

Economics, Institutions and Culture Explaining Regionalist Party Success in Europe

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Abstract

Why do some regions in western Europe have regionalists, or sub-state nationalists, actively seeking autonomy, while other regions have dormant or nonexistent groups? In this paper, I compare two forms of preference heterogeneity, economic and cultural, to determine which type, or combination, of preference difference is more significant for explaining regionalist mobilization. In addition, I investigate the effects of political decentralization on regionalist party success. Focusing on national electoral behavior, I develop hypotheses regarding both the incidence and success of regionalist parties competing in national elections. To test these hypotheses, I compiled a dataset including all regions in western Europe from 1977-1997, combining electoral, economic and cultural data collected at the regional, national and European levels. Methodological issues at both the data collection and analysis stages are considered, particularly the importance of evaluating both the incidence and success stages.

1 Introduction

With high-profile events such as ETA's latest attacks in the Basque Country, the Scottish National Party's becoming the ruling party in the Scottish parliament or Catalonia's attempt to gain more autonomy from Spain, explaining regionalist mobilization in Western Europe remains a topic of great interest to academics as well as politicians (Lynch 1996; de Winter and Türsan 1998; van Houten 2000).

Certain regionalist identity groups (e.g. the Scottish, Basques and Flemish) have increased calls for national self-determination, or at least greater autonomy, in recent years.¹ Most observers conclude that voting for regionalist parties in national elections has increased in the last few decades, perhaps even substantially (Lancaster and Lewis-Beck 1989; Gordin 2001; Pereira, Villodres and Nieto 2003). This trend contradicts the predictions of classic social theory, which relies heavily on the developmental hypothesis. Over time, this model hypothesizes that Western capitalist development will diminish intra-national cultural differences, leaving a more homogeneous population unmotivated for social action (Nielsen 1980, 1985; Ragin 1987). Evidence to contradict this prediction exists in nearly all of the Western democracies,² and certainly if you look beyond Europe (Horowitz 1985; Chua 2003).

Yet, as Hearl, Budge and Pearson (1996, 168) complain, simply looking at the dramatic cases, such as Scotland and Catalonia, could obscure the broader trends. Even if the data supports the notion that support for regional parties is on the rise, the larger question remains: why do some sub-state regions in Europe have regionalists actively seeking autonomy, and others lie dormant?

Drawing implications from the ethnic politics and comparative parties literatures, this article develops hypotheses regarding the incidence and success of regionalist political par-

¹Following Scheinman (1977, 67), regionalism includes all sub-state national movements which aim for some form of autonomy within or outside the traditional state. These movements can justify their goals with a variety of ethnic, cultural, political, economic, or social claims.

²In fact, Arend Lijphart finds little theoretical value in the developmental perspective and other theories that predicted a decrease in ethnic tension in post-war Europe, contending "there were no adequate theoretical grounds for the expectation that ethnic conflict would gradually disappear" (1977, 55).

ties, such as the Scottish National Party, the Plaid Cymru, and the Basque National Party. Similar logics theoretically explain the incidence and success of these parties. Most significantly, I expect cultural and economic differences to drive the decisions of regionalist political parties to compete in national-level elections as well as their success.

In addition to preference heterogeneity, I evaluate the effects of decentralization on regionalist party mobilization. Conflicting theories regarding this variable have emerged. Brancati (2007) argues that decentralization encourages regionalist mobilization, largely by increasing the viability of regionalist political entrepreneurs. In contrast, Michael Hechter contends that decentralization may hurt regionalist parties by undercutting the demand from voters (2000, 122). Finally, the effect may actually combine these two arguments and result in curvilinear effects, with minor decentralization subverting regionalists whereas significant decentralization simply leaves regionalist elites and voters wanting more. Using both incidence and success data, I evaluate these competing arguments.

Thus far, much of the best work on regionalist parties in Europe utilizes the case study method and focuses on particular regions or even particular parties (Lynch 1996; de Winter and Türsan 1998). While these detail-rich studies provide insightful looks into individual parties, they do not readily lend themselves to generalizations. Of the quantitative studies, most focus on vote share and neglect the incidence question altogether (Gordin 2001; Tronconi 2006; Brancati 2007). Others focus simply on party entry, or incidence (Tavits 2006). Yet Hug (2001) compellingly argues that focusing on only one or the other stage potentially biases the results. This analysis contributes to the literature on regionalist political parties as one of the first time-series-cross-section statistical analysis of the incidence and success of regionalist political parties in Europe.

In the next section, drawing from the ethnic politics literature, I discuss the theory linking cultural and economic difference with the incidence and success of regionalist political parties. Next, I consider the new party literature, in particular the supply and demand framework for understanding the dynamics of new party entry and competition. From these two sections,

I develop the main hypotheses regarding preference heterogeneity, decentralization and the political opportunity structure.

Using a dataset of all regions within the EU-14 from 1977-1997, I then test these hypotheses.³ As the statistical models show, the demand side of the equation, in the form of preference heterogeneity, largely explains where regionalist parties compete. In particular, it is cultural heterogeneity, not political economic difference, that motivates regionalist parties. As for decentralization, the results support a curvilinear relationship. Yet decentralization has an opposite effects at the two stages, thereby leaving us with more theoretical questions to consider.

