



Multi-level party competition in federal and regional states

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Over the last thirty or so years democracies across the developed world have witnessed a decentralist turn. Processes of federalisation, regionalisation¹ and devolution in hitherto centralised states have accumulated, while long-established federal states have experienced intensive debates about the scope for additional decentralisation of their federal systems. This decentralist turn is documented in the new index of regional authority produced by Marks, Hooghe and Schakel (2008a). Their index – covering 42 EU, OECD and other states – shows that regional authority was broadly stable from 1950-70, but has grown steadily since. Of those 42 states, 29 have become more regionalised, and only two (marginally) less regionalised. The biggest drivers of the growth of regional authority have been the proliferation of elected institutions at the regional level, and the accumulation of the functions of government held by those institutions (Marks, Hooghe and Schakel 2008b, p. 172).

Over a similar period, and in an interconnected process, the number of ‘ethnoregionalist’, or ‘non-statewide’ parties competing for elected office in Europe has proliferated. A growing number of parties compete for office in only part of the territory of the state concerned, typically seeking to establish or increase the level of, and to control, institutions of self-government in that territory. Lane, McKay and Newton (1991) counted 45 NSWPs in western Europe at the turn of the 1990s; Emanuele Massetti estimates there are now 93 in western Europe which have sufficient organisational infrastructure to contest elections on a regular basis, of which around 30 are significant players in regional party systems. In addition, a new contingent of NSWPs is now also emerging in central and eastern Europe.² There appear to be no systematic data on the prevalence of NSWPs outside of Europe.

These data on regional authority and NSWPs show that party competition in federal and regional states is not just about national parliaments. There are now more regional parliaments to win office in, winning office in those regional parliaments is now a bigger prize as the range of their functions has grown, and growing numbers of non-statewide parties now compete for office in regional settings alongside parties which have a statewide profile. This conjunction of changed circumstances has opened up significant a new research agenda. It raises questions about:

1. the decisions voters make in regional as compared with national elections, in particular whether they make decisions for the same reasons about particular parties in different electoral processes
2. the drivers behind the growth of NSWPs, once dismissable as ‘quaint and irritating anachronisms’ (Rokkan and Urwin 1982, p. 1), but now in many places the pivotal parties in regional party systems
3. the competitive challenges that NSWPs pose for statewide parties – and vice versa – in regional settings
4. the ways in which party competition at regional and statewide levels are, or are not, linked with or constitutive of one another.

This chapter explores how each of these questions has been addressed in scholarly work over the last decade or so. It begins by discussing a number of methodological constraints on the development of that work, in particular the often unreflected choice of the ‘nation-state’ as the primary unit of analysis in mainstream political science. By arguing for a move ‘beyond the nation-state’ the chapter reinforces the wider claim in this Handbook, and in multi-level governance scholarship more generally, that a single-level focus is inadequate for an understanding of contemporary governance. It also throws light on how two of the central

traditions of political science analysis – institutionalism and political sociology – have been applied to multi-level party competition in ways which, by and large, ignore one another rather than joining forces to build a more subtle, synthetic account. These concerns underlie the manifesto set out in the conclusion for a more ambitious programme of research better attuned to the complexity of politics in multi-level democracies.

Opening up the research agenda: beyond the ‘nation-state’

Though multi-level party competition has become a growth area in political analysis, three significant methodological problems have conspired to constrain its impact. The first concerns the residual weight of understandings of the ‘nationalisation’ of politics. Postwar social science has canonised the ‘nation-state’, submitting often unwittingly to a ‘methodological nationalism’,³ a set of assumptions that establish the nation-state as a ‘natural’ unit of analysis for ‘social science’ (, p. 276). Those assumptions have come under increasing challenge by political scientists exploring new forms of transnationalised political process (Grande 2006; Stone 2008; Egeberg 2008), especially but not only in the field of European integration. Where political science has yet to shake off the grip of methodological nationalism is in the field of territorial politics *within* the state. Michael Keating (1998, p. ix) has argued that ‘territorial effects have been a constant presence in European politics, but that too often social scientists have simply not looked for them, or defined them out of existence where they conflicted with successive modernization paradigms.’ These ‘modernization paradigms’ have a number of different forms, but a common story: over centuries an intertwined process of state formation and national integration culminated in the mass-democratic, national welfare states that were consolidated after World War II (Marshall [1950] 1992; Tilly 1975; Rokkan 1999; Zürn and Leibfried 2005). That common story depicts the integration of the mass population into a shared national, statewide political life *inter alia* through processes of cultural homogenisation and linguistic standardisation and the nationalisation of political participation through electoral competition for office in national parliaments.

