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Who is heard in parliamentary policy debates?

A study of stakeholder patterns in the committees of the Spanish and Catalan legislatures

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Parliamentary Committee as Policy Actors

- Committees play an important (but not always recognised) role in public policy (Benton and Russell, 2013).
 - Their impact can be observed in the short or long term, and be more or less direct:
 - Amendments to proposed legislation.
 - Direct recommendations (report conclusions).
 - Influence on public debate (agenda-setting).
 - Influence on elite opinion (perception-shaping).
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Committee Witness Functions for Parliamentary Work⁽¹⁾



Oversight: hearings enable MPs to better scrutinise gvt and public affairs.



Expertise: builds specialist knowledge of MPs and parliamentary bodies.

– e.g. Hendriks et al. 2017; Beswick & Elstub 2019; Oñate and Ortega 2019; Geddes, 2023.



Representation : gives a voice to diverse groups and interests.

– e.g. Geddes 2018; Bochel & Berthier, 2020; Green 2016; Rumbul, 2016.



Influence: hearings offer a ‘privileged arena’ for interest groups.

– e.g. Eising & Spohr, 2017; Cross et al 2021.

Mapping Committee Witnesses: Spain's Congress of Deputies (CoD) and the Catalan *Parlament* (CP)

- Spain's CoD is the lower house in a bi-cameral parliament (350 MPs). The CP is unicameral (135 MPs).
- Similarities:
 - Committee system, role of parties.
 - Lack of written evidence function.
- Differences:
 - Competencies of national vs sub-national parliament.
 - Importance of hearings as vehicle of representation.



Research Question and Methods

- **RQs:**

1. What is the *organisational affiliation* of witnesses who appear in committees?
2. What *policy issues* do they discuss?
3. How do witnesses' organisational profiles vary by policy area?
 - Rationale: a window into external actors' access and knowledge contributions to committees; identifying which are valued as epistemic authorities in different fields.

- **Data**

- All committees and associate bodies during selected years (CoD = 2024/22; CP = 2022).
 - All witnesses who appeared and provided a verbal contribution.
 - Coding recorded: witness organisation and policy topic (among other characteristics).
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Database: Committees and Witnesses

