Interplay of Decentralisation, Climate Change, and Energy Preferences in Multilevel Democracies: Analyzing the Case of Spain

Abstract

In light of the increasing significance that renewable energies have been gaining in Spain recently, regional governments have emerged with significant contributions in this matter to favor decarbonisation. However, academic findings suggest that this interest may stem from the ambition of non-statewide parties for subnational levels to spearhead the transition to renewable sources and gradually gain autonomy to develop their own strategies in this matter more independently from the central government. This study examines whether the focus on climate change in the manifestos of parties competing in the 2016, 2019, and 2023 Spanish national elections correlates with their decentralisation preferences and to what extent this association is influenced by energy transition-related inclinations. Empirical findings indicate that parties' emphasis on climate change and energy transition tends to be higher when their positions lean towards greater regional autonomy and when decentralisation is more prominent.

Introduction

In March 2024, during the first day of the European Hydrogen Congress, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez asserted Spain's firm belief in hydrogen as a strategic investment in renewable energy. More concretely, he expressed aspirations for Spain to emerge as a 'hub' for this renewable energy vector. This declaration aligns with recent statistics positioning Spain (22.6%) among the top five countries expected to invest significantly in renewable projects in the coming years, trailing only behind the United States (45.2%), China (33.3%), Germany (25%), and Australia (21.4%) (RatedPower 2023).

In this context, regional governments—also referred to as Autonomous Communities (ACs)—have adeptly capitalized on the collaborative framework established by Spanish legislation between these governments and the Central Administration in addressing climate change (Vargas-Amelin and Pindado, 2014) to actively contribute to the crucial task of decarbonizing the economy. Notable instances abound across various regions, such as Catalonia's enactment of Law 16/2017 focused on climate change, Andalusia's approval of Law 8/2018 aimed at combating climate change and facilitating the transition to a new energy paradigm, or the Balearic Islands' adoption of Law 10/2019 centered on Energy Transition and Climate Change (López 2020).

However, emerging academic insights suggest that the interest of subnational actors in promoting clean and sustainable energy may stem from different motives, among which is their ambition to formulate their own renewable energy strategies and policies independently of the central government (Ohlhorst 2013). This inclination gains significance when viewed in light of the broader trend wherein political parties with stronger pro-peripheral inclinations assume leadership roles in addressing climate issues to seek greater autonomy for the regions, as revealed by the literature on Green Nationalism at the subnational level (Conversi 2020, 2022; Conversi and Hau 2021).

Considering the dearth of dedicated research into both the aforementioned findings of Green Nationalism on the national stage and elucidating the role that energy transition plays for regionalist parties in pursuing greater autonomy for their regions, the current article aims to address the following research questions: *Are parties' climate policy preferences associated with their center–periphery*

inclinations at the national level? And *to what extent is this relationship mediated by parties' energy-related preferences?* To achieve this, the party manifestos of parties that secured seats in the Spanish Congress of Deputies following the general elections of June 2016, November 2019, and July 2023 are analyzed, based on a particularly meticulous conceptualisation and operationalisation of climate policy (Carter et al 2018). Thus, the article commences by elaborating on the relationship between decentralisation and climate policy preferences, and shedding light on the potential implications of the renewable energy transition in this context. Subsequently, relevant background information on Spain is provided, followed by an outline of the methodology employed in this study. The subsequent section delves into the findings, and finally, the conclusions drawn from this research are presented.

Relationship between Decentralisation and Climate Policy Preferences

The historical connection between environmentalism and regionalism is well-established (Kernalegenn 2023), as illustrated by the findings of a study on the 1992 General Election in the Welsh county constituency of Ceredigion and Pembroke North (Fowler and Jones 2006). This initial empirical investigation shed light on the implications of the alliance between the nationalist party Plaid Cymru and the semi-autonomous wing of the Green Party of England and Wales, known as the Wales Green Party, for the convergence of these two notions. However, while the authors of the Welsh study still deemed this relationship somewhat nebulous due to its dependence on various situational factors, it has since evolved alongside a new strain of nationalism. This evolving nationalism places significant emphasis on environmental concerns, adopting a comprehensive array of policies aimed at combatting climate change (Hau 2022).

This new conception of the phenomenon, coined as Green Nationalism (Conversi 2020; 2022; Conversi and Hau 2021), has been identified, for example, in regions like the Vauban district, where a revitalisation of national sentiments has been observed based on environmental defense (Posocco and Watson 2022). This resurgence is attributed to the pride the region takes in Germany's example of adapting to the challenges posed by the climate crisis. However, this idea has gained popularity, especially over the last decade, paralleling the development of various articles that have identified its use by political parties of subnational regions or nations to challenge the structure of political authority within states.

In line with this, literature reveals that minority nationalist parties such as We Make Corsica/For Corsica in Corsica (de Winter and Tursan 2003; Hau 2022), and the Galician National Bloc (BNG) in Galicia (Hau 2022), have been weaving together environmentalism and autonomy in their campaigns. They are placing increasing emphasis on climate change as a phenomenon that requires locally-tailored solutions. Similarly, it is known that in Scotland, the strength of sub-state climate ambitions is closely tied to the high priority given to demands for more self-government on the region's political agenda. This is coupled with the presence of robust sub-state nationalist parties and their efforts to ensure that territorial divisions remain significant (McEwen and Bomberg 2014).

In relation to this last country together with the region of Catalonia, it is known that minority nationalist parties, such as the Scottish National Party and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), blend traditional nationalist preservationist ideals with contemporary climate change policies. They do so through their assertions in manifestos, posters, policy briefs, and flyers, as well as through the promotion of green policies and bill proposals (Conversi and Hau 2021). In this same Spanish region, as well as in the Basque Country, recent studies reflect how nationalist parties strategically incorporate climate change concerns into their assertion of claims, narratives, and frameworks as integral parts of their nationalist endeavors (Hau 2022; Kerr 2023). Regarding Catalonia, other research indicates a trend of placing greater emphasis on climate policy and adopting more pro-climate positions by parties more aligned with decentralisation. They do this as a means to compete for political authority, in addition to addressing environmental concerns (Enguer and Navarrete 2023).

The connection between territorial identity and progressive politics reflects the growing importance of regional parliaments in shaping climate policy today. For instance, they are taking the lead in situations where coordination between national and regional levels is lacking (Jordaan et al. 2019), advocating for effective global agreements on climate change (Galarraga et al. 2011), implementing adaptation measures (Hjerpe et al. 2015), and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through policies in energy, water, transport, and waste management (Bulkeley 2011). This trend has the potential to prompt parties with regional sensitivities to prioritize this 'localized' issue (Hopkin and Barbera 2009; Navarrete, 2020) and propose tailored solutions that better suit various regional interests (Hooghe and Marks 2010). Indeed, manifestos supporting decentralisation often maintain pro-climate stances, indicating that parties vying in regional elections are leveraging climate change to assert the political significance of sub-state levels and pursue greater economic and/or political autonomy (McEwen and Bomberg 2013; Alonso et al. 2017).