There is little doubt that these were powerful forces of nation-state integration, and that these forces achieved their fullest reach in the first decades after World War II. However it also seems clear that nation-state integration was always incomplete, and that the reach of integration achieved after World War II has since ebbed. States did not achieve cultural homogeneity, and single, statewide patterns of political participation. The decentred social mobilisation expressed by non-statewide political parties and the institutional decentralisation of democracy captured by Marks, Hooghe and Schakel provide obvious empirical demonstration. That these limits are not more fully recognised in scholarship on party competition reflects the weight of the nation-state paradigm. Scholarship on parties and elections continues to project forward national modernisation paradigms in a broadly Rokkanian tradition, but largely stripped of Rokkan’s concern with the ‘periphery’.

If the methodological nationalism of work focused within the state acts as an exogenous, structural obstacle to a greater impact of work on the regional dimension of party competition, others are self-inflicted. A second obstacle is a disconnection between scholarly debates in the US and those in (western) Europe. Separate institutional forums have emerged for work on regional party competition in the federalism/regionalism research groups of the American Political Science Association in the US and the European Consortium of Political Research and some national political science associations in Europe. Successful journals with overlapping remits covering the field of multi-level party competition exist in the US (*Publius. The Journal of Federalism*) and in Europe (*Regional and Federal Studies*). Yet

there is relatively little overlap in memberships of research groups, or cross-fertilisation of research agendas. These distinct institutional geographies have fostered divergent intellectual traditions. Much US scholarship on multi-level party competition continues to trace a lineage to an institutionalist tradition in federal studies as marked out in classic contributions by Wheare (1946), Riker (1964), Friedrich (1968) Watts (1999) and others, now modernised with the adoption of ‘new’ institutionalist approaches (Erk 2008, p. 5-6). Yet that tradition has had little resonance in a (western) Europe which had just three federal states for most of the postwar period (Austria, Germany and Switzerland). Instead, European research has built a stronger focus on regional social mobilisation, including work on the political movements of stateless nationhood in Europe (here connecting to work on Canada – cf. Keating 1996; McEwen 2006; Henderson 2007) and more broadly on the demands and movements for the recognition of regional interests which continue to transform the constitutional structures of both federal and regionalised states in Europe.

This continental divide between institutional and sociological perspectives echoes an earlier debate – which was especially potent in Canada – about the causal relationships between territorial social cleavage and institutional change, broadly between the position set out by W.S. Livingston (1952) that territorial social diversity produces federal forms of government, and that of Alan Cairns (1977: 716) that political parties and interest groups mobilise in response to the ‘governmental structure in which they exist’. The continental divide that currently exists between US institutionalist perspectives and European sociological ones reproduces a version of the positions in that debate, yet shows little prospect of reconciling them, or even bringing them into more structured dialogue with one another. By talking past each other in this way US and European scholars impede the development of a more compelling and overarching theoretical account of new dynamics of regional party competition and their relation – and challenge – to the nation-state paradigm. The effect is to limit the impact of their work.

That effect is compounded by a related point and a third obstacle to greater impact: the proliferation (especially in European scholarship) of small scale, often single case studies of regional party competition (although often bundled as collections, e.g. De Winter and Türsan 1998; Hough and Jeffery 2006a; Swenden and Maddens 2008a). With few exceptions, for example the work of Chhibber and Kollman (2004), Downs (1998), Keating (2001) and on a smaller scale Deschouwer (2003), Swenden and Maddens (2008b) and Thorlakson (2007), scholars have not moved towards establishing the conceptual foundations or datasets for more ambitious theoretical contributions or comparative analyses.

The net effect of these various obstacles to the development of the field is that what follows is an account of an only partially worked through research agenda whose resonance with wider political science debates is still more at the stage of potential than realisation.