2 Explaining Resurgent Regionalists

As it became increasingly clear that development would not resolve all the sub-national conflicts in Europe, scholars introduced a variety of models to explain its resurgence. In the conclusion of a 1977 edited volume on ethnic conflict in the West, Milton Esman summarizes the factors that led to the resurgence of autonomy movements in Europe (1977*a*): a group identity based on some objective trait; political, economic or cultural grievances; a perception that prospects would be better under an alternative regime; a less effective central government; and political organization. Each of these conditions existed in Scotland in the 1970s, thereby explaining Scotland's calls for autonomy (Esman 1977*b*, 284).⁴

Esman is not alone in focusing on grievances as a trigger for these movements. Suzanne Berger contends that objective regional discrepancies in economic success heightened the

³Following many cross-national studies of European Union countries, the dataset excludes Luxembourg for reasons of unit homogeneity. The end point of the time-series is simply the final election collected by Caramani (2000) while the starting point is restricted by available regional economic data. In the final section, I discuss both my data collection efforts to extend the dataset in both temporal directions along with different statistical specifications.

⁴It should be noted that not all observers agree that Scotland has 'legitimate' grievances. Birch notes that Scotland has been chronically over-represented in the House of Parliament and receives much more government expenditure per capita than England (1977, 102–105); however, he concedes that Scotland has a legitimate claim about "the inescapable evidence of mismanagement by London governments" (Birch 1977, 107).

salience of regional or ethnic issues (1977, 176). Similarly, Rudolph argues that “economic difficulty in ethnically distinct regions has tended to heighten ethnic awareness” (1977, 540). In the right context, these grievances led to demands for either autonomy or outright independence (Esman 1977*a*; McCrone 2001).⁵

Though by no means complete, the theories described above represent the most popular explanations for increased sub-national demands in post-World War II Europe. Walker Connor (1977, 23–25) summarizes them nicely:

(1) the theory of relative (economic, cultural, and/or political) deprivation; (2) anomie, resulting from a growing feeling of alienation from the depersonalized and dehumanizing modern mass society, leading, in turn, to what is alternately described as a reversion to ‘tribalism’ or as a new, more relevant alternative; (3) a ‘center-periphery’ series of relationships in which these newly assertive ethnic groups (the peripheral peoples) are viewed as having remained essentially outside or at the edge of the dominant society and have, therefore, been only marginally influenced by that society’s principal currents; and (4) the loss of global prestige suffered by individual European states, as contrasted with their eminence in the prewar period, and a corresponding loss of pride in being viewed as British rather than Scottish, or French rather than Breton.

Alienation, economic grievances and, perhaps, a perception that the benefits of belonging to the large post-imperial states of Europe are much diminished all serve as reasons why ethnic or regionalist groups may have increased their demands for autonomy.

3 Preferences matter, but which preferences?

In recent years, economists have focused more attention on ethnicity, decentralization, and autonomy. Alesina and Spolaore, for instance, argue that the optimal size of a state “emerges

⁵Similarly, Charles Ragin considers these factors in explicating the reactive ethnicity perspective. Under the reactive ethnicity view, a subordinated ethnic or regional group perceives an uneven distribution of resources that favors the dominant ethnic group. Urbanization and industrialization exacerbates this situation by concentrating members of the same subgroup in similar neighborhoods and social classes (Ragin 1987, 135). Francois Nielsen counters that despite the reactive ethnicity model’s usefulness in explaining the resurgence of ethno-national mobilization, the empirical evidence, particularly from Flanders, does not support either the reactive ethnicity model or Hechter’s internal colonialism model (1980, 79–89). This dual subjugation provides the grievances needed by leaders of regional groups to successfully mobilize their populations.

from a trade-off between the benefits of scale and the costs of heterogeneity in the population” (Alesina and Spolaore 2003, 175). Political economists find that economic growth, attempts at redistribution and public policies suffer with greater ethnic heterogeneity (East-erly and Levine 1997; Posner 2004). Or, differently stated, a government of a homogeneous population tends to be more successful at public policies because the day-to-day lives of the people are more similar (Tilly 1975, 79).⁶ In fact, Birch (1978, 335) argued that the “balance of advantages”—such as military security and economic access to markets—had shifted in favor of smaller states progressively since World War II. Due to this comparative advantage, European regions may see themselves as more capable of providing sustained economic growth than the traditional nation-states (Newhouse 1997, 69), yielding political separatism as an unintended consequence of economic integration (Alesina and Spolaore 1997, 1042).

Marks and Hooghe (2000, 799) summarize the problem for modern European states:

The logical implication of neoclassical theory is that national states are both too large and too small. Too large, because they encompass heterogeneous populations that are best served by local jurisdictions; too small, because they cannot encompass the territorial scope of market exchange or of policies that have international externalities.

Yet, as Horowitz (1981, 167) argued, if the trade-off between large and small states has shifted so dramatically in favor of smaller states across the universe of cases, the important question then becomes “what kind of groups are likely to secede, and under what circumstances.” For these questions, I focus on the second half of the Alesina and Spolaore (2003) trade-off: preferences.

I argue that a major deficiency in the formal models is a lack of full consideration on the advantages of smallness. In the models, the advantages of smaller states are attributed to more homogeneous preferences, but little consideration is given to what type of preferences. The economic models are decidedly vague about whether it is cultural, economic, political

⁶In contrast with Tilly (1975), Habyarimana et al. (2007) contends that it is not that co-ethnics share similar tastes for public goods that makes homogeneous populations better at producing public goods. Rather, “successful collective action among homogeneous ethnic communities can be attributed to the existence of norms and institutions that police the defection of non-contributors” (Habyarimana et al. 2007, 724).

or some other type of preferences. Rather, they utilize distance from the capital as a simple proxy for different preferences to observe and model (Alesina and Spolaore 1997, 2003). Yet, if there are territorial differences in culture, political preferences, or economic interest, then a region will be more likely to pursue more autonomy from the capital. In those regions that have a combination of these different preferences, regionalist political entrepreneurs have an even larger base to exploit. By exploring these types of preferences more explicitly, I can better explain cross-regional variation.