Implications of the Renewable Energy Transition

Decentralisation has been identified as one of the critical factors that can potentially catalyze the transition to renewable energy. Specifically, decentralisation could lead to a reduction in GHG emissions by fostering the promotion of renewable energy sources (Sun et al. 2023; Su et al. 2021; Bagnera 2022). In line with this perspective, recent research outlines three distinct channels that could explain this relationship (Albrecht 2021).

Initially, we encounter the efficiency channel, which originates from the 'Decentralisation Theorem' (Oates 1972). According to this theorem, due to the diversity of preferences among sub-national territories, decentralising the government structure is essential to achieve enhanced responsiveness and efficiency regarding the unique needs and environments of each individual region (Oates 1999). Indeed, it has been suggested that lack of financial or personal resources in the regional administration is associated with implementation deficits of public policies (Rieder et al. 2014). This overarching mechanism can be directly applied to the context of renewable energy, considering that, unlike the streamlined bureaucratic requirements of a limited number of centralized energy facilities, the widespread and rapidly growing array of renewable energy plants situated in diverse locations may be better overseen by regional authorities with greater political and fiscal autonomy. In this vein, there are indications that more decentralised governments are potentially better equipped to meet the increasing demands for renewable energy implementation, considering the intricate balance between land use and environmental protection inherent in the deployment of renewable energy plants (Poggi et al. 2018).

Second, the significance of the democratisation channel is highlighted. It emphasizes how the vertical division of power enhances communication tools and amplifies the participation and engagement of local citizens in the formulation of policies (Isufaj 2014). This mechanism is believed to instill a greater sense of ownership among members of the local community regarding energy projects and investments (Van der Schoor and Scholtens 2019). For instance, in Germany, 72 new local power companies were established within just seven years, driven by the motive and ambition to achieve 100% renewable energy without adversely impacting communities. Likewise, further research has emphasized the crucial role that social and community acceptance plays in renewable energy transition implementation (Stadelmann-Steffen et al., 2018, 2019; Dermont et al. 2017).

The third avenue through which decentralisation contributes to the transition to renewable energy is known as the regional policy channel. Given that renewable energy installations can be deployed in rural and peripheral areas due to their ample land availability and low population density, these regions stand to gain significant benefits from the expansion of renewable energy. In this regard, it has been demonstrated that when sub-national authorities possess adequate political and fiscal autonomy, they are capable of formulating their own renewable energy strategies and policies independently of the central government (Ohlhorst 2013). Moreover, these assertions have recently been reinforced by the

finding that in Switzerland, the varying degrees to which cantons promote and regulate small-scale hydropower are correlated with the cantonal deployment of such projects (Stadelmann-Steffen, 2019). These are findings that align with the crucial role that the regional level plays in fostering local and municipal involvement in the energy transition, given its coordinating and motivating capabilities (Melica 2018), as well as its contribution to increasing investment in research and development (Ruiz-Fuensanta et al. 2019).

Among the various mechanisms through which governmental decentralisation positively influences renewable energy deployment, the emphasis on regional policies stands out for its potential connection to the discursive axis of Green Nationalism. As elucidated in the previous section, scholars within this academic paradigm have revealed the tendency of parties with more pro-peripheral sensibilities to assume leadership roles in climate matters, driven not only by environmental concerns but also by their desire to challenge the central authority of states and achieve more autonomy for the regions they represent. This inclination is potentially linked to the emphasis these same actors would potentially place on promoting renewable energies, given the capacity they offer subnational authorities to formulate their own renewable energy strategies and policies independently of the central government. Therefore, the potential decentralisation in energy production that accompanies a transition to renewables becomes attractive for both sub-state governments and parties seeking greater autonomy to campaign on climate issues.

Based on the reviewed research, it initially appears that there might be an association between political parties' focus on decentralisation and their attention to climate issues. Building on this, we propose two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The prominence of climate content in party manifestos increases with the prominence of decentralisation.

Hypothesis 2: The more pro-climate a party is in its manifesto, the greater the prominence of decentralisation.

Additionally, given the protagonism likely attributed to the goal of achieving energy independence by regionalist parties, two additional hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3: The positive relationship between the prominence of climate content and the prominence of decentralisation is notably driven by the salience of energy-related themes.

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between the pro-climate stance of parties and the prominence of decentralisation is notably driven by the salience of energy-related themes.

Background information

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 aimed to disperse authority from the central state to regional governments by recognizing and empowering the ACs. The decentralisation process occurred through two asymmetric routes (Leon 2011): seven ACs followed the 'fast-track' mechanism -the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia, Galicia, Navarre, Canary Islands, and Valencia[1]- while the remaining ten gained autonomy through the 'slow-track' procedure. As a result, the first group received greater powers over several policy areas (primary and secondary education, health care, university education, occupational training, and social services) during the 1980s, whereas for the slow-track regions, decentralisation occurred during the second half of the 1990s. Decentralisation has been gradually increasing in Spain over the years, and Spain now has one of the most decentralised territorial organisation systems in Europe (Cocciolo 2020) and the world (Mayol 2002). Its score of 35.6 on the

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[1] Although Valencia and Canary Islands initially accessed autonomy sticking to the legal mechanisms established in Article 143 that provided for lower levels of authority and responsibility, they were endowed with fast-track competences from 1982 (Leon 2011).

Regional Authorities Index in 2018 placed it well above the average of the total sample of cases analyzed (10.66), making it one of the best-positioned countries.

The evolution of the decentralisation processes referred to in Spain has led to the development of a legal framework that contemplates shared competencies between the Central Administration and the ACs in matters of climate change (Vargas-Amelin and Pindado 2014). Likewise, while Law 54/97 on the Electricity Sector stated that ACs are responsible for 'the promotion of special regime renewable energy and energy efficiency in their Community territory' (Ministry of Presidency 1997) the more recent Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan of Spain explicitly mentions the primary role of regional administrations in the process of energy transition towards a sustainable model (Ministry for the Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge 2021). In the face of the central government's inactivity, some regions have resorted to assuming increasingly prominent roles in both climate change and energy transition (Cocciolo 2020). In this regard, over the past decade, we encounter notable examples in various regions such as Catalonia approving Law 16/2017 on climate change, Andalusia approving Law 8/2018 on measures against climate change and for the transition to a new energy model, or the Balearic Islands approving Law 10/2019 on Energy Transition and Climate Change (López 2020).

Although initially it seemed to pave the way towards a sort of 'climate federalism', the aforementioned trend has suffered notable setbacks. In this regard, the repeal of Catalan Law 16/2017 on Climate Change by the Constitutional Court through ruling 87/2019 on the grounds of unconstitutionality stands out (Rodríguez-Beas 2019). Among the objections raised by this court against the aforementioned law, its opposition to the free decision-making of the ACs regarding energy transition, as assumed by the content of Article 19 for said subnational level of government, are noteworthy. This dialogue between regional proactivity versus the prevalence of centralist criteria of constitutional interpretation makes the Spanish state a scenario of opportunity for both the study of the relationship between center-periphery preferences and political parties' stance on climate change, as well as for observing the way in which energy transition mediates this nexus.

