a political tool at the service of the totalitarian State (Santacana, "Espejo" 206). Sport was subordinated to the state and impregnated with fascist terminology. Football finally adjusted its rules to the development of the political regime, and only in the last period of Franco's dictatorship could the clubs start to reassert their influence (Shaw 38).

The consecutive victories of Real Madrid in the first five editions of the European Champion Clubs Cup contributed decisively to improving the image of Franco's Spain abroad, as pointed out by numerous academics and researchers specializing in the period (Botines; Shaw; Bahamonde, "El Real"; Ball). This was true not only due to the five convincing European Cup victories, but also to the results achieved against their rivals, their playing style, and their capacity to overcome adverse scoreboards. Alfredo Di Stéfano, Ferenc Puskas, and Francisco Gento were the main stars on a team whose fame and prestige went beyond Spanish borders. Without meaning to, Real Madrid acquired strong political symbolism during the Francoist period, to the extent that they came to be considered the *regime's team* (González Aja 198).

However, Real Madrid was not the only club that acquired a strong political profile during Francoism. The Basque and Catalan clubs, in particular, acquired a high level of regionalist significance, and they even became channels of expression for part of the political opposition to the regime. Apart from the regionalist significance that clubs like Athletic de Bilbao or FC Barcelona had acquired previously, Basques

and Catalans mainly adhered to the Republican cause during the Civil War. Consequently, Franco neutralized any institutions that could have a separatist motivation. The Basque and Catalan languages were marginalized, and their use was prohibited in schools and other official institutions. The flags of the Basque Country and Catalonia, the *ikurriña* and the *senyera*, respectively, were also banned, along with many other manifestations of regional identification (Llopis-Goig, “Spanish Football”).

During the 1940s and 1950s, football clubs – including Athletic de Bilbao and FC Barcelona – were directed by Falangists or local business owners who had declared their loyalty to the Caudillo at the end of the Civil War. However, after two decades of institutional convergence with the political regime, football achieved some degree of autonomy (Bahamonde, “El Real” 186). The managers and members who led the football clubs in the 1960s and 1970s were less tolerant of the centralist arrogance and anti-democratic authoritarianism of the regime, and they were closer to the political and cultural opposition movements that began to develop in regions like Catalonia and the Basque Country. Taking into account the enormous difficulties created by the powerful repressive machinery of the Franco regime, it is not surprising that football stadiums were one of the few places where they could hoist their regional flags, express themselves in their native languages, and express their opposition to a centralist and repressive regime that threatened their regional identities.

FC Barcelona, mostly made up of local footballers until the 1960s, started to contract foreign players as a way to assert its rivalry with Real Madrid. Although this new hiring policy did not produce significant sporting results until the mid-1980s, FC Barcelona became the “national team” of Catalonia and was regarded as one of the most important Catalan institutions, in both economic and political terms. The repression in Catalonia after the Civil War had contributed to this special significance. Barça matches in the old Les Corts stadium became powerful nationalist *performances*, an orderly way for thousands of Catalans to wave their *senyeres*, sing songs such as *Els Segadors*, and speak in their scorned mother tongue. The 1960s and 1970s saw the transformation of FC Barcelona into the true catalyst of the nationalistic aspirations of the Catalans. The Franco regime did not mind that football could serve as a scenario for expressing regional tensions. In fact, as the writer Manuel Vázquez-Montalbán highlighted

on many occasions, during Francoism, football was a “relief valve” through which opposition to centralism was channelled (Vázquez-Montalbán). With the presidency of Agustí Montalt (1969-77), the club began an ambitious policy of Catalanisation. In 1972, the *senyera* flew in the stadiums, Catalan was heard over the megaphones, and one year later the entity recovered its original name. The club increased its nationalist orientation at the same time that it increased its capacity to integrate the waves of immigration from other regions of Spain in the 1950s and 1970s (Llopis-Goig, “Spanish Football”).