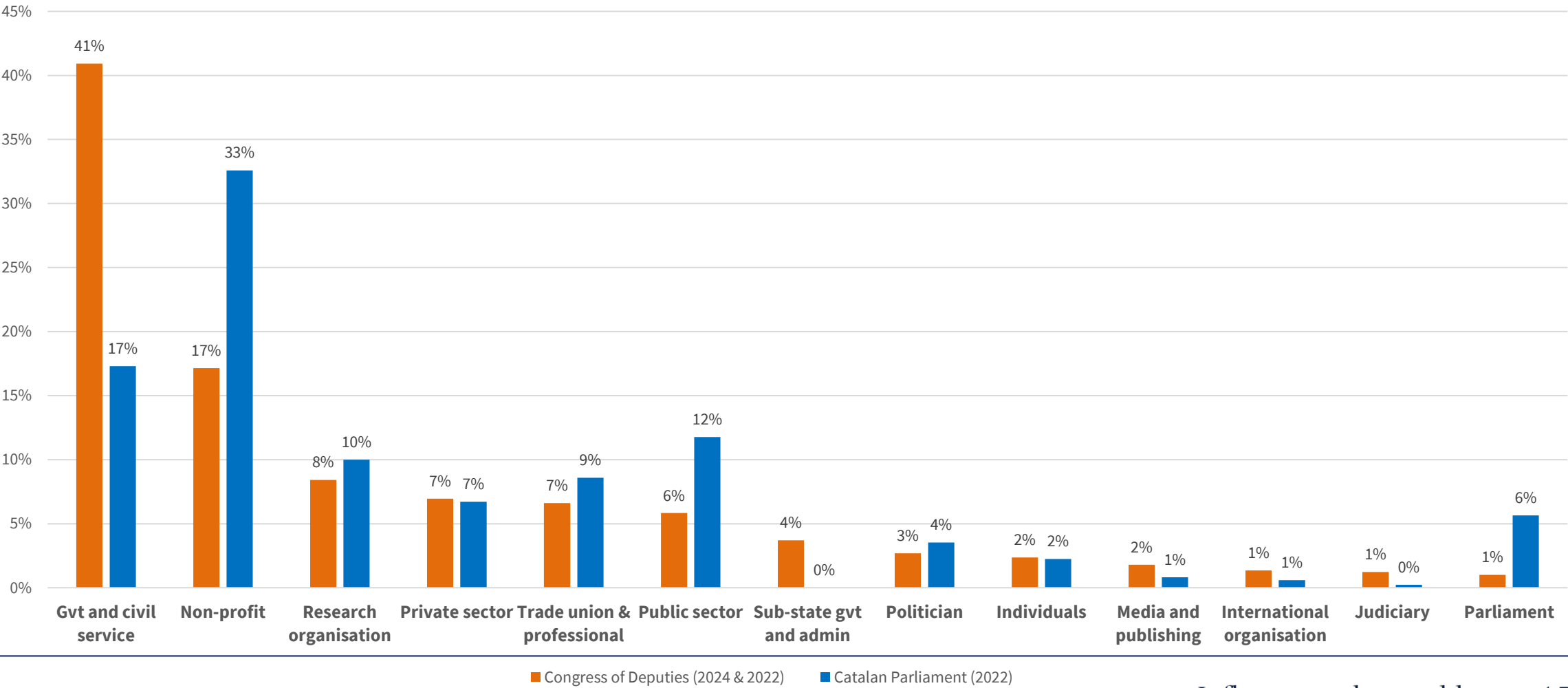
	CD (2022)	CD (2024)	CP (2022)
Committees			
Legislative	21	22	16
Non-Legislative (i)	10	10	8
Joint Congress-Senate	7	8	N/A
Investigative	4	3	1
Study	N/A	N/A	6
Others (ii)	8	5	3
Total Committees	49	48	34
Committee Witnesses Identified	516	357	850
Total Witnesses per Parliament	873		850

(i) Includes regulatory, legally-required, and monitoring committees in each legislature.

(ii) Refers to other subcommittees and working groups formed on specific topics.