Methods

This article analyzed the party manifestos for the political parties stood for the June 2016[2], November 2019[3], and July 2023[4] general elections in Spain. It did so by taking quasi-sentences as the unit of observation (Schmitt and Wüst 2012) and relying on the notion of salience to shed light on political party preferences. Consequently, higher values denote a greater emphasis placed on a topic, whereas lower values indicate less attention toward it. The initial hand-coded database resulting from this process had a total of 49816 quasi-sentences.

The methodology adopted a climate policy focus, aligning with Carter et al.'s (2018) meticulous conceptualisation and operationalisation of this notion. This approach addressed shortcomings in previous measurements, which predominantly concentrated on environmental protection (e.g., Comparative Agendas Project or Comparative Manifestos Project), by employing four categorical

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[2] People's Party (PP), and Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Citizens (Cs), Together We Can (UP), Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV), Unite the Basque Country (EHB), In Tide (EM), Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), In Common We Can (ECP), Canarian Coalition - Nationalist Canary Party (CC-PNC), and Commitment (CMP).

[3] People's Party (PP), Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Citizens (Cs), Together We Can (UP), More Country – Equo (MP-E), VOX, Candidacy of Popular Unity (CUP), Together for Catalonia (JxC), In Common We Can (ECP), Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV), Unite the Basque Country (EHB), Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), Canarian Coalition - New Canaries (CC-NC), Teruel Exists (TE), Regionalist Party of Cantabria (RPC), Sum Navarre (NA+), and Commitment (CMP).

[4] People's Party (PP), Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Citizens (Cs), Unite, VOX, Together for Catalonia (JxC), In Common We Can (ECP), Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV), Unite the Basque Country (EHB), Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), Canarian Coalition (CC), and Navarrese People's Union (UPN).

variables. One variable quantified the percentage of quasi-sentences in each political party's manifesto categorized as either 'pro-climate', 'anti-climate', 'neutral', or 'not sufficiently relevant' concerning net GHG emissions. 'Pro-climate' content advocated policies aimed at reducing GHG emissions or increasing GHG sinks, while 'anti-climate' content supported policies leading to increased GHG emissions or reduced GHG sinks. 'Neutral' content pertained to net GHG emissions and implied that emissions would remain unchanged. 'Not sufficiently relevant' content lacked substantial relevance to net GHG emissions and thus did not fall into any of the other categories.

Subsequently, another variable was formulated to offer additional insights into the 'pro' and 'anti' climate categories and to systematically diversify the content of the measures. This variable coded the 'pro-climate' category from the initial variable based on the percentage of quasi-sentences in each political party's manifesto dedicated to more detailed subcategories[5]. Likewise, the 'anti-climate' quasi-sentences were also coded in additional fine-grained subcategories[6]. Later, the proportions explained by the first variable were used as the dependent variable in a salience estimation that factored in the sum of 'pro-climate' and 'anti-climate' content per political party's manifesto. Finally, to gauge the content dedicated to reducing GHG emissions through the specific promotion of improvements related to energy transition, a last variable called 'lower carbon and energy efficiency' was created. Its values are the result of the sum of the content dedicated in each party manifesto to the 'pro' climate subcategories defined in the previously explained variable called 'pro-lower carbon energy' and 'pro-energy efficiency'.

When it comes to the independent variable, the center-periphery preferences were examined through two distinct measures: salience of the center-periphery cleavage, quantified by calculating the proportion of quasi-sentences in each party's manifesto advocating for or against decentralization relative to total quasi-sentences; and positioning on the center-periphery axis, assessed by the difference between quasi-sentences favoring and opposing decentralization within each party's manifesto. These contents were assessed inspired on the content of the variables 'TDR_modify_selfrule' for aspects of self-governance and 'TDR_fund_general' for financial and fiscal matters, as defined in the Framing Territorial Demands (FraTerr) dataset by Elias et al. (2023). Additionally, a variable was introduced to distinguish between SWPs and NSWPs, a distinction consistently represented in all graphs throughout the results section.

After obtaining all the measurements, the scores for each party were plotted and linear regression models conducted. The results are analysed and discussed in the following section.

Presentation and discussion of the empirical findings

As explained in the previous section, there are two variables to gauge the salience of climate change in political party manifestos. Table 1 presents the percentage of content related to each category of the variable 'climate code' by political party, as per the first analysis. The results indicate a significant focus on 'pro-climate' content in the manifestos of the studied political parties, with higher figures observed in the 2019 elections. In 2016, CMP, UP, Cs, and CDC stood out for assigning greater importance to this category in their manifestos. In 2019, a clear dominance of the MP-E party coalition is witnessed, largely propelled by the involvement of a party like EQUO, whose ecological stance is notably remarkable in a country where Green politics have traditionally been non-existent at the central level (McFall 2012). Following this alliance, other parties such as CMP, EHB, TE, UP, and EAJ-PNV also stand out. Moving to the 2023 elections, parties such as Unite, which fills the ideological space left by UP in previous elections, EAJ-PNV, BNG, and PSOE, are the ones most vocal about 'pro-climate' issues. It's noteworthy that VOX and PP hold prominent positions concerning the content dedicated to 'anti-

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[5] 'Pro environment', 'pro-climate policy', 'pro-lower carbon energy', 'pro-lower carbon transport', 'pro-carbon sinks', 'planning', 'agriculture and food', 'waste', and 'anti-growth'.

[6] 'Pro-roads', 'pro-aviation and shipping', 'pro-fossil fuel', 'anti-environment', 'anti-climate (other)', 'pro-growth', 'anti-environmental taxes', 'pro-tourism', 'pro-global free trade', 'pro-intensive agriculture', 'anti-regulation'.

climate' in their manifestos, although they are occasionally surpassed by PRC and TE in 2019, or UPN in 2023.

Table 1. Share of quasi-sentences delivered in party manifestos, by climate code and political party (%)[7]

[Insert Table 1 here]

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Note: The 'pro-climate policy' category covers general climate protection content that may contain quasi-sentences about pro-sustainable development, pro-environmentalism, pro-green growth, pro-general environmental EU action that potentially involves climate change, general criticisms of the government's environment policy that potentially encompass but are not specific to climate policy, pro-use of environmental indicators, pro-environmental taxation, pro sustainable tourism, and pro-foreign environmental aid.