With the advent of democracy, FC Barcelona increased its catalanising function. Thus, for example, on the 13th of April 1977, the general assembly of the club passed a resolution that demanded an autonomy statute for Catalonia (Santacana, “El Barça” 310). Two days later, the celebrations of the European Recopa, won by the club in Basel, turned into a political demonstration demanding an autonomy statute for Catalonia. However, although the link between Barça and Catalanism was strong during the last quarter of the 20th century, it never reached the strength it was going to acquire with the arrival of Joan Laporta to the club’s presidency. Josep Lluís Núñez (president of the club from 1978-2000) always remained on the fringe of the hegemonic party in Catalonia, *Convergència i Unió* (CIU), and he maintained fairly tense relations with the President of the Catalan Government from 1989 to 2003, Jordi Pujol (Burns, “Barça”; Miravittlas). His successor, Joan Gaspar (president from 2000-2003) did not hide his political inclinations toward the main right-wing Spanish party, the *Partido Popular* (PP) (Quiroga 185).

However, things took on a different tone with the arrival of Joan Laporta to the FC Barcelona presidency in June 2003. This young lawyer — who had the support of *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC) and certain sectors of the Catalan right — developed a discourse with strong independence connotations, in which the Catalan nation appeared as a victim of a prolonged injustice perpetrated by a Spanish state that continued to asphyxiate Catalonia and impede its progress. Laporta began a programme of re-catalanisation of the club that made him a favourite figure of the independence movement, although it also produced distrust among some of the club’s fans (Quiroga 188). Meanwhile, the club’s extraordinary playing and excellent results in recent years have turned FC Barcelona into an international reference. Contributing to this is the consolidation of Lionel Messi as one of the best players of all time, as well as the elaboration of high quality football

under the management of the coach Pep Guardiola. In addition, the evolution of the political situation, with a majority of deputies in the Catalan Parliament currently favouring the creation of an independent Catalan state, has been a determining factor in the direction taken by the club.

The support for nationalism also grew in the Basque country during late Francoism. One month before the Government of Spain legalized the *ikurriña* — the Basque flag —, the captains of Athletic de Bilbao and Real Sociedad had already carried it in front of thousands of fans who had attended Atocha stadium in San Sebastián to watch a match between the two teams (Quiroga 206). The gesture was repeated on many occasions, and at the end of May 1976, the newspaper *El País* stated that the players on these teams had done as much as the political parties to recover the *ikurriña*. In addition to supporting the Basque autonomy and the spread of Euskera, Athletic de Bilbao developed a home-grown sport policy — based on hiring only Basque and Navarran players — which made it an important emblem of Basque nationalism. It should be taken into account, however, that Athletic de Bilbao was not alone in this endeavour, as other Basque clubs such as Real Sociedad also defended the *ikurriña* and followed a home-grown sport policy. In any case, Athletic de Bilbao continued to be a symbol for all Bilbaoans, regardless of their degree of support for Basque nationalism.

Although the policy of hiring only Basque and Navarran football players was developed without controversy in the last two decades of the 20th century (Unzueta), in the mid-1990s — when Athletic de Bilbao was about to descend to second division — it was questioned by some sectors (MacClancey, “Nationalism”). However, the club’s President at the time, José María Arrate, defended this sport policy and considered it an essential element of the club’s identity (Quiroga 219).

The Board of Directors of Athletic de Bilbao was under the control of the Basque Nationalist Party in the 1980s and 90s (Leguineche, Unzueta and Seguro, 1998) and at the beginning of the 21st century, which facilitated the club’s good progress in economic terms, the renovation of its sport city, and the construction of the new San Mamés stadium. The defence of the grassroots was formalized in a document known as Plan DENA in 2001, which highlighted the priority of hiring Basque and Navarran football players: first, those coming from the reserve and, second, those coming from other clubs (Castillo). Athletic de Bilbao has maintained this sport policy until the present day — unlike

Real Sociedad, which returned to hiring foreigners in 1989–, making it a unique case at a global level.

Although the booing of the royal family and the Spanish anthem by Athletic de Bilbao fans during the final games of the King's Cup in 2009 and 2012 demonstrated the resentment of some of the Basque fans toward the main symbols of the Spanish nation, the socio-political situation of the Basque Country is quite different from that of Catalonia. On the one hand, after almost four decades of criminal activity, the terrorist group ETA renounced its armed conflict in 2011. On the other, the current Lendakari of the Basque Government, Íñigo Urkullu, has stated on many occasions that the independence of the Basque Country is not one of his main objectives. All of this establishes a clearly different political situation from what is present today in Catalonia.