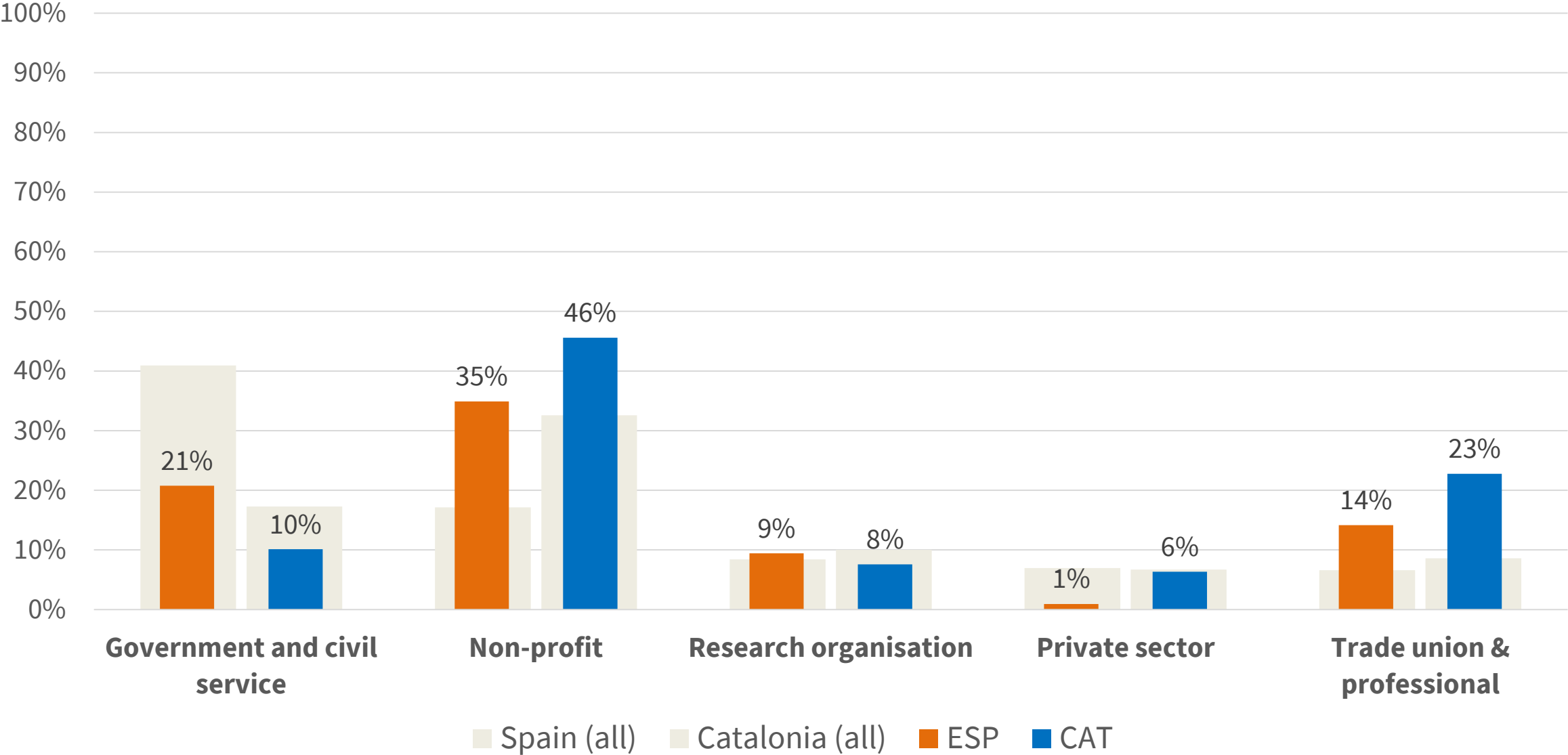
Witness organisational types (average across all committees)