When it comes to the study of specific 'pro climate' policy subcategories, further variations are found (Table 2). The results of the second, more detailed assessment of 'pro-climate' policy importance indicate that the political parties examined generally emphasize more 'pro-environment' in their manifestos, which is logical given that it is the most comprehensive category within the variable it belongs to, followed by 'pro-lower carbon transport', 'pro-lower carbon energy' and 'pro-carbon sinks'. When considering such content, it's notable how much emphasis three political parties, CMP, UP and Cs, placed on the three aforementioned categories back in 2016. Moving into 2019, UP shares this focus with MP-E, which also devotes significant attention to the categories where EHB demonstrates a remarkable, nearly exclusive focus: 'waste' and 'agriculture and food'. Additionally, noteworthy are the figures from other parties like CMP and PRC, particularly emphasizing 'pro-energy efficiency'. By 2023, the shift in ideological competition space from UP to Unite is reflected in Unite's increased emphasis on 'pro-climate' categories similar to those previously championed by UP. Additionally, it's worth mentioning the significant emphasis placed on 'pro-lower carbon energy' by EAJ-PNV and BNG. The latter also directs considerable attention towards 'pro-carbon sinks'.

On the flip side, the most notable 'anti-climate' categories typically include 'pro-growth', 'pro-roads', 'pro-aviation and shipping', and, to a lesser extent, 'anti-taxes' from 2019 onwards, with 'pro-intensive agriculture' and 'pro-fossil fuel' gaining momentum from 2023 onwards. While in 2016, it was the PP that dominated this aspect due to its focus on 'pro-growth' topics, by 2019, the leadership in this category is shared with VOX, JxC, and EAJ-PNV. Interestingly, driven by the specific needs of the regions they represent, CC-NC and TE have begun to stand out in their use of 'pro-aviation & shipping' and 'pro-roads', respectively. A similar trend persists in the subsequent elections, with the most notable development being the increasing utilisation of 'pro-fossil fuel' content by the PP and VOX.

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[7] The category 'Neutral' was removed due to lack of relevance in the results.

Table 2. Share of quasi-sentences delivered in party manifestos, by pro-climate policy subcategory and political party (%)[8]

[Insert Table 2 here]

*Non-Statewide Parties (NSWPs)

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

In light of the percentages shown in tables 1 and 2, an initial support for the hypotheses suggested in the first and second hypotheses of this article can be perceived. To confirm or reject them, the link between decentralisation and climate policy preferences needs to be examined. In this regard, the data initially reveals that higher shares of quasi-sentences dedicated to support decentralisation correlate with a greater prominence of climate-related content in parties' manifestos (Figure 1). Similarly, the greater a party's pro-periphery stance on the center-periphery axis, the more significant the attention given to climate content in its manifesto (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Relationship between the salience of decentralisation and the salience of climate change

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 2. Relationship between the position on decentralisation and the salience of climate change

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

In testing the third hypothesis, the association between the salience of pro-decentralisation and of 'pro-climate' text subcategories is analyzed (Figure 3). The results indicate that among the different 'pro-climate' related topics, the parties that dedicate more content in their manifestos to support decentralisation especially provide greater prominence to 'pro-lower carbon and energy efficiency'.

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[8] The category 'Pro-climate (other)' was removed due to lack of relevance in the results.

Similarly, when we study the association between parties' stance on pro-decentralisation and the salience of 'pro-climate' subcategories, it can be appreciated that the generally positive relationship between these two variables is particularly driven by the number of quasi-sentences that parties dedicate to pro-energy transition and energy efficiency related content in their manifestos (Figure 4). Remarkably, as hinted by the figures presented in Tables 1 and 2, this trend is followed by the categories of 'pro-lower carbon transport' and 'pro-carbon sinks'.

Figure 3. Relationship between the salience of decentralisation and the salience of pro climate change categories

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 4. Relationship between the position on decentralisation and the salience of pro climate change categories

[Insert Figure 4 here]

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

In the light of the evidence presented, any of the hypothesis posed in this study can be rejected. Given the consistent positive correlation observed among all independent and the dependent variable in Figures 1 and 2, it is reasonable to suggest that political parties with stronger pro-peripheral inclinations may be prioritizing the issue of climate change in Spanish national elections, akin to what existing literature on Green Nationalism has demonstrated they do when competing in regional elections (e.g., Enguer and Navarrete 2023). This implies, foremost, that the heightened attention parties with peripheral sensitivities tend to allocate to issues specific to their regions (Hooghe and Marks 2010; Hopkin and Barbera 2009; Navarrete 2020) might be driving their increased focus on climate change, even on the national stage. Similarly, the localized findings could be pointing towards the use of this same theme in elections at the aforementioned level of government to compete for political power within the center-periphery divide (Conversi 2020, 2022; Conversi and Hau 2021). In fact, we can find several quasi-sentences in the manifestos of the most pro-periphery parties using climate change as an additional justification to seek greater economic and/or political autonomy at the sub-state level, thus emphasizing its political significance (Mcewen and Bomberg 2013; Alonso et al. 2017):

> *'Transfer the proceeds from the auction of emission rights to the Government of Catalonia for them to be allocated to the fight against climate change'* (ERC 2023)

> *'Demand the territorial distribution among the autonomous communities of resources allocated to implement research, mitigation, and adaptation policies to climate change'* (JxC 2023)

'However, we are aware that in the current political scenario, the State maintains control over political decisions and legal norms that directly affect the environment' (BNG 2023)

The discernible results depicted in Figures 3 and 4 corroborate the vested interest of pro-peripheral parties in attaining greater autonomy in energy-related affairs. This inclination stems from several factors. Firstly, there is a notable enhancement in the participation of local citizens in the policymaking process due to the vertical division of power (Rieder et al. 2014; Poggi et al. 2018). Additionally, subnational governments are perceived to be better equipped to oversee the proliferation of renewable energy infrastructure across various locations (Isufaj 2014; Van der Schoor and Scholtens 2019; Stadelmann-Steffen et al., 2018, 2019; Dermont et al., 2017). Finally, regional governments are perceived as having the potential to achieve increased autonomy from the central government, particularly when granted jurisdictional powers, such as those they could obtain in the energy sector by spearheading the transition to renewable sources and gradually reducing the state's role as energy provider (Ohlhorst 2013; Stadelmann-Steffen 2019; Melica 2018; Ruiz-Fuensanta et al. 2019). This would align with the demands expressed through different quasi-sentences identified in the manifestos studied:

'It is necessary to defend our right to decide our own energy model, to contribute to the fight against the climate crisis, and to do so in a way that the productive role benefits the social and economic interests of Galicia while safeguarding the preservation of biodiversity' (BNG 2023)

'In particular, the State will be urged to implement specific measures to accelerate the energy transition in the Canary Islands (considering that in isolated and insular territories such as the Canary Islands, it is more challenging to undertake the necessary changes for the new energy paradigm)' (CC 2023)

'The energy transition towards a system where demand is predominantly met by renewable energies implies a progressive electrification of consumption and increasingly decentralized generation, of smaller size and closer to consumption points' (EAJ-PNV 2023)

Conclusion

This article aimed to investigate how the emphasis placed on climate change in party manifestos correlates with their preferences for decentralisation and to what extent this relationship is influenced by inclinations related to energy transition. By examining manifestos for the Spanish national elections of June 2016, November 2019, and July 2023, it provides empirical evidence of variations between parties and across elections regarding pro-climate emphasis. This emphasis was led by Cs and CDC in the first elections, by MP-E, EHB, TE, UP, and EAJ-PNV in the second elections, and by Unite, EAJ-PNV, BNG, and PSOE in the third elections. Among pro-climate topics, Spanish parties tend to emphasize 'pro-environment', 'pro-lower carbon transport', 'pro-lower carbon energy', and 'pro-carbon sinks'. Occasionally, notable focuses were additionally observed in 2019, such as MP-E's emphasis on 'waste' and 'planning', PRC's focus on 'pro-energy efficiency', and TE's emphasis on 'pro-lower carbon transport'.