3. Regional/National Identification and Pride in the Spanish Team

After presenting the main historical coordinates that have determined the evolution of the ties of FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid with the political sphere and, more specifically, with the space of regionalist/nationalist feelings, this section aims to examine the opinions and political attitudes of their fans in order to find out whether there is convergence between them and the clubs. The objective is to discover, on the one hand, whether the FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao fans maintain a political orientation of identification with their own regions (rather than with the whole of Spain), if they declare themselves in favour of strongly decentralized forms of territorial organizations of the state, and whether they place themselves in left-wing ideological positions, given that these positions are where decentralization of the state has traditionally been proposed, compared to a more unitary and centralist vision that has characterized right and centre-right positions. On the other hand, another objective is to test whether Real Madrid fans consider themselves mainly Spanish, choose more centralist state forms, and ideologically consider themselves more on the right, in consonance with the traditional image of this club, especially due to its consideration as the “regime's team” during the Francoist stage.

As mentioned above, the empirical information available refers to the degree to which the fans of each club feel Spanish or of the region where they reside (national identity), the degree of territorial decentralization of the state they consider most appropriate for Spain,

and their position on the left-right axis (ideological self-positioning). In relation to national identity, there is a fourth indicator related to the degree of pride experienced every time the Spanish national team performs well in a sport championship (pride in the national team).

Next, a comparative analysis is presented of these indicators for the fans of FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid, that is, the population over 18 years old that self-identify with these football clubs on the survey. Taking into account that the fans of these three clubs are dispersed throughout the Spanish territory, the statistical information corresponding to each of them is subdivided: first, the results obtained in the whole of Spain and, second, the results registered in the region where the club is located; FC Barcelona in Catalonia, Athletic de Bilbao in the Basque Country, and Real Madrid in the Community of Madrid. It is important to keep in mind that, according to the survey on which the study is based, 49.2% of the FC Barcelona fans live outside of Catalonia, 30.4% of the Athletic de Bilbao fans live outside the Basque Country, and 76.5% of the Real Madrid fans live outside the Community of Madrid.

The data represented in table 1 show that a majority of the fans of the three clubs feel equally as Spanish as belonging to the region where they live. In the case of FC Barcelona, 42.8% of its fans in all of Spain and 35.2% of its fans residing in Catalonia state that they are both Spanish and from the region. The exclusive feeling of being Spanish is clearly higher among the fans living in Spain than among those living in Catalonia (15.3% and 9.7%, respectively). Although quite low, these latter numbers reveal that the condition of *culé* is not incompatible with the feeling of being Spanish, as can be derived from the schemas and stereotypes often used to address these questions in the news media and in numerous informative publications. In any case, those who feel exclusively or more from the region make up 28.4% in the whole of Spain, whereas in Catalonia the percentage is 45.4%, and both percentages are much higher than those presented by, for example, the fans of Real Madrid.

Among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao all over Spain, the majority feel just as Spanish as they do from the region (35.7%), although this proportion is lower than what is obtained by FC Barcelona. In the Basque Country, the number of fans who feel more attached to their region is higher than those who feel more Spanish, and along with those who only feel tied to the region, represent 56.4% of the population. None of the Athletic de Bilbao fans in the Basque Country defined themselves as exclusively Spanish, although the percentage reached 10.7% in the whole

country. In any case, the results also show that being a fan of Athletic de Bilbao is not incompatible with feelings of being Spanish: 16.1% and 7.7% of their fans in Spain and the Basque Country, respectively, define themselves exclusively as Spanish or as more Spanish.

The national identity of Real Madrid fans is quite different from those of these two clubs. In fact, 55.7% in Spain and 37.6% in the region of Madrid consider themselves both Spanish and from their region. Likewise, 23.8% and 35.6%, respectively, consider themselves only Spanish. There is, then, a predominance of a dual identity and, above all, a percentage of Spanishness that was not as high in FC Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao fans.