Comparative differences in topics witnesses discussed

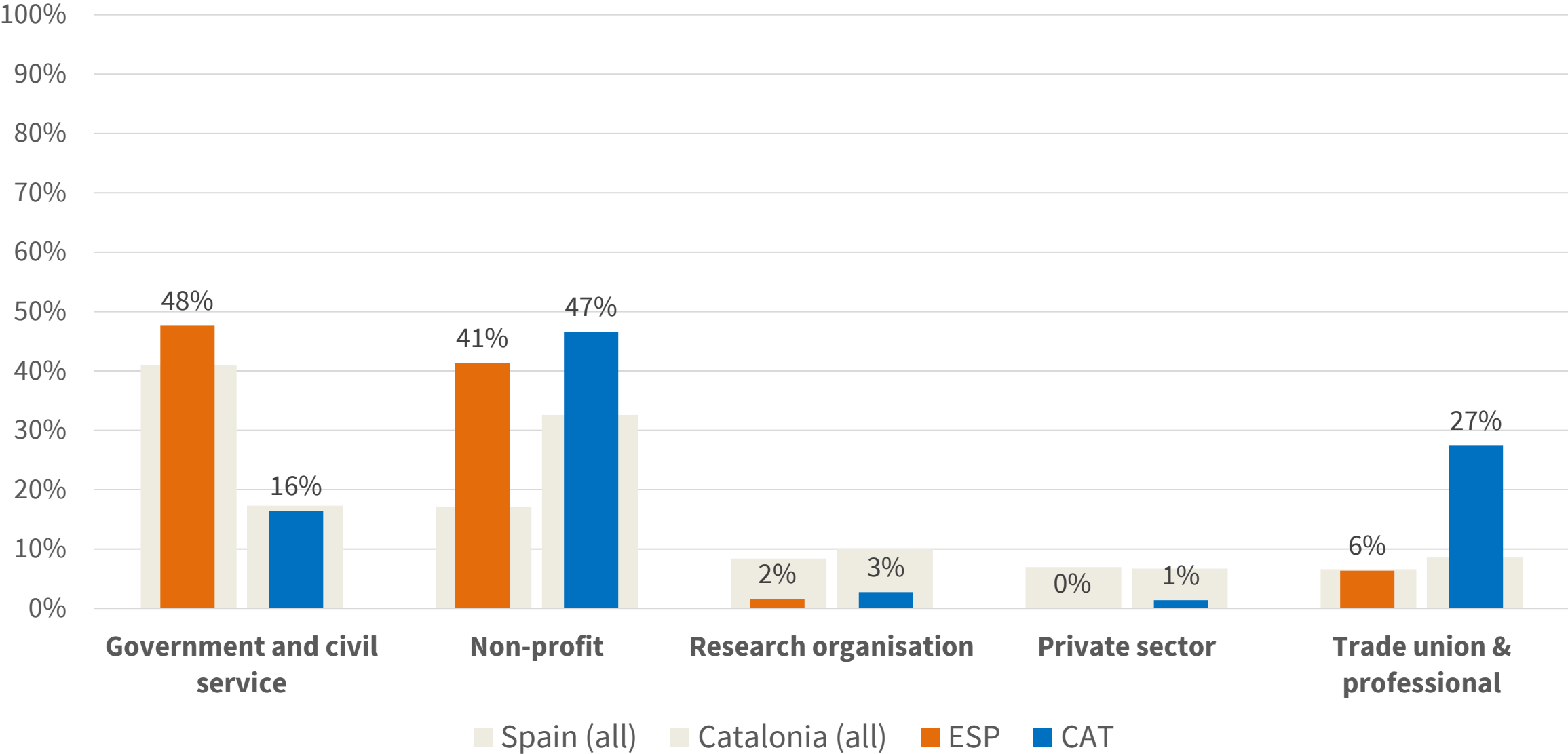
Thematic area	CD (ESP)	CP (CAT)	Diff. (pps)
Rights, Justice & Crime	21%	28%	-7%
Energy, Environment & Transport	14%	13%	1%
Governmental Issues	12%	12%	1%
Health	12%	9%	3%
Defence & International Affairs	8%	2%	6%
Economy	7%	3%	4%
Social and Labour Market	7%	9%	-2%
Research, Tech & Comms	7%	5%	1%
Education & Culture	5%	14%	-9%
Housing & Localities	4%	4%	0%
Agriculture	4%	2%	1%
Total	100%	100%	