This variation between political parties is associated with the variables suggested in the research questions of this paper, that are more explicitly stated through its four different hypotheses. First, it is found that parties whose manifestos give more salience to decentralisation and those with a more pro-periphery stance tend to confer more prominence to climate policy. Consistent with the Green Nationalism literature, this suggests that parties are increasingly incorporating climate change into their issue agendas as a strategic move to vie for political dominance within the center–periphery dynamic, while pursuing greater economic and/or political autonomy (Mcewen and Bomberg 2013; Alonso et al. 2017), alongside their environmental concerns. This would run in parallel to the more and more relevant

role played by regional parliaments in climate policy, that would be encouraging parties with peripheral sensibilities to focus more on this increasingly 'territorialized' matter (Hopkin and Barbera 2009) at a level where they can offer narrow packages more suitable for different regional interests (Hooghe and Marks 2010).

Secondly, this article has identified that higher proportions of quasi-sentences dedicated to supporting decentralisation correlate with a greater prominence of lower carbon and energy efficiency content in parties' manifestos. This finding suggests that these parties are using this issue more to enhance the participation of local citizens in the policymaking process (Rieder et al. 2014; Poggi et al. 2018), as well as to promote the management of renewable energies by subnational authorities both for their better capacity to improve the provision of these due to the territorial dispersion of their production facilities (Isufaj 2014; Van der Schoor and Scholtens 2019; Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2018, 2019; Dermont et al. 2017) and for the potential that decentralisation in this matter grants regional governments to strengthen their autonomy and independence from the central government (Ohlhorst 2013; Stadelmann-Steffen 2019; Melica 2018; Ruiz-Fuensanta et al. 2019).

As the Spanish case has been thoroughly analyzed through the study of the manifestos of the parties competing in the last three national election periods, the conclusions of this research are based on the observation of thirty-two political parties. Since all major parties for the aforementioned elections have already been covered, future research could broaden this articles' perspective by focusing on additional parties from other countries with similar characteristics, such as a multilevel system in which regions have competencies in climate change and energy transition, in addition to having relevant non-state actors competing in them. Furthermore, policy preferences of political parties are also expressed through parliamentary speeches, or even (social) media statements. Therefore, analyses assessing the relationship between parties' climate or renewable energy policy preferences and other dimensions of party competition would benefit from studying other political texts. In any case, this research represents a significant step in the underexplored topic of parties' positions on climate and renewable energy policy in multilevel settings, which notably indicate that parties' positions on this matter are not independent from their competition in a multilevel system.

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Table 1. Share of quasi-sentences delivered in party manifestos, by climate code and political party (percent).

Climate Code	UP	Unite	MP-E	PSOE	Cs	PP	VOX	CUP*	ECP*	ERC*	CDC/JxC*	EHB*	EAJ-PNV*	EM/BNG*	CC-PNC/CC-NC/CC*	NA+/UPN	PRC*	TE*	CMP*
2016																			
Pro climate policy	12.5	-	-	6.5	8	5.1	-	-	12.6	6.4	7.6	3.6	8	-	5.2	-	-	-	21.2
Anti climate policy	0.7	-	-	0.3	1	3.5	-	-	0	0.6	1.2	0	0.8	-	6.3	-	-	-	0.1
2019																			
Pro climate policy	17.2	-	78.3	6.5	7.5	7.6	2.8	13.5	7.3	8	9.8	41.5	16.0	8.5	8.9	2.8	13.1	29.4	30.7
Anti climate policy	0	-	0	0	2.6	5.6	1.7	0	0.2	0.4	1.2	0	0.9	0	3.2	1	13.9	20.6	0.3
2023																			
Pro climate policy	-	21.7	-	13.9	-	6.2	3.2	-	-	8.2	3.1	7.8	18	14.9	13	10.5	-	-	
Anti climate policy	-	0.2	-	1.3	-	2.8	8	-	-	0.3	0	0	0.7	1	3.1	6.3	-	-	

*Non-Statewide Parties (NSWPs)

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Note: The 'pro-climate policy' category covers general climate protection content that may contain quasi-sentences about pro-sustainable development, pro-environmentalism, pro-green growth, pro-general environmental EU action that potentially involves climate change, general criticisms of the government's environment policy that potentially encompass but are not specific to climate policy, pro-use of environmental indicators, pro-environmental taxation, pro sustainable tourism, and pro-foreign environmental aid.

Table 2. Share of quasi-sentences delivered in party manifestos, by pro-climate policy subcategory and political party (percent).