Table 1: National and regional identity feelings

<i>Football club</i>	FC Barcelona		Athletic de Bilbao		Real Madrid	
<i>Fans from...</i>	Spain	Catalonia	Spain	Basque Country	Spain	Madrid Region
Only Spanish	15.3	9.7	10.7	--	23.8	35.6
More Spanish than native of the region he/she lives in	5.4	2.8	5.4	7.7	9.0	14.1
As much Spanish as native of the region he/she lives in	42.8	35.2	35.7	28.2	55.7	37.6
More native of the region he/she lives in than Spanish	13.6	19.0	25.0	33.3	6.1	2.0
Only native of the region where he/she lives	14.6	26.4	16.1	23.1	1.3	0.7
None of the above	6.6	4.6	7.1	7.7	3.3	9.4
NK/NA	1.7	2.3	--	--	0.8	0.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

A second approach to feelings of national identity is provided by a more strictly footballistic indicator, the degree of pride experienced by the fans of the different football clubs when the Spanish national team performs well. As the data from table 2 show, the majority of the fans of the three clubs have feelings of pride (very and strongly proud), although they are much higher in Real Madrid fans, and they obtain the lowest scores among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao. In the case of the latter, 41% of the fans in this territory feel not very or not at all proud of the successes of the Spanish national team, a percentage that is around 32% in the case of FC Barcelona. However, in both cases, a majority state that they are proud of the successes of the Spanish national team: 51.3% of Athletic de Bilbao fans and 66.7% of FC Barcelona fans in their respective regions.

Table 2: Feelings of pride when the Spanish national team performs well

<i>Football club</i>	FC Barcelona		Athletic de Bilbao		Real Madrid	
<i>Fans from...</i>	Spain	Catalonia	Spain	Basque Country	Spain	Madrid Region
Very proud	40.0	30.1	23.2	10.3	60.8	57.0
Fairly proud	37.4	36.6	39.3	41.0	32.8	32.2
Not very proud	9.4	13.0	17.9	20.5	3.5	6.7
Not proud at all	11.8	19.0	14.3	20.5	1.1	0.7
NK/NA	1.4	1.3	5.3	7.7	1.8	3.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

The numbers are quite different among the fans of Real Madrid, both in the whole country and in the region of Madrid. As table 2 shows, the proud fans make up 93.6% in the former case and 89.2% in the latter. By contrast, the percentage who state they are not very or not at all proud is reduced to 4.6% and 7.4%, respectively.

4. Preferences Related to the Territorial Organization of the State

After examining the differences related to identitary feelings, this section is dedicated to the analysis of the preferences related to the territorial organization of the state. The data that appear in table 3 show the existence of important differences among the fans of the three football clubs. The Real Madrid fans in the region of Madrid were mainly in favour of a state with one central government with no autonomy for the regions (30.9%). Next, 24.8% state that they are in favour of the current system, and 21.5% believe that it would be advisable to reduce the autonomy the regions currently have. The fans of Real Madrid in Spain overall are slightly more in favour of the current system (39.8%), although 37.6% support reducing the autonomy the regions currently have.

The situation is quite different among the fans of Athletic de Bilbao. Its fans — both in Spain and in the Basque Country — are equally in favour of maintaining the state as it is currently set up (41.1% and 41%, respectively). However, the other preferences move toward wanting greater autonomy for the regions (35.8% and 43.6%), whereas the percentages of those in favour of reducing the autonomy reach only 12.5% in Spain as a whole and 5.1% in the Basque Country.

Finally, among the fans of FC Barcelona, a clear demand for greater regional autonomy is detected. In fact, among the club's fans living in Catalonia, the preferred option is one where the autonomous regions could become independent states, with 42.6%. This is followed by a state where the regions have greater autonomy than they have now, with 19.9%. Thus, 62.5% of the FC Barcelona fans in Catalonia demand greater territorial decentralization from the central state.