Health



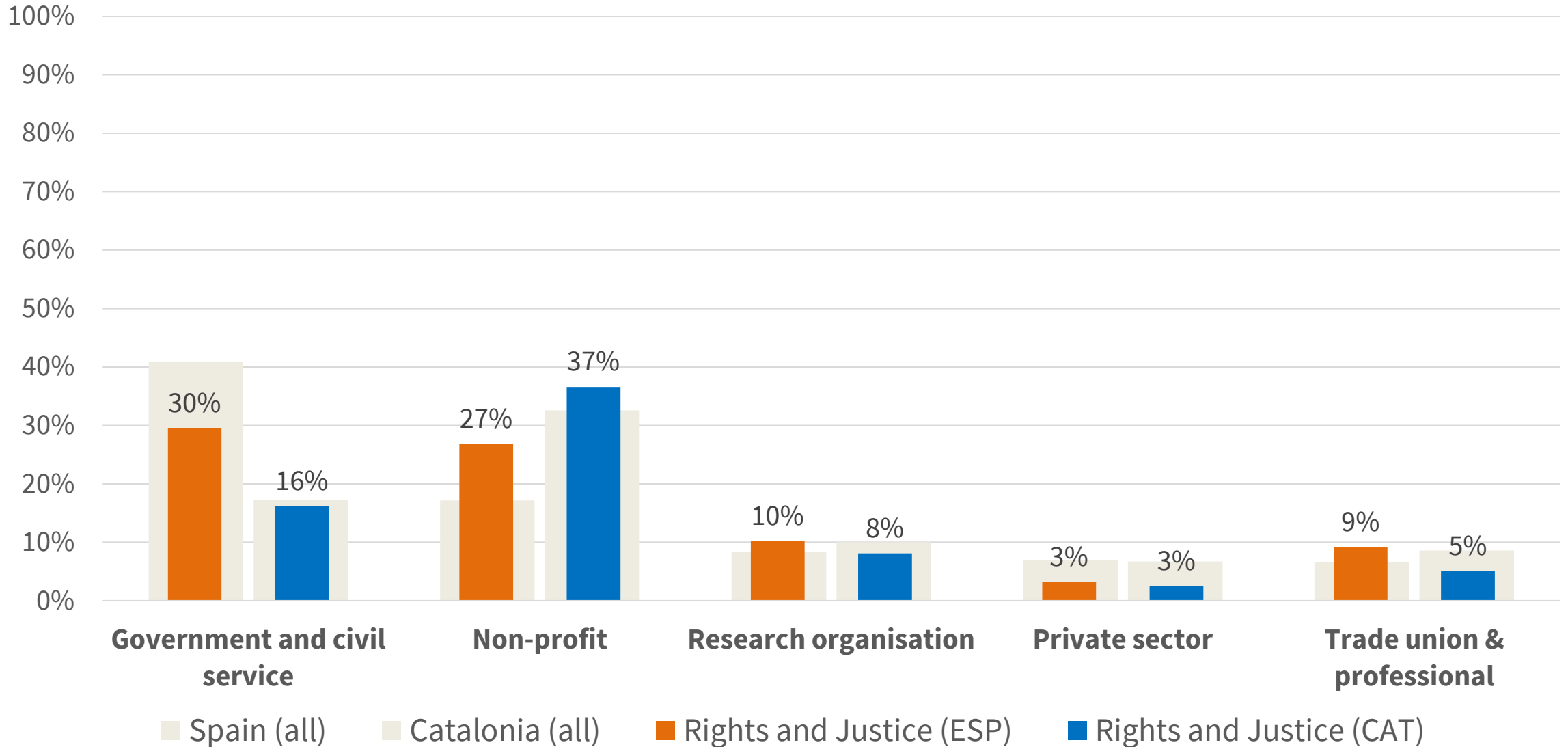
N =106 (CoD), 79 (Cat Parl) [total for all categories]