Climate Code Subcategory	UP	Unite	MP-E	PSOE	Cs	PP	VOX	CUP*	ECP*	ERC*	CDC/JxC*	EHB*	EAJ PNV*	EM/BNG*	CC-PNC/CC-NC/CC*	NA+/UPN*	PRC*	TE*	CMP*
2016																			
Pro-climate categories																			
Pro-Environment	1.7	-	-	2.6	1.4	1.1	-	-	4.4	3.1	1.8	0	3	2.5	0.4	-	-	-	5.1
Pro-lower Carbon Energy	2.1	-	-	1	1.8	0.5	-	-	1.2	1	1	3.6	2.6	2	3	-	-	-	3.8
Pro-lower Carbon Transport	3.2	-	-	0.3	1.2	0.7	-	-	2	1	1.9	0	1.3	1.2	0.2	-	-	-	4
Pro-energy Efficiency	0.8	-	-	0.7	0.6	1.3	-	-	0.9	0.1	0.6	0	0.4	0.5	0.4	-	-	-	3.3
Pro-Carbon Sinks	3.1	-	-	0.6	1.3	0.6	-	-	0.8	0.3	1.3	0	0.4	1	0.2	-	-	-	1.3
Planning	0.6	-	-	0.5	0.5	0.2	-	-	0.3	0	0.2	0	0.2	0.5	0.1	-	-	-	0.4
Agriculture & Food	0.5	-	-	0.3	0.2	0.7	-	-	1	0.2	0.3	0	0	1.2	0.4	-	-	-	0.9
Waste	0.5	-	-	0.4	1	0.1	-	-	1.3	0.3	0.6	0	0	0.5	0.2	-	-	-	2.1
Anti-Growth	0	-	-	0.1	0	0	-	-	0.3	0.1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	0
Anti-Climate Categories																			
Pro-roads	0.4	-	-	0	0	0.1	-	-	0	0.4	0.1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
Pro-aviations & Shipp	0.1	-	-	0.1	0	0.1	-	-	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	4.4	-	-	-	0
Pro-fossil fuel	0.2	-	-	0	0	0.1	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
Pro-growth	0.1	-	-	0.2	0.6	1.4	-	-	0	0	0.4	0	0.8	0	0.4	-	-	-	0
Anti-taxes	0	-	-	0	0	0.4	-	-	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
Pro-tourism	0	-	-	0	0.4	0.9	-	-	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	1.2	-	-	-	0.1
Pro-global free trade	0	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	0.1	0.4	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
Pro-intensive Agriculture	0	-	-	0.1	0	0.5	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	-	-	-	0
Anti-regulation	0	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
Anti-climate (other)	0	-	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0
2019																			
Pro-climate categories																			
Pro-Environment	3.8	-	34.8	2.7	1.8	2.1	0	9.9	5	3	2.8	4.1	3.3	2.1	2.4	1.1	0	1.5	8.7
Pro-lower Carbon Energy	1.5	-	7.2	0.2	0	0	0.6	1.8	0.8	1	1.5	0.3	4.4	1.4	3.2	0.7	0	5.9	5
Pro-lower Carbon Transport	4.8	-	11.4	0.1	0	0.4	1.1	0	0.6	1.3	2.3	0	2.7	0.9	0.8	0.7	0	13.2	3.7
Pro-energy Efficiency	1.5	-	2.7	0	0	0.4	0	0	0.2	0.3	1.1	0	2.9	0.2	0.3	0.7	11.5	2.9	5.3
Pro-Carbon Sinks	2	-	0.9	0.1	0	0.4	0.6	0.9	0.1	0.5	0.9	0	0.1	3	0	0	0.8	5.9	1.6

|																			
Planning	0	-	4.3	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0.4	0	0	0.9	0	0	0	0.8	0	0.7
Agriculture & Food	3.1	-	7.9	0.2	0	0	0.6	0	0	0.6	0.6	21.6	0.3	0	0.3	0.4	0	0	2.3
Waste	0.3	-	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0.3	0.6	14.3	1.2	0	2.1	0	0	0	3
Anti-Growth	0	-	0.3	0	0	0	0	0.9	0.4	0.7	0	0.7	0	0.9	0	0	0	0	0.1
Anti-Climate Categories																			
Pro-roads	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	0	0	0	0	0.4	0	20.6	0.1
Pro-aviations & Shipp	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.3	0	0	0	2.6	0	13.9	0	0.1
Pro-fossil fuel	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pro-growth	0	-	0	0	0	1.1	0.6	0	0.1	0.1	0.7	0	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-taxes	0	-	0	0	0	0	0.6	0	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	0.7	0	0	0
Pro-tourism	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0.2
Pro-global free trade	0	-	0	0	0	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pro-intensive Agriculture	0	-	0	0	0	0.4	0	0	0	0.1	0	0	0.1	0	0.5	0	0	0	0
Anti-regulation	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-climate (other)	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

2023

|																			
Pro-climate categories																			
Pro-Environment	-	6.3	-	4.9	-	0.8	0.9	-	-	1.4	2.8	2.4	2.9	1.6	3.7	1.1	-	-	-
Pro-lower Carbon Energy	-	2.1	-	1.1	-	0.8	0.5	-	-	0.3	1.5	1.8	8.6	3.7	1.9	3.2	-	-	-
Pro-lower Carbon Transport	-	2.5	-	3	-	0.6	0.6	-	-	0.6	2.3	2.4	3.4	3	3.1	3.2	-	-	-
Pro-energy Efficiency	-	1.2	-	0.8	-	0.8	0.5	-	-	0	1.1	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.6	1.1	-	-	-
Pro-Carbon Sinks	-	3.2	-	1.1	-	1.2	0.6	-	-	0	0.9	0.6	0.5	4.8	3.1	1.1	-	-	-
Planning	-	1.7	-	0.9	-	0.5	0	-	-	0	0	0	0.4	0.8	0	0	-	-	-
Agriculture & Food	-	3.1	-	1	-	1.4	0.1	-	-	0.5	0.6	0	1.3	0.5	0.6	0	-	-	-
Waste	-	1.4	-	0.7	-	0.2	0.1	-	-	0.1	0.6	0	0.4	0.3	0	0	-	-	-
Anti-Growth	-	0.1	-	0	-	0	0	-	-	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Anti-Climate Categories																			
Pro-roads	-	0	-	0.1	-	0	0.1	-	-	0	0.2	0	0	0.6	0	4.2	-	-	-
Pro-aviations & Shipp	-	0	-	0.2	-	0.1	0	-	-	0	0.3	0	0.1	0.2	3.1	0	-	-	-
Pro-fossil fuel	-	0	-	0	-	1.3	1.2	-	-	0	0.3	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Pro-growth	-	0.1	-	0.8	-	1.3	0.4	-	-	0	0	0	0.6	0	0	0	-	-	-
Anti-taxes	-	0	-	0	-	0.5	1.4	-	-	0	0.1	0	0	0	0	1.1	-	-	-
Pro-tourism	-	0	-	0.3	-	0.8	0.3	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Pro-global free trade	-	0	-	0	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Pro-intensive Agriculture	-	0	-	0	-	0.2	1.5	-	-	0	0	0	0	0.2	0	1.1	-	-	-
Anti-regulation	-	0	-	0	-	0	0.6	-	-	0	0.7	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
Anti-climate (other)	-	0	-	0	-	0	2.5	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		-	-

*Non-Statewide Parties (NSWPs)