The regional voter and the relationship of regional and national elections

The regional voter was long an elusive phenomenon. Prompted by the apparently renewed vigour of peripheral identities from the end of the 1960s, a range of authors sought evidence for its impact on statewide voting behaviour (Rose and Urwin 1975; Urwin 1982; Rokkan and Urwin 1983). But none of them found it: ‘electorally, contemporary peripheral mobilisation has not been very successful’ (Rokkan and Urwin 1983, p. 165). Daniele Caramani appeared to add a final word in his magisterial *The Nationalization of Politics* in 2004: ‘Even though there has been a strong trend to institutional decentralization ... the period since World War II has witnessed a fundamental stability of the territorial configurations of the vote in Europe (Caramani 2004: 291). This conclusion is entirely valid on its own terms, in a book focused

on elections to national parliaments. Indeed, others who have looked for evidence of de-nationalisation in statewide elections have confirmed Caramani's finding of territorial stability of voting behaviour (Deschouwer 2008). Yet Caramani's conclusion also overlooks the possibility that elections to *regional* parliaments might be, or have become an arena in which voting behaviour diverges from the 'nationalised' patterns of state-wide elections.

Such divergences may not be replicated in elections to national parliaments, yet can still have vital significance for national politics, for example in impacting on the range of coalition opportunities available at the national level (Downs 1998, p. 146), introducing new veto points in intergovernmental relations that limit what national governments can do (Lehmbruch 1976; 1998), or at a more fundamental level in challenging the decision-making scope of national parliaments. The election of a pro-independence government in Scotland in 2007 has, for example, prompted debate about a range of schemes which would transfer powers from the UK to the Scottish Parliament (Jeffery 2009). Against this background, interest in the relation of regional to national elections has grown significantly over the last decade. In most cases the starting point has been to explore whether regional elections are what Reif and Schmitt (1980) called 'second order' elections. Reif and Schmitt coined this terminology in their analysis of voting behaviour in European Parliament (EP) elections. Voters did not vote in EP elections on the basis of judgements about latest developments in European integration, but rather about 'the political situation of the first-order arena [their national parliament] at the moment when the second-order election is being held' (Reif 1985, p. 8). EP election results were functions of national politics; they offered scope for voters to express short-term frustrations about national politics – in particular by not turning out, voting against the incumbent parties in national government, and voting for fringe or protest parties – because there was less 'at stake' in EP elections than in national parliament elections. Voters could then return to their 'normal' voting behaviour at the next national election, when their decisions really mattered.

The adoption of this framework of analysis for the relationship of regional to national elections – as indeed Reif and Schmitt (1980, p. 8) had recommended – is widespread (cf. Hough and Jeffery 2006a). But it has been adopted as a convenient, off the shelf choice in the absence of bespoke approaches, and brings with it particular consequences. In particular it imports from the study of EP elections the assumption that other forms of politics are subordinate to national politics. Most of the findings of work on regional elections as second order elections confirm that subordination. Reporting on contributions to an edited collection on sub-state elections in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK, Jeffery and Hough (2006: 252) conclude: 'The general finding, then, is that most sub-state elections do indeed appear to be second order, subordinate to voters' considerations of state-level politics'.

There may be a sense of self-fulfilling prophesy at play here. Research findings may be path-dependent on research questions. If other starting points are taken which treat regional elections on their own terms, rather than as functions of national elections, a different or at least more nuanced picture might emerge. Two such starting points appear possible, the first institutional and American in origin, the second sociological and European. The institutional approach has a hidden link to Reif and Schmitt. Their work drew on ideas in US scholarship about the relationship of presidential elections to other kinds of election held in the presidential mid-term (mainly Senate and House elections, but also gubernatorial and state legislative elections). The broad finding in that scholarship is that 'at every midterm, the electorate turns against the presidential party' simply 'for being the party in power' (Erikson 1988, p. 1028). While this finding is unambiguous - 'an almost invariable historical regularity' (Erikson 1988, p. 1011) – for Senate and House elections, there is a more

contested picture in the relationship of presidential to state gubernatorial and legislative elections (or, in European terms, *regional* elections in the US).

State elections have risen up the scholarly agenda as the political weight and policy portfolios of the states have grown over the last three decades or so. Some analysis views state, and in particular gubernatorial elections as (in European terminology) second order, serving as mid-term referendums on the record of the incumbent US president (Simon, Ostrom and Marra 1991), especially on the state of the national economy (e.g. Simon 1989). Carsey and Wright (1998, p. 1002) conclude that ‘presidential approval clearly intrudes [in gubernatorial elections] in a major way’. This analysis of second-orderness has been challenged by other accounts which find that governors are held accountable for their *state-level* record, in particular the state economy: ‘voters in these elections express support or dissent for the performance of the incumbent based upon how well the economy is doing’ (Atkeson and Partin 1995, p. 99; cf. Leyden and Borrelli 1995; Ebeid and Rodden 2006).