Table 3: Preferred type of state (degree of territorial decentralization)

<i>Football club</i>	FC Barcelona		Athletic de Bilbao		Real Madrid	
<i>Fans from...</i>	Spain	Catalonia	Spain	Basque Country	Spain	Madrid Region
A state with one Central Government without autonomous regions	15.1	8.3	7.1	--	22.8	30.9
A state in which the regions have less autonomy than they currently have	5.9	4.2	5.4	5.1	14.8	21.5
A state with autonomous regions as in the current system	27.8	16.2	41.1	41.0	39.8	24.8
A state in which autonomous regions have greater autonomy than they currently have	15.1	19.9	30.4	35.9	7.2	6.0
A state in which autonomous regions could become independent states	23.5	42.6	5.4	7.7	2.5	2.0
NK/NA	12.6	8.8	10.6	10.3	12.9	14.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

This indicator also shows that the fans are not merely “transmission belts” of the political positions projected by the football clubs with which they identify. Only in this way is it possible to understand that 21% and 12.5% of the Barça fans — in Spain and in Catalonia, respectively — are in favour of a state where there is no autonomy for the regions or less autonomy than there is now. In the case of Athletic de Bilbao, these two positions are held by 12.5% and 5.1% of its fans in Spain and the Basque Country, respectively. Finally, the Madrid fans feel inclined toward a state with a degree of territorial decentralization like the current one or much less, but they also support positions that demand greater autonomy for the regions — 7.2% in Spain and 6% in the region of Madrid — or even the possibility that these regions could become independent — 2.5% and 2%, respectively —.

5. Ideological Orientation (Scale of Self-placement on the Left-right)

The last indicator selected to examine the political culture of the fans of the three Spanish football clubs has to do with the political ideology. The variables commonly used to measure this construct consist of asking interviewees to place themselves on a ten-point scale, where one corresponds to the position on the far left and ten to the one on the far right. To synthesize the information recorded, the ten positions were grouped in five categories defined as left (1+2), centre-left (3+4), centre (5+6), centre-right (7+8) and right (9+10).

Table 4 collects the scores for each of these five ideological categories for the fans of the three football clubs in Spain overall and in their respective regional territories. It can be highlighted, first, that the Real Madrid fans place themselves in the categories of centre-right and right significantly more than the fans of the other two clubs. These two categories register 18.1% and 15.5% of the Madrid fans all over Spain and in the region of Madrid, respectively. However, twice as many are situated on the left and centre-left, specifically 31% in Spain and 33.6% in the region of Madrid, which contrasts with the stereotype associating Real Madrid fans with positions more on the right. The Barça fans in the centre-right and right positions are half as numerous — 7.5% and 6.9%, respectively — compared to 3.6% of Athletic de Bilbao fans in Spain and none in the Basque Country. The Barça fans, however, stand out for reaching the highest scores in the position on the left: both the followers of this club in Spain overall (14.6%) and in Catalonia (14.8%) represent a much higher percentage than Athletic de Bilbao

and Real Madrid fans in this position. Finally, Athletic de Bilbao fans lead the other two groups in the centre-left and centre positions. In the former, they reach 35.7% in Spain and 35.9% in the Basque Country, whereas in the latter, they represent 32.1% and 30.8%, respectively.

Table 4: Ideological self-placement (left-right scale)

<i>Football club</i>	FC Barcelona		Athletic de Bilbao		Real Madrid	
<i>Fans from...</i>	Spain	Catalonia	Spain	Basque Country	Spain	Madrid Region
Left	14.6	14.8	8.9	10.3	4.4	5.4
Centre-left	29.6	31.9	35.7	35.9	24.6	28.2
Centre	24.7	22.3	32.1	30.8	29.1	27.5
Centre-right	7.5	6.9	3.6	--	14.8	12.1
Right	1.6	0.9	--	--	3.3	3.4
NK/NA	22.0	23.2	19.7	23.0	23.8	23.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own processing based on CIS (2014)

Nevertheless, beyond the differences described, it should again be pointed out that identification with a certain football team does not imply incompatibility with certain ideological adscriptions. Thus, for example, 9.1% and 7.8% of the Barça fans in Spain and Catalonia — respectively — are defined as centre-right or right, whereas 29% and 33.6% of the Real Madrid fans consider themselves on the left or centre-left. Therefore, it seems clear that one thing is the political orientation of the club, and another is that of the fans.