4 Explaining Regionalist Party Success

Turning to the broader new party literature, several potential factors may drive demand. Typically, salient new issues create the ‘push’ for new parties (Rüdig 1990). For Green parties, the controversy over nuclear energy, among other issues, created a push for alternative representation in parliaments (Kitschelt 1989). For New Radical Right parties, immigration concerns and economic insecurity often fuel support (Hug 2001, 4). For regionalist political parties, it is not surprising that regional issues drive demand for new political representation (Hug 2001, 3). However, underlying these demands must be a certain level of preference heterogeneity, either in cultural or economic terms. In other words, citizens who live in a region which is different from the rest of the country are more likely to support regionalist parties (Hearl, Budge and Pearson 1996; de Winter and Türsan 1998). And in fact, most studies include historical language of the region, a proxy for cultural difference, as an explanatory variable and conclude that language trumps political economic variables as a causal variable (Hearl, Budge and Pearson 1996; Gordin 2001; Fearon and van Houten 2002).

Language difference is highly correlated with regionalist party existence and success. As demonstrated in an analysis of nine advanced industrial countries, 91% (20 out of 22) of the regions where regionalist parties competed did have a distinct language; however, 62% (32 out of 52) of the regions with distinct languages did not have regionalist parties competing in

elections (Fearon and van Houten 2002). These simple statistics highlight the near necessity of language difference as a determinant of regionalist parties but they also show that a different language is by no means sufficient for a regionalist party (Fearon and van Houten 2002, 20).⁷ In other words, while nearly all regions that have a regionalist party also have a distinct historical language, more than half of the regions with a distinct language do not support a regionalist party. Cultural difference, in the form of historical language, must be considered a significant potential explanatory variable in any empirical model of regional mobilization.

Rather than compare the most commonly used language in the region to that of the capital, Fearon and Laitin (2000) utilize the *Ethnologue*'s categorization of languages into different language families to determine how similar the region's language is to the capital's language (SIL International 2006). Using the historic language of the region rather than the current language allows the measure to serve as a proxy for cultural differences in a way that using current language cannot because it may underestimate preference differences due to linguistic but not cultural assimilation (Fearon and Laitin 2000).

By following the coding guidelines, I derived each region's Language Family from the *Ethnologue* database.⁸ Following Fearon and van Houten (2002), the Language Family variable is converted to Language Difference by using the reciprocal.⁹ As Language Difference

⁷Gordin's Boolean analysis comes to the same conclusion about language's necessary but not sufficient relationship with regionalist party success. In almost all cases where a regionalist party exists, the region has a distinct language, but the presence of a distinct language does not, by itself, guarantee a regionalist party (Gordin 2001).

⁸Basically, the coding works as follows: Each language has a classification designated by Grimes' *Ethnologue* (SIL International 2006). The Language Family variable simply measures the level at which the region's language branches off from the capital's language. For example, English's classification is Indo-European, Germanic, West, English while Scotland's code is Indo-European, Celtic, Insular, Goidelic. The two languages branch off at the second level, so the code is two. Another example is Spanish (Indo-European, Italic, Romance, Italo-Western, Western, Gallo-Iberian, Ibero-Romance, West Iberian, Castilian) and Basque (Basque), which gives Basque a code of one. If two languages are identical, the Language Family code is ten, which is one level higher than the most similar yet still distinct languages. Examples of regions coded ten are Andalusian and Canaries (both utilize Spanish). For a more complete discussion of the coding guidelines, see Fearon and Laitin (2000) and Fearon and van Houten (2002).

⁹Language Difference is simply the reciprocal of Language Family, or $1/\text{Language Family}$. This simple conversion emphasizes the differences that are earlier in the family trees (e.g. Spanish is more different from Basque than Catalan), both because branches earlier in the family tree are more significant and because larger differences between languages are more reliably coded in the *Ethnologue*. Drawn from the *Ethnologue*

between the region and the rest of the country increases, I expect support for the regionalist political parties to increase both in terms of competing in the elections in the first place and electoral success [Language Difference].

Hypothesis 1: As Language Difference increases, regionalist parties will be more likely to compete in national elections and will be more successful.

Previous studies demonstrate convincingly that cultural differences are a key predictor for regionalist party support (Hearl, Budge, and Pearson 1996; Fearon and van Houten 2002), but cultural differences are not the only preferences that can affect support for regional autonomy. The dramatic rise of the Lega Nord in Italy highlights another factor that can create grievances for a region: political-economic preferences. Predictions vary about whether relatively poor or rich regions should seek autonomy; however, based on the idea that divergent preferences lead groups to seek autonomy, I predict that regions with greater economic differences from the rest of the country will be more supportive of regional parties, *ceteris paribus* [Economic Difference]. This variable is simply measured as the difference between the per capita income of a region and the country.¹⁰ With this measure, I argue that regions with either higher or lower than average per capita GDP have different political-economic preferences than the rest of the country.¹¹

Hypothesis 2: As Economic Difference increases, regionalist parties will be more likely to compete in national elections and will be more successful.

Based on these variables, a simple analysis of the group means demonstrates there are

(SIL International 2006), the coding of the Language Family variable is available upon request of the author.

¹⁰Specifically, $EconDif = \text{abs}(\text{RelGDP} - 100)$ where relative regional GDP (RelGDP) is simply the ratio of regional GDP per capita to national GDP * 100. So a region that has the same GDP per capita as the country would have a 100. A relatively poor region (Andalusia) would score below 100 (74) while a relatively rich region (Basque) would score higher (128) on the RelGDP variable. Thus, Economic Difference increases as a region is either richer or poorer than the national average.