There are a number of variations on this argument. Robert Stein (1990) has argued that US voters differentiate their voting in state as compared to federal elections according to the functional responsibilities that are at stake at each level of government. Cutler’s (2008) recent work on Ontario elections in Canada shows that ‘valence’ judgements on parties’ issue profiles on, and competence to deal with, provincial-level issues shape provincial election outcomes.⁴ The common denominator is a focus on *institutional* structure; federal systems make possible a ‘split-level democratic citizenship’ (Cutler 2008, p. 502) in which important matters are at stake in both statewide and regional elections, and voters (at the very least have the potential to) make different, and unconnected voting decisions for different types of election.

There have as yet been few attempts to deploy these institutional approaches to European regional elections, though some examples are beginning to emerge in UK scholarship (though with inconsistent findings): Curtice’s (2006) exploration of whether in the 2003 Scottish Parliament election voters made decisions intended to hold the Scottish government to account for its record over the previous four years (not really); and Johns et al’s (2007) examination of whether valence evaluations of government and opposition in Scotland determined the 2007 Scottish election outcome (they did). Rather more attention in European scholarship has been given to the extent to which distinctive territorial identities and/or voter conceptions of territorial interest may differentiate the voting behaviour of key voter groups in regional elections from that in national elections.

This is an interpretation favoured by Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully in their (still tentative) approach to ‘multi-level voting’ (MLV), as applied mainly to Wales in the UK, and focused on the pattern since devolution in 1999 for Welsh (and Scottish) nationalist parties to do better in devolved than UK elections (Trystan, Scully and Wyn Jones 2003; Scully, Wyn Jones and Trystan 2004; Wyn Jones and Scully 2006): ‘the complex nature of identities in nonstate nations such as Scotland and Wales ... provides, in elections to devolved institutions, an alternative national focus within which many voters may locate their electoral choices’ (Wyn Jones and Scully 2006, p. 130). Paterson et al (2001, p. 44; cf. 2006, p. 107) develop a similar analysis, though focused on territorial interest rather than identity (though of course those who define interests territorially may do so because of the identity they claim): ‘voters revealed that what they are looking for in a Scottish election are parties that are willing to use the devolved institutions to promote Scotland’s interests’. Hough and Jeffery (2006b, p. 137) point to equivalent patterns in post-communist eastern Germany, as do Pallares and Keating (2003, p. 250) in Spain, who see patterns of ‘dual voting’ in Spain as a voter response to ‘a vision of statewide parties based on ideological criteria and one of the non-statewide party based on regional interests’.

In sum, there is a growing body of evidence that in regions with distinctive territorial identities voters use regional elections to articulate a sense of distinctive political community, whether defined culturally as identity, instrumentally as interest, or both. This Euro-sociological approach challenges that of second-order elections; it points to circumstances in which regional voting behaviour is uncoupled from, rather than a variant of voting behaviour in national elections. So in a different way do the more institutional approaches used in North America and now beginning to emerge in Europe. One of the problems in moving to a more general evaluation of the explanatory power of these challenges to the conventional, nationalised interpretation of regional elections is that their key indicators in aggregate-level electoral data – shifts in support away from incumbent statewide parties to NSWPs in regional as compared to national elections – are the same as those predicted by the second-order model. The only systematic way to unpack that aggregate-level trend is to carry out more individual-level surveys of voter behaviour designed simultaneously to test competing second-order, sociological and institutional approaches. This is partly a question of persuading research funders to support more work on regional elections in more places, but also one of ingenuity in interrogating what by now are already rich datasets on regional elections and regional public attitudes in Germany, Spain and the UK.⁵

Political parties: competitive challenges in multi-level politics

There are two types of political party that are active in regional-level settings: statewide parties which compete for office across all or almost all of the state territory, and non-statewide parties which have a region-specific rationale, though generally compete in both regional and statewide elections in their region. Growing attention has been given in the last decade or so to NSWPs, though again they are viewed in different ways in North American and European scholarship. The discussion first focuses on these differences before moving on to explore the competitive dynamics between NSWPs and statewide parties.

Where do non-statewide parties come from?

The growing number of NSWPs has prompted a large number of case studies of particular parties, but rather fewer attempts at classification and explanation. One exception has been the work led by Lieven de Winter and his collaborators – all based in Europe – on what they initially called ‘ethnoregionalist’ (de Winter and Türsan 1998) and later ‘autonomist’ parties (Lynch, Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro and de Winter 2006). This work has a sociological foundation, linked back to the work of Rokkan and his collaborators on the social cleavage between centre and periphery (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1999). It focuses on ethnoregionalism as ‘ethnic entrepreneurship’ (Türsan 1998, p. 6) designed to articulate, mobilise and defend the collective identity of a territorially defined social group within (and sometimes crossing the border of) a state. The central objective of ethnoregionalist parties is to establish, or strengthen some kind of ‘self-government’ within or beyond the state concerned (de Winter 1998, p. 241).