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 1. Relationship between the salience of decentralisation and the salience of climate change
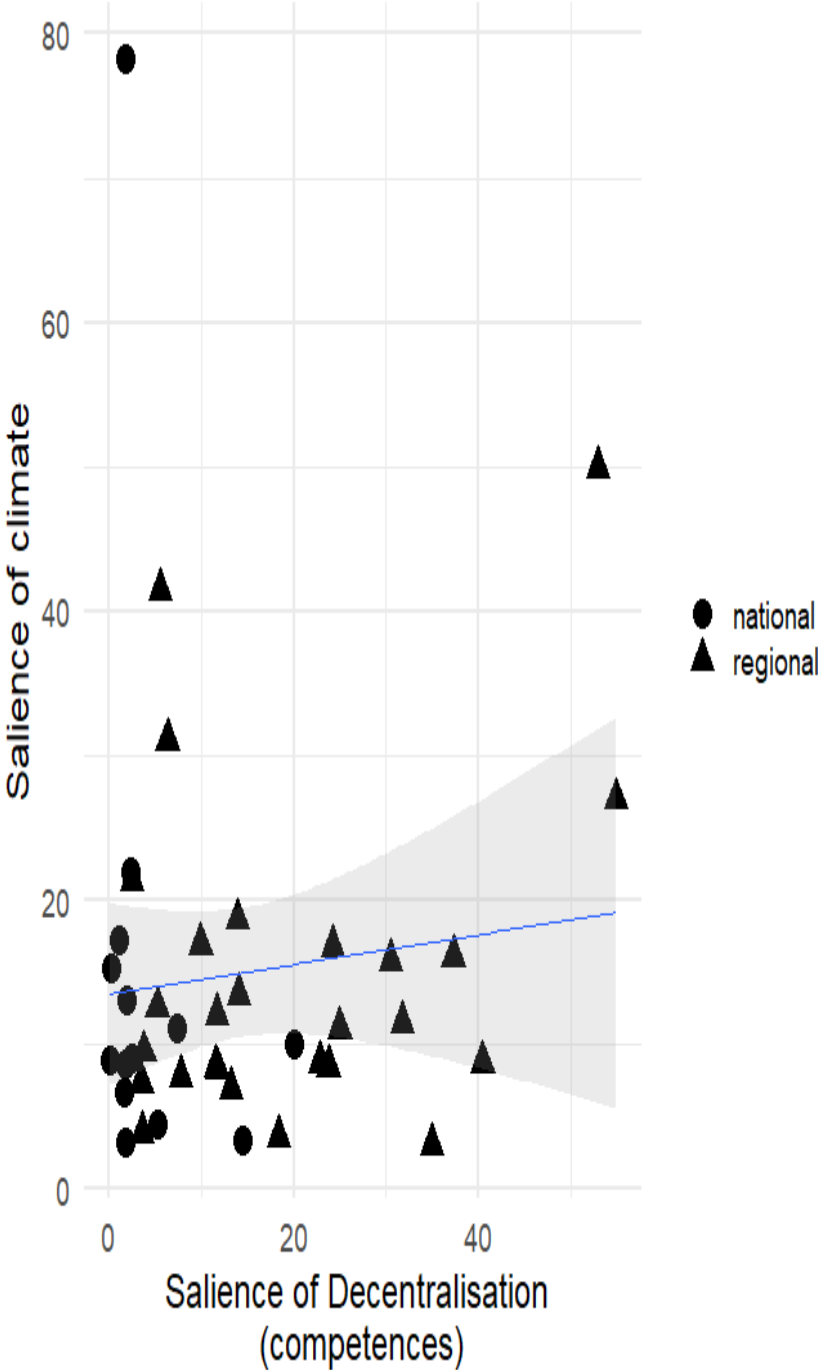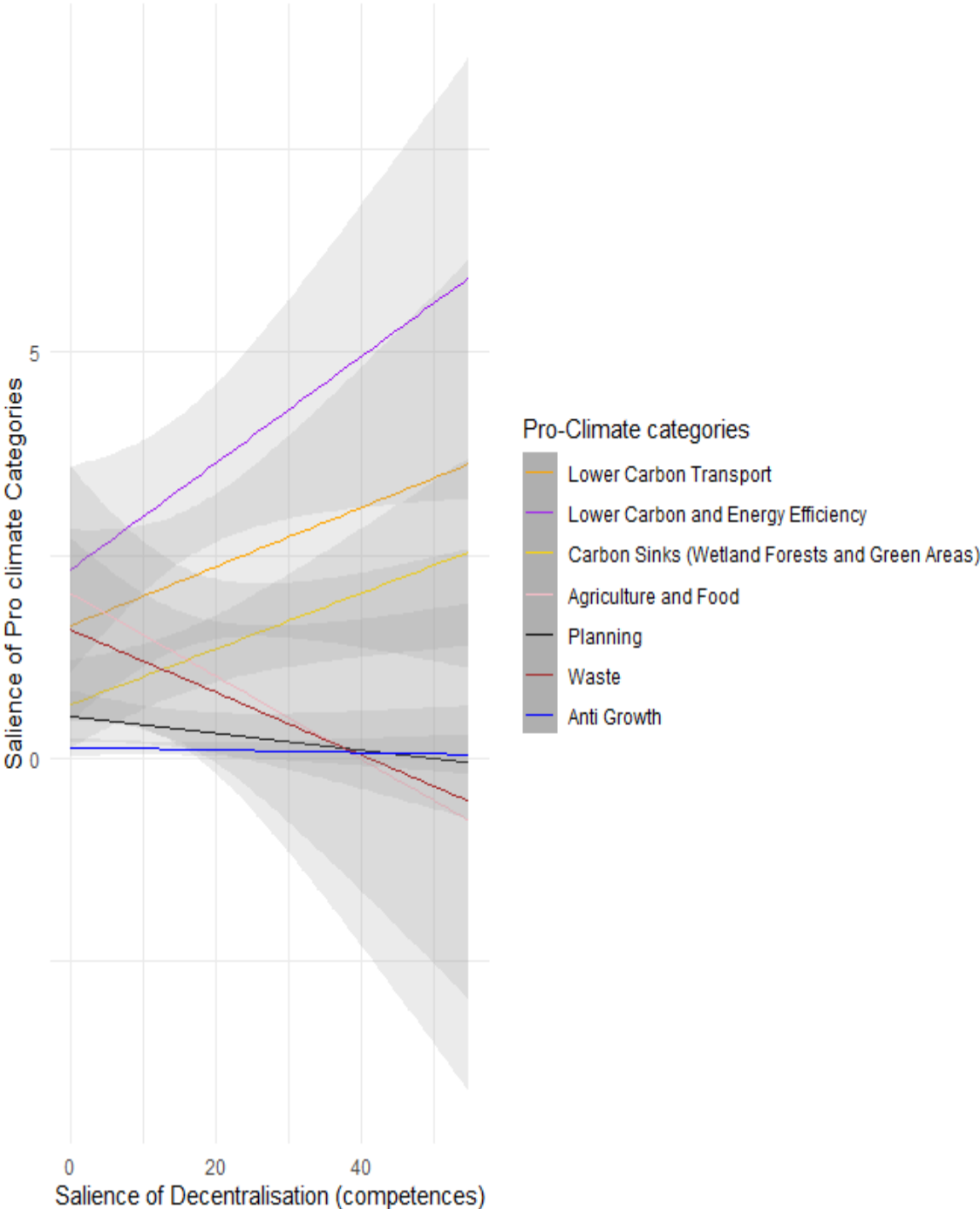