¹¹Ideally, I would be able to measure differences in political ideology between each region and the rest of the country; however, measuring this concept would be difficult at best. For instance, survey data would be imperfect because there are not adequate numbers of respondents in all regions within a country to create a proper measure. Further, sufficient survey data does not exist across the cross-sectional time series; hence, I utilize the Economic Difference variable as a proxy.

obvious differences between those regions where regionalist political parties compete and those where they do not. Table 1 provides an illustration of these group differences.

	Regionalist Party Incidence	
	No	Yes
Language Difference	0.14	0.33
Economic Difference	15.03	19.26
Observations	672	145

On average, regionalist parties compete when there is far more historical linguistic difference and where the regions have more different per capita incomes.

In addition to economic difference, relative economic well-being should influence support for regionalist movements (see Bolton and Roland 1997). In the case of advanced groups in advanced countries, such as the Basques in Spain or the Northern League in Italy, their grievance tends to be that they are subsidizing poorer regions or that the center’s economic policies are holding their growth down (Horowitz 1981, 184). Along these lines, the Scottish National Party attempts to garner favor among voters by demonstrating that Scotland is subsidizing the rest of the United Kingdom (Begg and Stewart 1971, 148). Though theoretical debates remain over whether rich or poor regions will be more assertive (Hechter 1975), extant empirical studies suggest that richer regions are now expected to be the more assertive regions (de Winter and Türsan 1998; van Houten 2000; Gordin 2001; Fearon and van Houten 2002). As a control variable, therefore, I also include the relative per capita GDP of the region (see footnote 10). In contrast to the economic difference variable, this continuous variable measures whether a region is poorer or richer than the center. From the literature, I expect that richer regions will be more supportive of autonomy, and therefore regional parties, than poorer regions [Relative GDP per capita].

Significantly, though, several authors argue new demand is necessary but it may not be sufficient (Kitschelt 1995; Hug 2001; Tavits 2006; Meguid 2008). Successful new party

entry also depends on the opportunity, or 'pull.' The opportunity structure includes the political institutions, such as electoral laws, but it also includes the strategies of mainstream parties (Meguid 2008; Selb and Pituctin 2010). Hug argues that most studies of new parties fail to appreciate the importance of mainstream parties (2001, 37), but more recent studies provide lessons about the potential effect of mainstream party strategies on regional political party entry and electoral success. In fact, Bonnie Meguid argues, "the electoral successes and failures of green, radical right, and ethnoterritorial parties are not merely the reflection of the institutional and sociological environment. . . . their electoral lows and highs are influenced by the strategies of the most powerful set of political actors—the electorally and governmentally dominant mainstream parties" (2008, 273–274). In other words, the decision of new parties to enter political competition hinges directly on the strategies of the mainstream parties. At least two strategic party opportunity structure hypotheses warrant discussion.

First, using a spatial model, Kitschelt argues that when the mainstream parties converge, there is space for right-wing entrepreneurs to exploit and enter the political marketplace (1995). It is only when this space is open that political entrepreneurs can attempt to seize the opportunity with a winning strategy of their own (Kitschelt 1995, 14).

Using the Comparative Manifesto Project data (Budge et al. 2001),¹² the cumulative right-left ideological score for the largest party is simply subtracted from that of the second largest party [Party Divergence]. If the ideological distance between the two main parties decreases, implying convergence in the spatial model, then regionalist political parties will be more likely to enter competition.

Second, both Meguid (2005, 2008) and Hug (2001) argue that mainstream parties can subvert potential new parties by incorporating their new issue into their platform. By accommodating new issues, the mainstream parties decrease the 'push' for new parties,

¹²Admittedly, the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) has numerous critics. For these purposes, the most relevant criticism is that the CMP measures salience rather than position. But it does correlate with expert measures of party positions. And one advantage to the data, of course, is that it is available for the full time-series-cross-section.

thereby limiting their electoral support.¹³ Theoretically, Hug contends that mainstream parties can adopt the demands of the potential parties and reduce the likelihood of new entry (Hug 2001, 53); however, he does not directly empirically test whether the mainstream party strategies affect new party entry (Hug 2001, 118). With a variety of statistical tests, Meguid demonstrates that mainstream party strategies do affect the electoral strength of niche parties (2008). In the case of regionalist parties, if the mainstream political parties incorporate a more positive position on decentralization, as coded in the Comparative Manifesto Project, then voters will express less support for regionalist political parties.¹⁴ To capture whether a major party accommodates the regionalist party's issue, the decentralization score for either the largest or second largest party, whichever has the higher decentralization position, is included [Party Accommodation].

In early studies of regionalist political party success, political decentralization is relatively neglected. But states, similar to mainstream parties, are not innocent bystanders in this process and their evolving relationship with their regional units will affect the movements. Indeed, Rudolph and Thompson (1985) find that states are remarkably successful in placating sub-national movements with public sector policies and rather less so when they use repressive tactics. Political options to placate sub-national demands range from output concessions, or public policy changes to resolve some of the grievances of the groups, to changing the constitution to a more power-sharing model, to devolution (Keating 1988, 173).

Michael Hechter argues that when a central government is responsive to the demands of regionalist groups vis-à-vis devolution, it reduces the incentive to support regionalist parties (2000, 122), an argument very much in line with Meguid's accommodative strategy theory.

¹³Meguid (2005, 2008) considers multiple mainstream party strategies, including accommodative, dismissive, and adversarial, but I focus on accommodative strategies in this paper.