De Winter (1998, p. 211-212) measured the success of ethnoregionalist parties in terms of vote share and seats in *national* parliament elections on the basis that ‘the main policy objective of ethnoregionalist parties is the reorganisation of the national power structure towards an increase in the degree of self-government, and for this reorganisation only legislative bodies at the national level are competent’) This justification –challenged by Miodownik and Cartrite (2006, p. 54) as a ‘logic more appropriate to state-wide politics’ –

appears flawed in a number of ways. First (and the main concern of Miodownik and Cartrite) is that it defines out of significance parties which do not make it into national parliaments, but which may still be significant players in regional parliaments. Second, not all – and more likely, not many – constitutional reforms introducing or strengthening regional self-government have been driven by ethnoregionalist party presence in national parliaments, but rather the vigour of pro-autonomy sentiment in the region itself. And third, institutions of self-government are often introduced for reasons other than ethnoregionalist pressures – e.g. to provide new means of implementing national or EU policies or to promote ‘endogenous’ regional economic development (cf Jeffery 2008, p. 3-7) – yet once established can provide new platforms for regional political ‘entrepreneurship’.

The latter is a point well made by Pallares, Montero and Llera (1997) in their analysis of NSWPs in Spain. Some of those parties match de Winter and colleagues’ definition of ethnoregionalism, and their strength and legitimacy was instrumental in establishing a regionalised democracy in Spain. But other NSWPs have since emerged in almost every Spanish region, including those where there is no realistic claim to a distinctive social identity, and have become advocates in some cases of further regionalisation. These parties emerged not to defend social identities but in response to the ‘new political opportunity structure’ (Pallares, Montero and Llera 1997, p. 168) of the regionalised state. Spain in other words has NSWPs with both sociological roots in territorial cleavage and institutional roots in the opportunity structures of the Spanish state (indeed this is why Pallares, Montero and Llera (1997, p. 139) adopted the awkward but more inclusive term ‘non-statewide party’).

This institutionalist perspective is echoed elsewhere, with especially notable contributions in North American scholarship. Dawn Brancati’s (2006) 37-country study (with cases from all continents except Africa) demonstrates that decentralised institutional structures more readily explain the prevalence of NSWPs than territorial social cleavage. And Chhibber and Kollmann (2004: 20) have developed an ambitious theory of party system formation in their longitudinal study of Canada, India, the UK and the US which suggests that party systems form on a spectrum from ‘centralized’ (i.e. uniform and state-wide) to ‘provincialised’ (i.e. with regional differentiation) depending on ‘which level of government controls resources that voters care about’. So, ‘as authority devolves to lower levels of government, state-based, province-based or even region-based political parties can gain increasing votes at the expense of national parties’ (Chhibber and Kollmann 2004, p.222-3). Echoing the institutionalist strand of work on regional elections, what matters in explaining the growth of NSWPs is the importance of what regional political institutions are empowered to do, because that is what matters for voters.

The dynamics of regional party competition

Whatever the origins of NSWPs, their presence impacts on the dynamics of party competition in the regions concerned. One of the more fruitful themes in recent research has been the exploration of the strategic opportunities and dilemmas that face both NSWPs and the statewide parties that compete with them in the NSW regions. Research has moved beyond an understanding of NSWPs as single-issue parties focused solely on the pursuit of institutions of self-government that might better give voice to and protect distinctive regional identities. The self-government project may well be the defining and predominant feature of NSWPs in the absence of self-government. But once institutions of self-government have been established – as is now increasingly the case – other strategic calculations become significant, not least the fact that few NSWPs have won a parliamentary majority (or achieved sufficient strength to become a leading player in regional coalition governments) on a

platform of 'pure' regionalism. The logic of office-seeking requires NSWPs to open out to wider constituencies of voters (Newman 1997; Tronconi 2006).