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 2. Relationship between the position on decentralisation and the salience of climate change
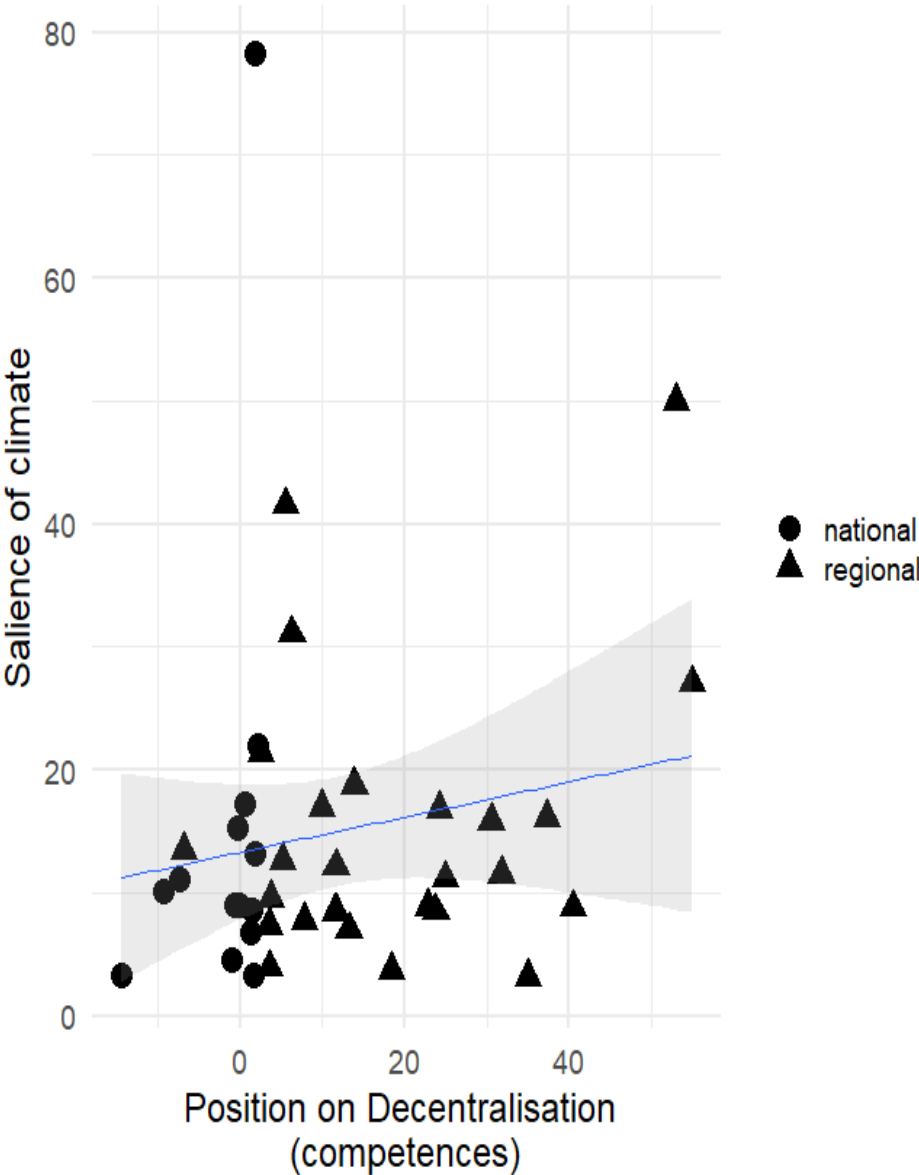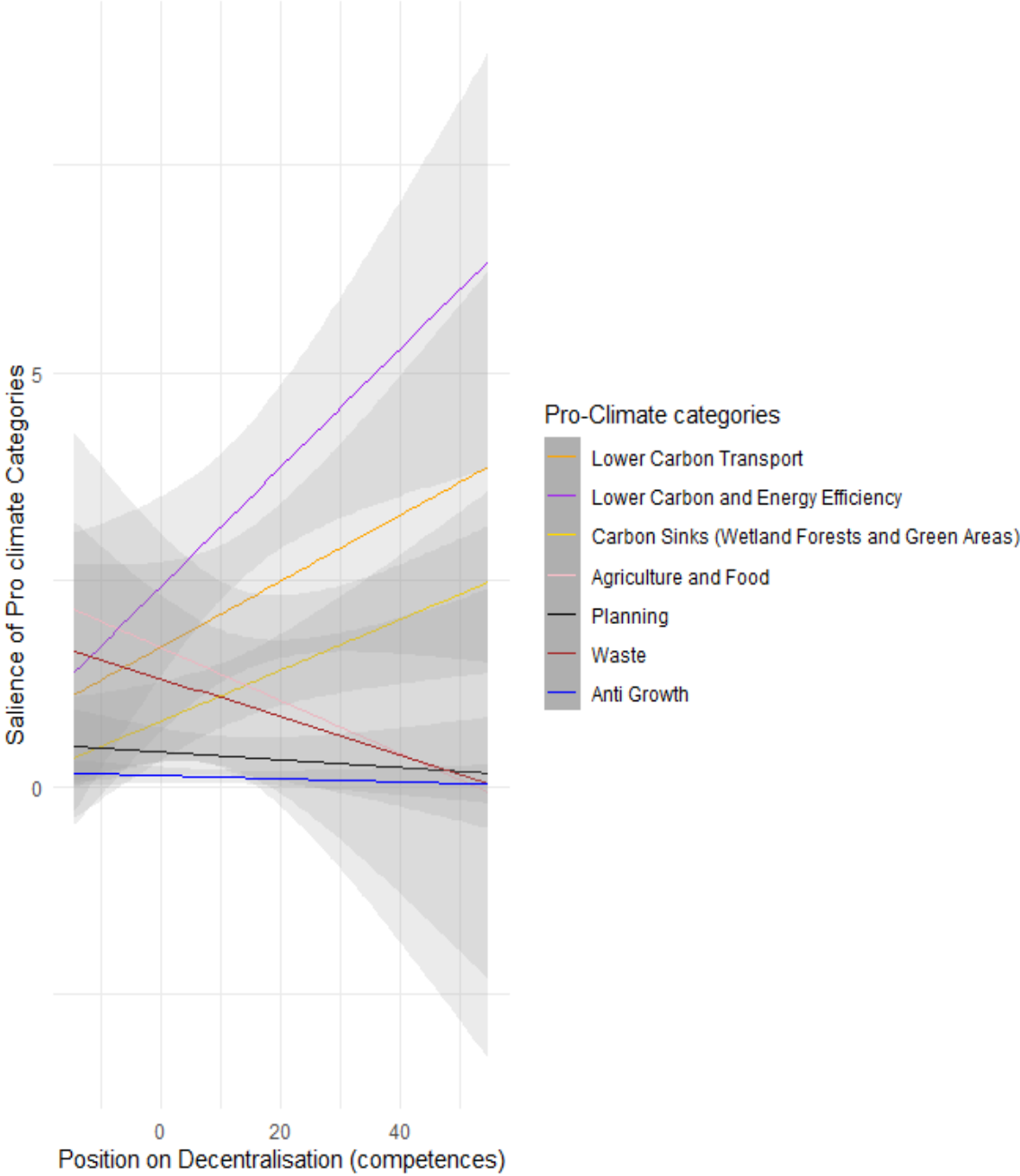

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 3. Relationship between the salience of decentralisation and the salience of pro-climate change categories

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).

Figure 4. Relationship between the position on decentralisation and the salience of pro-climate change categories

Source: Scores based on authors' own measurements (2024).