¹⁴This strategic move on the part of mainstream parties can be either pre-emptive or reactive. Mainstream parties can either accommodate the issue, thereby subverting potential regionalist political parties, or they can react to regionalist political party success and undercut an existing movement by accommodating their main issue. Either way, the logic suggests the move would decrease the likelihood of regionalist political party incidence.

In other words, the central government might try to undercut a burgeoning sub-state nationalist movement by providing a degree of decentralization. But the effect of decentralization is non-linear in this logic. Some degree of decentralization may subvert regionalist party supporters, but contrary to the goals of central elites, devolution could succeed in “whetting [regionalist party leaders’] appetites for even greater powers and privileges” (Hechter 2000, 140). For instance, devolution might provide them experience and resources at lower levels of government that increases their likelihood of success at higher levels (Brancati 2004, 2). Thus, beyond a threshold, political decentralization may actually increase electoral support for regionalist political parties. Gerring (2005, 80) finds that minor parties perform better in federal systems, at least in the plurality systems on which he focuses.

To control for the decentralization hypothesis, both political decentralization and a squared decentralization term are included [Regional Governance Index]. Compiled by Hooghe and Marks (2001, 192), this index measures the formal regional governance structures in European countries on four criteria across four time periods: constitutional federalism, special territorial autonomy, the role of regions in central government, and whether regional assemblies use direct or indirect elections.¹⁵ Based on the theoretical predictions of the literature, I expect to find a non-linear relationship between centralization and support for regional parties [Regional Governance Index].

Finally, several authors attempt to find a relationship between proportional representation [PR] and support for regional parties. Though the general literature on electoral systems predicts that PR should increase the support for small parties, such as regional ones, several authors find that when it has an effect on regional parties, PR actually dampens support for regional parties (de Winter 1998, 219; Gordin 2001, 164; Pereira, Villodres, and Nieto 2003, 11) . Generally, plurality systems are expected to discourage small parties in part because voters strategically decide between major parties rather than waste their votes (Pereira, Villodres and Nieto 2003, 6). But the geographic concentration of regional minorities may

¹⁵In future iterations, I will also use fiscal decentralization measures for this hypothesis. Following Rodden (2002), I will use sub-national expenditures as a share of total public sector expenditures.

explain this somewhat counter-intuitive finding, particularly in Europe.

From this brief discussion, several determinants of party success emerge. In the following section, I use both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors to explain the decision of regional political parties to enter political competition and their success upon entry.

5 When and Where Do Regionalist Parties Compete?

This section introduces the dataset and methods used to test the theoretical propositions regarding regionalist political party entry. After reviewing the structure of the data and the dependent variable, I introduce the model specifications and analyze the incidence of regionalist political parties in national political competition. The next section proceeds to investigate the electoral success of these same parties.

5.1 Measurement and the Dependent Variable

For this dataset, electoral data for each region in the EU-14 starting in 1977 or the earliest election for which regional economic data has been collected.¹⁶ Following the Assembly of European Regions (1996), the region is simply the “territorial body of public law established at the level immediately below that of the state and endowed with political self-government.” The region was then matched with its corresponding EU designated NUTS code.¹⁷ This process is critical in determining the appropriate universe of regions in the fourteen countries because the ‘zeros,’ or non-events, in this case are as important to explaining regionalist political party entry as those cases where parties do exist.

Drawing from the regionalist party literature (de Winter and Türsan 1998; Caramani 2000; Pereira, Villodres and Nieto 2003), Appendix A lists the regionalist parties in Western

¹⁶District-level electoral data for these countries can be found in Caramani (2000). The district-level data are aggregated by the appropriate regional NUTS code.

¹⁷The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) is the EU classification system for subdividing each member state (European Union 2004). As the NUTS number increases, the size of the subdivision decreases. For example, NUTS1 levels include regions with three to seven million people, while NUTS3 groups, which are sub-divisions of NUTS1 and NUTS2, include 150,000 to 800,000 citizens.

Europe that competed in national elections between 1950 and 1997 that are included in this analysis. Parties with a regionalist agenda are included, not necessarily parties that only compete in particular regions or only parties that are explicitly pro-independence. This coding yielded the first stage dependent variable, which is simply a dichotomous variable across regions in all fourteen countries measuring 1 if a regionalist political party competed in the national election held that year, and 0 otherwise.

For this analysis, the observation is the region-level result of a national election, or rather, whether a regionalist political party competes in a given national election in a particular region or not. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the dependent variable across countries. Since 1950, regionalist political parties only compete in six countries in Western Europe, including Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. The total number of cases is simply the number of regions multiplied by the number of elections in each country.¹⁸

For Belgium, nearly all region-election years are counted as having regionalist political parties because the party system is nearly entirely regionalized.¹⁹ In France, regionalist parties compete in national elections only in 1986 in Bretagne and Corsica, while in the United Kingdom, regionalist parties compete in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland in nearly every election since 1950. For both Italy and Spain, regionalist political parties compete in certain regions, such as Basque Country, Catalonia, and South Tyrol, in every election, but parties begin to compete in other parts of the country as time progresses.

Table 2 demonstrates that variation occurs across space. Among the cases where regionalist political parties do compete, there is distribution over time as well. Generally, regionalist political parties compete in more regions as time progresses, with regionalist par-

¹⁸There are a few exceptions to this simple multiplication. In Denmark, there were no elections for Roskilde until 1971 (12 total). In Germany, no elections were held in Saarland until 1957 (12 total) and 6 German regions are only included since 1990 (3 total). In Netherlands, no elections were held in Flevoland until 1986 (4 total).

