

Chapter 4

Empowering the Regional Political Perspective in Iberian Studies: Galicia as a Bridge Between Spain and Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Iberian studies has traditionally focused on Spain and Portugal, either through their administrative divisions or as a whole. While this has produced valuable insights, it often overlooks the internal diversity of the Iberian Peninsula—especially regarding historical paths, economic structures, and political dynamics. A regional approach beyond the nation-state paradigm offers a promising alternative. Galicia serves provides a compelling case: its deep-rooted historical, cultural, and economic ties across borders position it as a potential bridge between Portugal and Spain. This chapter examines whether these historical connections remain relevant in today's Iberian context. Through an institutionalist lens, it analyzes Galicia's evolving cross-border interactions, confirming that its transborder dynamics are still politically, economically, and culturally significant. This reinforces the value of regional perspectives for understanding Iberian complexity across time and space.

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INTRODUCTION

Context and Objectives

Iberian studies has long centered on Spain and Portugal, a focus that remains both logical and historically grounded, as these two nation-states dominate the peninsula demographically and politically. Rooted in Max Weber's definition of the state as the legitimate wielder of force within a set territory, this nation-state framework continues to shape scholarly and political perspectives. Over time, the architecture and scale of these states have evolved (Leuffen, 2012; Máiz, 2008), reinforcing the durability of this approach in understanding the region's political dynamics.

This definition underscores the centrality of political organization in shaping the identity and governance of nation-states, rendering them a primary analytical category in political science and related disciplines. Furthermore, the stability of Portugal and Spain as nation-states enhances their utility as reference points for Iberian studies, as their shared territorial delimitation is among the oldest in Europe. The border between the two countries is one of the most enduring in the world, and its historical significance is widely acknowledged (Haggett, 2001; Medina, 2006). Its role in shaping the political and cultural dynamics of the Iberian Peninsula is exemplified by research centers such as Centro de Estudos Padre Sarmiento and Centro de Estudos Galegos da Universidade do Minho, among others. Subsequently, the nation-state approach has been central to Iberian studies, bridging established disciplines like history and cultural studies with the analysis of recent phenomena such as the rise of illiberal politics in Spain and Portugal (Kelly and Pujol, 2024).

However, while the nation-state framework is undeniably useful, it is not without limitations, particularly when applied to the Iberian Peninsula. The nation-state, as a product of nineteenth-century political movements, is a relatively recent construct compared to the long history of Hispano-Luso interaction. An exclusive focus on this framework risks overlooking the rich shared history of Spain and Portugal, which predates the emergence of the nation-state. For instance, both countries were part of the same political entity during the Iberian Union (1580-1640) under the Habsburg Monarchy (Rivero Rodríguez, 2017), an important period that falls entirely outside the nation-state analytical framework.

Given these limitations, a more comprehensive approach is necessary. The regional lens offers several advantages that can help overcome these limitations, particularly in its ability to account for spatial and temporal variations with greater granularity. By focusing on smaller, more defined units of observation, the regional perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of territorial realities, capturing the diversity and complexity that the nation-state framework often overlooks. In Spain, this diversity is particularly pronounced and is formally recognized in

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