That logic requires NSWPs to compete also on the terrain conventionally contested by statewide parties. They have a number of choices in doing so, as has been shown in attempts to classify NSWPs on 'secondary' (de Winter 1998, p. 208-11) ideological criteria, including

- classic left-right positioning on the respective roles of market and state (where NSWPs compete directly against social democratic and conservative/liberal parties)
- post-materialism (where NSWPs compete with green parties)
- anti-modernism (where NSWPs compete with the authoritarian right on issues like immigration or Euroscepticism)

NSWPs' responses to these strategic choices may in principle help them open up a wider constituency. But they may also bring new dilemmas. First, they may threaten the internal cohesion of the NSWP, either through a perceived dilution of the party's commitment to regionalist cause, or through a perceived dilution of the ideological position grafted onto its regionalism at some earlier stage in the attempt now to make the breakthrough into government (Elias 2009). In this sense NSWPs face an internal party dilemma which bears resemblance to the 'law' of deradicalisation and institutionalisation within a once contested political system that Robert Michels (1915) identified in early 20th century socialist parties: the more that office is sought, and the more the party professionalises itself in the pursuit of office, the more it develops a stake in the current system and the more its transformative vigour is dimmed. One risk in these circumstances is that other NSWPs, 'truer' to the cause of mobilising collective identity to win self-government, will emerge. The complex histories of division, re-combination and further division of regionalist parties in Corsica (Olivesi 1998) and Sardinia (Hepburn 2009) exemplify that risk.

Another risk – which leads into the second strategic dilemma faced by NSWPs – is that pragmatism and moderation in pursuit of government office may blur the distinctions between NSWPs and SWPs in the region concerned. Saul Newman (1997: p. 56) makes the incisive point that NSWPs are frequently 'more ideological followers than ... leaders', whose 'socio-economic agendas resemble ... the ideological position of the regionally dominant party when they arise'. The ideological positioning of NSWPs is in other words – as Emanuele Massetti (2009: ??) puts it – a 'deeply contextual process'; in a Scottish political environment long dominated by the UK Labour Party the SNP, for example, was unlikely to gain much traction with a right wing economic agenda; Flemish regionalism, equally, was never likely to have a left-leaning agenda. NSWPs 'do not challenge the status quo as much as reflect it in a new way' (Newman 1997: p. 56). But as they engage with others' ideological agendas, they logically face the challenge of maintaining their own distinctive identity.

That challenge may, thirdly, be exacerbated by a reverse dynamic: when statewide parties move onto NSWP turf by stressing regionalist agendas, either through regionally tailored variations of the statewide party programme, and/or by allowing regional branches of the statewide party greater organisational autonomy in competing in the region. Examples include the socialists in Catalonia, who are formally autonomous of the Spanish Socialist Party (Hopkin 2003, p. 233), and, to a lesser degree, the Labour Party in the UK which has gradually allowed its Welsh and Scottish branches more organisational and programmatic leeway in competing with Plaid Cymru and the SNP (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor, 2007). In neither case have the statewide parties yet had clear or sustained success in facing down the NSWP challenge. Elsewhere they have, for example in Sardinia, where the persistent weakness of Sardinian regionalism reflects the success of successive statewide parties 'at playing the Sardinian card' (Hepburn 2009, p. ??), or in Belgium, where the statewide parties dissolved themselves into regional-scale parties, and subsequently eclipsed the Flemish,

Wallon and Brussels regionalists who had earlier led the argument for the regionalisation of the Belgian state (Deschouwer 2009a). Of course, statewide parties that play the regional card too emphatically run the danger of eroding their appeal in other parts of the state and undermining their statewide credentials (Chandler 1987, p. 152).

The patterns of interaction between NSWPs and statewide parties in regional contexts are, by definition, diverse. They produce distinctive patterns of party competition in any regions in which NSWPs attain significant levels of support, with regional branches of statewide parties drawn into different kinds of strategic calculation than apply in statewide elections. But even in states, or parts of states, which lack significant NSWPs there is evidence that regional branches of statewide parties also detach themselves, to varying degrees, from the logic which drives the party at statewide level. This is most obviously the case in Anglophone Canada, where statewide party labels are used, but have significantly different meanings, across the various provinces (Carty and Wolinetz 2006). But it is also the case even in more centralised and politically uniform federations like Germany and Austria. Detterbeck and Jeffery (2008, p. 84) show in the German case that ‘decision-making within the parties [the main statewide parties, the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party] has become more decentralized and fine-tuned to specific Land circumstances. Fallend (2004) makes a similar analysis in the Austrian case, with regional branches of the two main statewide parties likewise bringing different strategic calculations to bear when they compete in regional as opposed to national elections. There are echoes here of the analysis of Chhibber and Kollman (2004): parties organise themselves according to the institutional logics of political systems. If important decision-making powers are organised at the regional level as well as at the national level, statewide parties will adjust their organisational structures accordingly.