¹⁹Considering the distinctiveness of the Belgian and Northern Ireland case, these outliers may bias the statistical results. To ensure robustness, I use a jackknife procedure, simply leaving out each country and running the models again.

Table 2: Observations with Regionalist Political Parties

Country	# of Regions	# of Elections	Total Observations	Observations with Regionalist Parties
Austria	9	14	126	0
Belgium	3	15	45	38
Denmark	15	20	292	0
Finland	6	13	78	39
France	22	13	286	4
Germany	16	13	147	0
Greece	13	9	117	0
Ireland	2	15	30	0
Italy	20	12	240	83
Netherlands	12	14	158	0
Portugal	7	9	63	0
Spain	17	7	119	41
Sweden	21	16	336	0
United Kingdom	12	14	168	42
EU14 total	175	184	2205	247

ties competing in 7.5% of observations in the 1950s and nearly 14.4% of the observations in the 1990s. But the trend is not linear, with the least amount of regionalist party activity in the 1960s and the most during the 1980s. Along with Table 1, these numbers demonstrate that variation over time and space exists, and that generally regionalist political parties compete in more regions in more recent decades, though the trend levels off in the 1990s. It is this variation in time and space the next section seeks to explain.

The time cut-offs represent a major source of future revision. On one end, the analysis is cut off by the lack of consistently gathered economic data at the regional level. On the other end, the excellent electoral data gathered by Caramani (2000) ends in 1997. I am currently gathering new data to extend the analysis in both directions.

5.2 Model Specification

This section examines under what conditions regionalist political parties are more likely to compete in national-level elections. The data are cross-sectional time-series and the

dependent variable is a simple dummy variable, where a 1 means that at least one regionalist political party competed for a national Parliamentary seat in that region.²⁰ Traditionally, analysts simply used standard logit or probit to deal with binary cross-section time-series data (Beck, Katz and Tucker 1998). Unfortunately, the bias from duration dependence is potentially significant. Standard logit and probit can underestimate variability by 50% or more (Beck, Katz and Tucker 1998, 1263).

Recognizing that binary time-series-cross-section data are actually grouped duration or event history data, Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998, 1261) (BKT) propose a fairly simple way to correct the temporal dependence problems, simply adding either a series of dummy variables or splines to a standard logit or probit analysis. In this data, temporal dependence seems obvious: whether a regionalist political party competes in a particular election depends on the electoral history of that party. Once a party enters competition at one election, it is easier to compete in future elections. A standard likelihood ratio test confirms the existence of temporal dependence in this data (Beck, Katz and Tucker 1998, 1269).

Since adding numerous temporal dummies is not necessarily ideal due to the loss of degrees of freedom, Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998, 1721) prefer to use natural cubic splines to correct for duration dependence.²¹ This particular dataset presents an additional temporal complication. While most event history analysis has only one ‘failure’ per unit, political parties can compete in multiple elections, and in fact should be expected to do so more frequently if they have an electoral history. The model in Table 3 follows the advice of Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998, 1272) and includes a control variable which counts the number of previous events. This variable does not change the substantive results of the models.

To correct for the lack of independence within units, the model in Table 3 utilizes ro-

²⁰Regionalist political parties competed in 247 cases. In 73% (177 cases) of these observations, only one party competed in the election. In 22% (53), two regionalist political parties competed, and in less than 5% of cases, either 3 or 4 parties competed.

²¹Tucker’s software, BTSCS, creates the temporal splines from the data (Tucker 1999). The use of splines and temporal dummies is explained and justified in detail in Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998). The model was also run with temporal dummies instead of splines with no difference in the significance or sign in the coefficients.

bust (Huber/White) standard errors, clustered at the regional level. This option in Stata changes the assumptions of probit so that independence is assumed across units—in this case, regions—but not necessarily within units. Table 3 estimates the model discussed above.²²

Table 3: Probit (BKT) Regression of Regionalist Party Incidence

Variable	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)
Language Difference	3.528***	(0.869)
Economic Difference	-0.005	(0.007)
Party Accommodation	-0.079*	(0.033)
Party Divergence	-0.013**	(0.005)
Proportional Representation	0.928**	(0.334)
Regional Governance Index	0.592***	(0.125)
Regional Governance Index ²	-0.067***	(0.014)
Elections Since Last Incidence	-0.344	(0.281)
Spline 1	2.028	(2.117)
Spline 2	0.751	(0.554)
Spline 3	-4.223	(4.200)
Constant	-1.773***	(0.563)
N	817	
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.512	

Note: Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust Huber-White standard errors, clustered by region, in parentheses. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

The results of the model largely support the hypotheses. As Language Difference increases, the likelihood that a regionalist political party competes in a national election increases. For Hypothesis 1, then, Language Difference has a consistently significant effect in the predicted direction. Using *Clarify* (King, Tomz and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg and King 2003) on the results from Table 3, this effect is demonstrated in Figure 1.