Social and Labour Market Policy



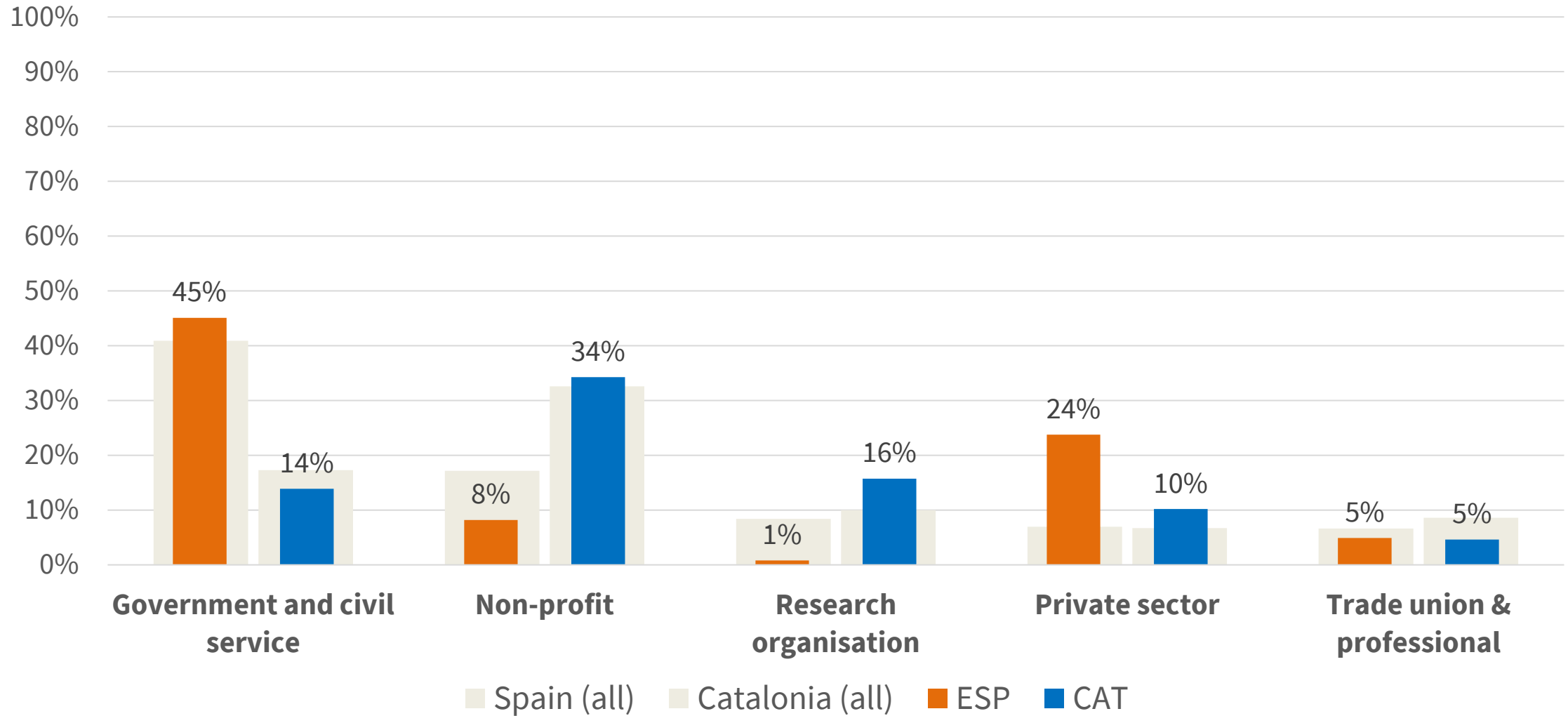
N = 63 (CoD), 73 (Cat Parl) [total for all categories]