Multi-level Party Competition

Statewide parties can, in other words, be just as important as NSWPs in shaping the content and trajectories of regional party competition. They are important in another respect: they form the major point of linkage between the different arenas of regional party competition in a state, and the overarching arena of statewide party competition. Because they are, by definition, everywhere, they are central to understanding the *multi-level* dynamics of party competition (Swenden and Maddens 2008b).

Contributions which explore the linkages between the parties that are engaged, simultaneously, in regional and statewide party competition (or reveal the absence of such links) are relatively rare. They fall into three categories: work on coalition formation, on congruence across levels of government, and on analytical frameworks for understanding multi-level politics. The seminal contribution on coalition formation was by Downs (1998), who looked systematically at 263 cases of regional coalition formation, and its relation to statewide party competition, in Belgium, France and Germany. Downs presented a multi-faceted challenge to the presumption that regional politics is a subordinate function of national politics. He showed, inter alia, that regional coalitions often did not replicate the party alliances that might have appeared ‘logical’ from a statewide perspective (Downs 1998, p. 146), that regional preferences often overrode ‘national circumstances and pressures’ (p. 217), and that coalition innovations at the regional level helped open up opportunities for new kinds of alliance at the statewide level (p. 231). Regional-level parties in other words exercised significant and unexpected autonomy and some of their regional-level choices had the effect of recalibrating the logic of statewide coalition formation. In that respect at least, political choices at the statewide level were contingent on prior choices at the regional level.

Downs (1998, p. 273) also had a wider point: that the expectations of coalition theory – much of it based in a formal modelling tradition, and focused almost exclusively on coalitions in national parliaments – did not necessarily hold at the regional level. This is a point taken up more recently by Stefuriuc (2009). Focusing on regional government formation in Spain, she confirms some aspects of formal coalition theory: coalitions tended to be of minimal winning size, with limited ideological range, and to control the median legislator. But she also emphasises that assumptions in coalition theory that parties are unitary (that is: nationalised) actors are both generally implausible, but also, logically, untenable in multi-level states. She also finds that parties can hold multiple goals simultaneously – for example, seeking government office at one level, while trying to exert influence by bargaining from a position outside government at another – depending on the incentives available to them at different levels.

The different choices available to the same party at different levels of government provide a link to work on the ‘congruence’ of party systems at regional and statewide levels. The concept of congruence has been used in two different ways. The first has been to map patterns of government and opposition at regional and statewide levels, and in particular – picking up on Downs (1998) – to identify where the composition of regional governments diverges from (or: is incongruent with) that of statewide government (e.g. Deschouwer 2009b; Jeffery 1999; Sturm 1999). The second usage of ‘congruence’ to capture the multi-level characteristics of party competition is one developed by Lori Thorlakson (2007, p. 70) who devises measures of decentralisation which illuminate ‘whether political arenas at the state [regional] level are cognitively and competitively independent of the federal political arena’ (as reflected in aggregate electoral data). These decentralisation measures cover resource-raising and expenditure autonomy and the scope of decision-making powers. The finding – in an analysis with similarities to that of Chhibber and Kollman – is that institutional decentralisation, and not territorial social diversity, explains incongruence best: ‘the institutional allocation of power in a federation influences the strategies of parties and voters, creating the potential for distinct politics to develop at the state [regional] level’ (Thorlakson 2007, p. 89).

Thorlakson’s restatement of the North American institutionalist position that has been a recurrent theme in this contribution, though based on impressive research, does not resolve much. Against it can be weighed equally trenchant restatements of a European sociological position that insists that social structure is primary, and is the basis of collective territorial mobilisation from which the institutional structures of government – whether more or less decentralised – follow (e.g. Erk 2008). What has been missing are analytical frameworks which have the intellectual ambition to recognise that both institutions and society matter, that both may be primary at the same time.

Deschouwer’s (2003) conceptual reflection on political parties in multi-level systems offers a potential starting point for this kind of analytical framework. Taking the party itself as the unit of analysis, Deschouwer (2003, p. 216-9) first sets out parameters for understanding at which level of government the ‘core’ of each party is to be found. This will not necessarily be at the statewide level, and may vary from party to party, and are also structured by the systemic features of the state concerned, including both institutional variables (intergovernmental coordination, scope of regional autonomy, asymmetry of institutional structure and electoral rules) and social variables of homogeneity/heterogeneity (p. 220-3). Parties make choices about how they compete with each other, at and across different levels of government, through the interaction of these party and systemic variables: ‘the way in which a party is positioned’ and ‘the way in which the system itself offers or limits opportunities for action’ (p. 219).