²²To ensure the results are not simply artifacts of this model choice, I will conduct robustness tests including alternative model specifications, including a probit analysis without the BKT corrections, a conditional fixed effects logit, and a random effects probit. These alternative specifications included different ways to control for a time trend, as well, including temporal dummies and a lagged dependent variable. Each deals with and introduces statistical problems of their own, yet together yield robust results for the key explanatory variables, particularly the EU coefficient. The discussion in this section focuses on the BKT model because it is the most theoretically appropriate for this particular dataset. Further, other specifications, based on

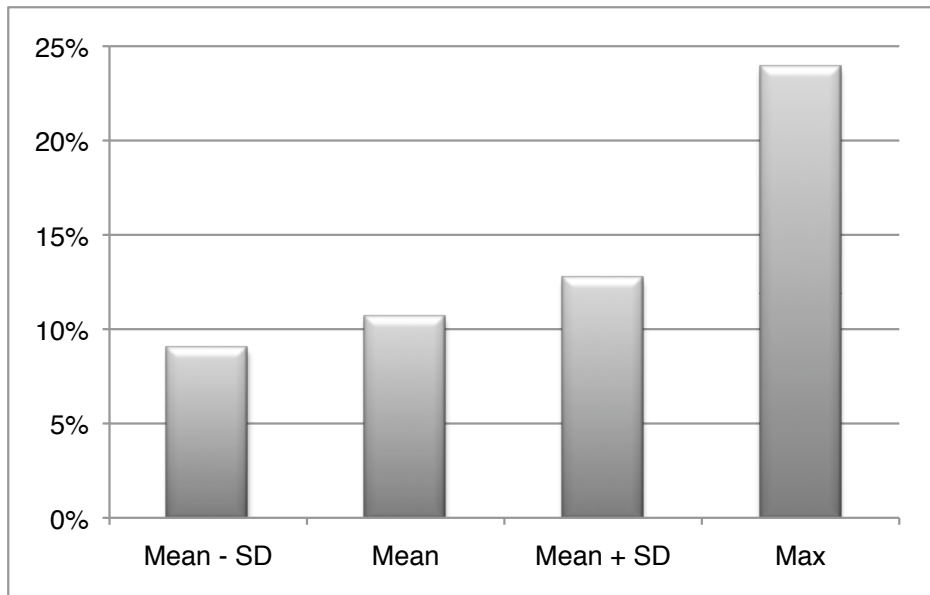


Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Regionalist Party Incidence, By Language Difference

Figure 1 demonstrates that as Language Difference increases from below average (mean minus standard deviation) to average to above average, and, finally, to its maximum level, the likelihood of regionalist political parties competing in electoral politics increases. Compared to higher levels of language difference, regions with average levels have very low probabilities. The mean of language difference is actually quite low on the scale—0.17 on a 0 to 1 scale—and implies a difference akin to a dialect of the national language rather than a different language or culture. Examples include Calabria or Sicily in Italy or Aragon in Spain. For these culturally similar regions, the likelihood of a regionalist political party competing in national elections is 12%.

By increasing language difference to 0.5, which is the classification for Bretagne in France or Trentino Alto Adige in Italy, the probability of a regionalist party competing increases to 16%. At the highest value on the scale, where regions such as Pais Vasco score, the chances of a regionalist political party competing are nearly 25%. These results buttress previous studies that found the significance of a cultural or language difference variable to be an

the BKT model in Table 3, will control for GDP per capita, national unemployment, effective number of electoral parties, time, and the number of previous events.

extremely powerful predictor of regional mobilization in Europe (van Houten 2000; Fearon and van Houten 2002).

In contrast, Economic Difference has no statistically significant effect on the incidence of regionalist parties. Measured as Economic Difference or Relative GDP, the measures do not significantly affect the probability of regionalist parties competing. I will return to this variable in the next section and again in the conclusion.

For the strategic party hypotheses, the results are consistent with theoretical expectations. Party Accommodation has a negative and significant coefficient, suggesting that mainstream parties can subvert potential competitors by co-opting their issue, in this case decentralization. Further, the results support the Party Divergence hypothesis. If the top two parties diverge in their left-right positions, then they eliminate room for minor parties to enter the competition. *Ceteris paribus*, the probability of a regionalist party competing drops from 13% to 9.7% if the Party Divergence score changes from the minimum to the maximum. These results suggest that mainstream party strategies do indeed affect the likelihood of minor regionalist political parties entering national elections, albeit in a small way compared to other factors.

In the literature on small parties, electoral system generally has a significant effect, with proportional representation increasing the number of parties. The positive effect of PR in the model is, therefore, not surprising.

Finally, for political decentralization, Table 3 indicates that the probability of a regionalist party competing is increasing at lower levels of decentralization, and decreasing at higher levels. Rather than the Hechter logic, a simpler logic for decentralization fits these robust results. Eventually, a national government can actually meet the demands of the autonomy-oriented regional citizens. At low levels of devolution, decentralization does not satiate the appetite of proponents of regional autonomy but in fact may increase opportunities for regional political entrepreneurs to gather support. The statistically significant, positive coefficient supports Brancati's (2007) theoretical argument and results regarding

regional party vote share; however, she does not address incidence. Further, beyond a certain level, decentralization does diminish enthusiasm for regionalist political parties to enter competition.

6 What Explains Regionalist Party Success?

The previous section demonstrated how different demand variables affected the incidence of regionalist parties. Whether political elites decide to contest national elections is an important observable implication of the theory; however, it is only half of the story. This section proceeds to analyze the electoral success of these same parties.

6.1 Measurement and the Dependent Variable

As in the previous section, the first step in evaluating the determinants of regionalist party success is to identify relevant political parties. Again, these are parties, like Herri Batasuna or Plaid Cymru, that have a regionalist agenda, not necessarily parties that only compete in particular regions of a country.²³ Extending the previous incidence model, this section analyzes only those districts where there is an active regionalist political party, thereby effectively excluding the cases where the regionalist party vote share is zero. To be clear, the dependent variable is the regionalist party's share of the district-level vote in national or Parliamentary, not regional or local, elections.

In addition to these now familiar variables, several other control variables may determine regionalist party success. Turnout is included to capture a degree of protest vote.²⁴ Also included is a dummy variable for whether other regionalist parties compete in that district in

²³Again, Appendix A lists these parties and their respective regions, countries and elections.