Rights, Justice and Crime



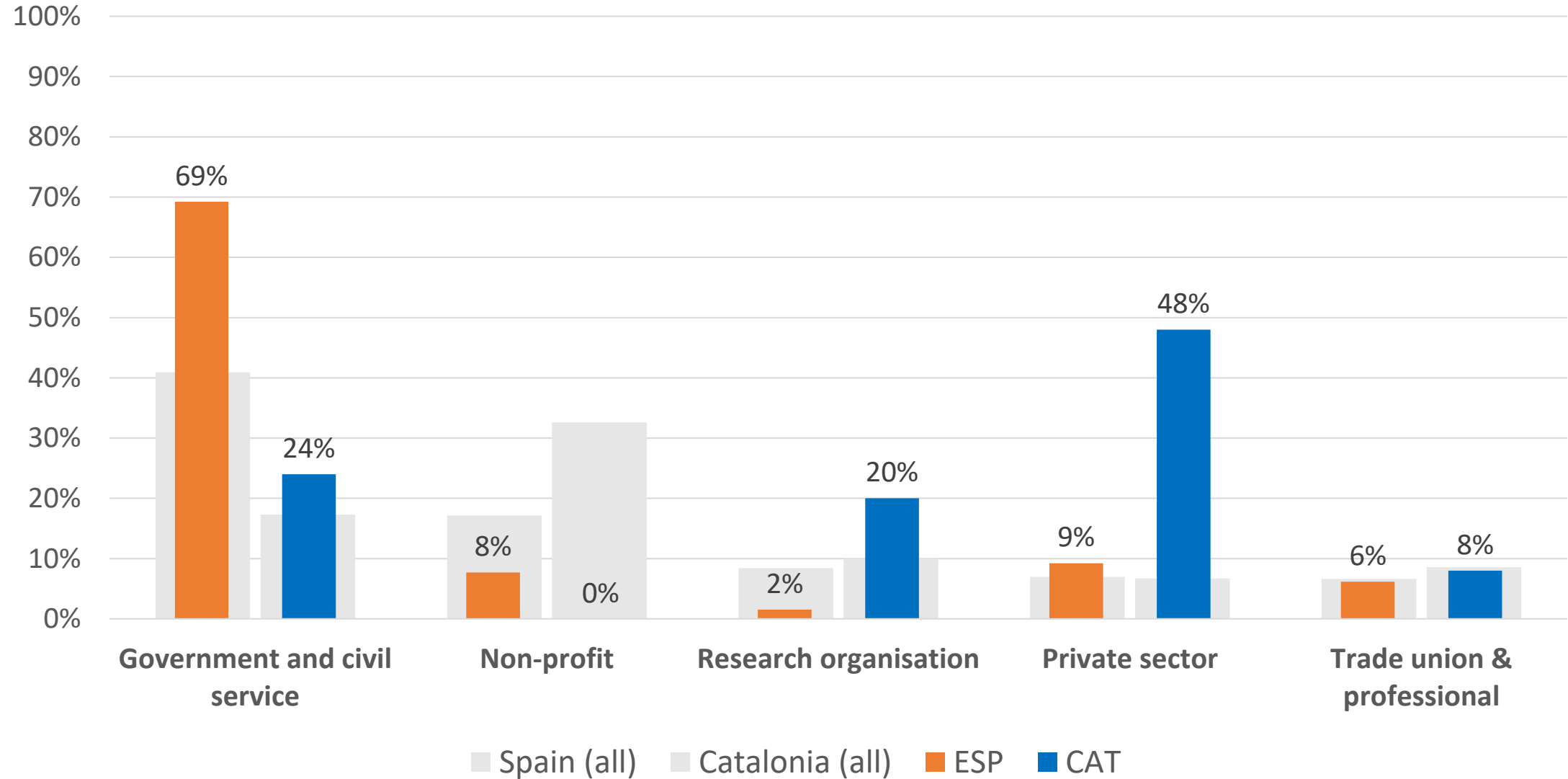
N = 186 (CoD), 235 (Cat Parl) [total for all categories]

Energy, environment and transport



N =122 (CoD), 108 (Cat Parl) [total for all categories]

Economy



N =75 (CoD), 25 (Cat Parl) [total for all categories]

Conclusions and implications

- **RQ 1. Organisational profiles:**
 - Higher proportion of witnesses from non-governmental sectors (especially non-profit organisations) in the Catalan Parliament.
- **PI 2. Policy topics:**
 - Similar proportions in both parliaments but with greater predominance of social topics in the Catalan Parliament, vs. defence and economy in the CD.
- **PI 3. Variation by thematic area:**
 - Greater presence of non-profits in social policy matters (and of unions/professional associations in health) vs. government/private sector in economic and climate transition issues.



(Possible) next steps

- More exploration with respect to particular committees/topics and witness characteristics (e.g. gender, geography)
- Research into causal drivers of witness patterns.
- Comparison with other parliaments.
- Use of mixed methods and case studies to open the ‘black box’ of *how* witness knowledge is used by MPs and committees.



¡Thanks for listening!

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- Find out more about SPARK: <https://www.project-spark.net/>

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