Future Agendas

The value of Deschouwer's contribution lies, in particular, in his call for researchers to be prepared to shift what he calls the 'point of reference' (p.217). Depending on the party (and the location of its 'core'), or the election, or the process of government formation, the point of reference, against which one can best understand the choices and opportunities open to the party, will vary. The analysis of multi-level politics requires multiple points of reference simultaneously.

And depending on the point of reference, the weight of institutional and sociological variables will vary. An ethnoregionalist party in a region with a strongly defined territorial identity and powerful and asymmetrical institutions of regional government will have different choices than a statewide party in a socially homogenous and institutionally symmetrical federation. Importantly even statewide parties in socially homogenous and institutionally symmetrical federations adapt their goals and strategies depending on the electoral arena. Even parties in such federations provide evidence that party competition is not shaped solely and simply by the logic of competing for office in national parliaments. A fundamental point follows: perhaps more clearly than anything else this contribution has shown – amid the vast diversity of institutional form and social structure in contemporary democracies, and the open range of choices these create for voters and parties – that the national is not 'natural'. It has shown a compelling need for a systematic de-nationalisation of the approaches traditionally used in the study of elections and parties.

It has also shown that territorially defined identities and/or interests combine with institutional opportunity structures to shape the way voters vote, and parties compete, in different ways in regional as compared to statewide settings. The de-nationalization of approach has to be both institutional *and* sociological, open to each, from different 'points of reference', being independent *and* dependent variable. The insistence of many of the authors cited in this contribution on *either* an institutional *or* a sociological independent variable (often combined with some kind of wholesale dismissal of the other) seems contrived, dogmatic and crudely reductionist. We would be better served by a recognition of the complexity of political societies, and of the multi-faceted research programme needed to capture that complexity.

That programme needs better data and better teamwork. Marks, Hooghe and Schakel (2008) have laid down a challenge on the data side with their dataset on regional authority, which was drawn together from secondary sources, without major external funding (but rather a lot of painstaking work). There exist vast amounts of attitudinal data in North America, Europe and elsewhere from election studies and public attitudes surveys which tell us much about how individuals and regional societies negotiate multi-level politics in specific places; these now require imaginative re-analysis and comparative analysis to help build generalisations and to isolate the respective impacts of institutional, sociological and other variables. Similarly we know much about parties and party competition in specific places; we need to scale up the ambition and build datasets which allow more systematic analysis across time and space. The adaptation of the Comparative Manifestos Project methodology for multi-level campaign analysis by research teams in Belgium (c.f. Pogorelis et al 2005; Libbrecht et al ????) and Germany (c.f. Bräuninger and Debus 2008; Däubler and Debus 2009; Debus 2008a; 2008b) – opens up that kind of possibility.

The call for better teamwork is about the transatlantic divide that has been a repeated theme in this contribution. It is difficult to challenge methodological nationalism when efforts are divided by a 'methodological continentalism', with North American institutionalists developing large n quantitative studies and European political sociologists deep in contextual

nuance and small n case studies each talking past each other. Enormous opportunities for cross-fertilisation are being lost. The professional associations and leading journals on either side of the Atlantic have a role to play here, and with it an outstanding opportunity to confront and de-bunk one of the most pervasive, yet perhaps most misleading assumptions in postwar social science: that the nation-state and its institutions are the natural unit of analysis for social scientists.

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¹ 'Region' is a problematic term, used simultaneously to describe supranational groupings of states and units of government within states. Within states the term is contested, especially when applied to stateless nations. However most comparative research on sub-state government does use the terminology of 'region', and this contribution reflects this common usage.

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³ The term was coined by Martins (1974, p. 276). Jeffery and Wincott (2010) discuss more fully the debate on, and critique of, methodological nationalism, and its implications for the study of regional politics.

⁴ Although others find classic second order effects also in Canadian provincial elections (Erikson and Phillipov 2001).

⁵ In Germany regional election studies are accessible online at <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp>. In Spain there are systematic analyses of regional public attitudes at http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/EN/1_encuestas/estudios/listaTematico.jsp?tema=121&todos=sj. In the UK regional election surveys and attitudes data are held at <http://www.esds.ac.uk/>.