6. Conclusions

The study presented in this article empirically examined the hypothesis of political-identitary isomorphism between football clubs and fans, based on which we would expect to find a statistical relationship between the political orientation traditionally associated with the main Spanish football clubs (FC Barcelona, Athletic de Bilbao, and Real Madrid) and the main traits of the political culture of their fans. Addressing this objective has required a dual task, consisting, on the one hand, of carrying out a historical review of the links of these football clubs to the political sphere, in order to extract the main political coordinates associated with the clubs, and on the other hand, of examining the political opinions and attitudes of the fans of these clubs, based on the data provided by a survey whose field work was performed in the year 2014 (CIS, 2014). This survey has provided indicators about national/regional identity, preferences about the degree of territorial decentralization of the state, and self-placement on a left-right scale.

The results of the study show that — except in some cases mentioned below — there is a relationship between the political orientations historically associated with the three football clubs studied and their fans, both in Spain overall and in their respective regions. With regard to FC Barcelona, although the majority of its fans in Catalonia consider themselves both Spanish and from the region (35.2%), 45.4% feel exclusively or more from the region than Spanish. In spite of this, it should be kept in mind that 12.3% show a feeling of Spanishness, and that 66.7% feel very or fairly proud of the successes of the Spanish national team. These fans are, however, clearly in favour of a territorial organization of the state that gives more or complete autonomy to their regions (62.5%). Nevertheless, 16.2% seem to be satisfied with the currently existing degree of autonomy, and 12.5% prefer less decentralization than the current level. In addition, more than half of the fans in the Catalan territory define themselves as left or centre-left (56.7%). The Barça fans are, therefore, the fans most on the left and most in favour of reforming the current state by increasing the autonomy of the regions.

The Athletic de Bilbao fans in the Basque Country are, in terms of collective identity, much less Spanish than the Catalans: here, 56.4% consider themselves exclusively or more from their region than Spanish. The fans who identify with the club also exhibit a lower level of pride in the sport successes of the national team (51.3%). Moreover, 43.6% demand a greater degree of territorial decentralization of the

state, where the regions would have greater or complete autonomy, and 46.2% define themselves as left or centre-left. Thus, also in this case, the political culture that the survey analysed attributes to the fans of this club seems to support the hypothesis of political-identity isomorphism between the club and its fans.

Finally, the results do not show a different direction in the case of Real Madrid fans. The statistical analysis carried out in this article shows that they mainly define themselves as Spanish (35.6%) or equally as Spanish as from their region (37.6%), with a very small minority prioritizing their regional identity over their Spanish identity. These fans, in addition, feel greater satisfaction about the performance of the Spanish national team: 89.2% feel proud of its good results. In another vein, 77.2% of Madrid's fans feel satisfied with the current degree of autonomy of the Spanish regions or think they should have less. Finally, although the Real Madrid fans surpass those of the other teams in the position of right and centre-right, the study showed that those who place themselves on the left and centre-left — contrary to what would be expected taking into account its traditional image as a central team or of the *establishment* — double those who place themselves on the right and centre-right.

The results obtained in this study show a high level of convergence between the political and ideological aspects traditionally associated with the clubs and the political culture of their fans. This result provides clear evidence of the socio-political symbolism these clubs have, in spite of their progressive transformation into powerful business machines, as well as their efficacy as agencies of socialization, integration, and social support. However, this is not an obstacle to rejecting a homogenous and unitary vision of each club's fans that does not coincide with the heterogeneity that has been identified in the study presented in this article. Although the results obtained have shown the relevance of the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis between clubs and fans for the three clubs, relevant percentages of fans also occupy ambivalent or opposite positions to what would be expected by the political-identity isomorphism hypothesis. In fact, among the fans of these three clubs in Spain as a whole, a majority feel they belong equally to Spain and to the regions where they live (dual identity), feel very or fairly proud of the successes of the Spanish national team, and are in favour of a state with a degree of decentralization like the current one.

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