²⁴Potentially, voter opinions on issues may be driving the vote for regional parties. While available studies demonstrate that left-right ideology has no effect on support for regional parties (Lancaster and Lewis-Beck 1989, 35), views on particular issues may affect vote choice. (Lancaster and Lewis-Beck 1989, 38) find that when a voter is dissatisfied with a national party's economic policy, they will be more likely to vote for a regional party. Since survey data for regions across the time series of this sample are unavailable, I include turnout to proxy for voter discontent with the government in an attempt to control for this variable's effect.

that election year.²⁵ By definition, if more than one regionalist party competes in an election, then the marketplace would be crowded. Thus, other regionalist parties should reduce the vote share for the particular regionalist party in the observation. Age of the political party is also included as a control.²⁶ Basically, older parties are expected to be more successful based on the logic that their ability to compete in multiple elections is a reflection of previous success or at least an ability to survive in the political marketplace. Finally, the size of the region itself is included.²⁷

6.2 Model Specification

This section examines under what conditions regionalist parties receive higher vote shares in national-level elections. The dataset are cross-sectional time-series and the dependent variable is vote share. Table 4 reports the Ordinary Least Squares results.²⁸

Table 4 yields several interesting results. This model provides further evidence to support

²⁵In 500 or 19% of the cases, the regionalist party has at least one regionalist party competitor. For robustness, other models included the number of other regionalist parties, a simple count variable, and the effective number of other regionalist parties. The formula for effective number of other regionalist parties [ENORP] is as follows:

$$1 / \sum_{i=1}^n (v_i)^2 \quad (1)$$

or the inverse of the sum of the squared vote share of the other regionalist parties in the district election. This index has been widely used in comparative politics, for both ethnic fragmentation and effective number of political parties, since being popularized by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Not only are these measures highly correlated with the dummy variable, because most districts that have multiple parties only have two, but the regression results do not change with the different measures.

²⁶Rather than measure a party's age by the length of time since their founding, party age is the length of time since they first competed in an election. This decision not only greatly simplifies the coding standards, but it also eliminates the need to subjectively decide whether a party that does not compete in an election is an interest group or a party and when they make the transition.

²⁷In future iterations, I will include other control variables that produce consistent results in previous work. These include political economic variables, such as regional unemployment and a region's percentage of agricultural employment. The basic logic is simple: high unemployment contributes to dissatisfaction with the current government, which leads to a higher likelihood of a protest vote. Extending the logic, unemployment provides an opportunity for protest votes while language contributes to regional parties being the outlet of choice, rather than another non-mainstream party (Hearl, Budge and Pearson 1996, 178–179). Similarly, Zirakzadeh (1989, 327) finds that a rise in regional unemployment increased support for regional parties in every Basque province. Hearl, Budge and Pearson (1996, 179) also find the percentage of the regional population employed by agriculture and industry to be significantly and positively related to regional party electoral success, but there is little a priori justification given for why the reader might expect

Table 4: OLS Regression of Regionalist Party Electoral Success

Variable	b	(S.E.)
Language Difference	7.879***	(2.474)
Economic Difference	0.080*	(0.035)
Party Accommodation	0.174	(0.286)
Regional Governance Index	-3.294**	(1.273)
Regional Governance Index ²	0.413**	(0.157)
Other Regionalist Parties	-2.793***	(0.845)
Turnout	0.073	(0.362)
Size of the Region	0.001**	(0.0003)
Party Age	-0.0003	(0.018)
Belgium	-4.843	(6.822)
France	-14.105	(7.539)
Italy	-0.489	(7.216)
Spain	-6.929	(7.058)
UK	-1.807	(7.183)
Constant	10.228	(12.241)
N		1812
R^2		0.040

Note: Table entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Finland is the reference country.

$p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

the contention that regional citizens are more supportive of regionalist parties when their preferences diverge from the rest of the country. *Ceteris paribus*, raising language difference from the minimum to the maximum increases the expected vote share of a regionalist party from 10% to nearly 19%. Supporting previous studies as well as the finding from the previous section, Table 4 demonstrates that the more culturally distinct a region, the greater the support for regionalist parties.

Though Economic Difference is more modest in its magnitude than Language Difference, it does have a statistically significant effect on vote shares in the predicted direction. Holding all other variables at their mean, shifting Economic Difference from its minimum to its maximum increases regionalist party vote share from 17.5% to 20.9%.

In contrast with the party entry stage, Party Accommodation does not have a statistically significant effect on vote shares. The prediction was that when mainstream parties accommodate regionalist movements by adopting a more positive view on decentralization, support for regionalist parties would decrease. Given the insignificant result, it seems likely that, as Meguid (2008) argues, the mainstream parties have more strategies available than simply accommodating new competitors by co-opting their issue. While accommodation works at the entry stage, it may be that adversarial or dismissive strategies are more effective at the election stage.

As expected, the size of the region had a positive effect on the dependent variable.²⁹ Also, the dummy variable for whether other regionalist parties compete in that constituency in that year was negative, as expected. Contrary to expectations, though, turnout and party age are insignificant.

Interestingly, the model yields a curvilinear result for decentralization, as predicted, but it is in the opposite shape of the incidence stage: at low levels of decentralization, the relation-

the relationships to be causal.

²⁸As shown in Table 4, this regression incorporates controls for country-level effects. But as with Table 3, I will subject these results to robustness tests using a range of alternative specifications and control variables.

²⁹In this model, geographic size is included. In previous papers, including population instead does not affect the other coefficients. Population data is not available by region for the entire time series, so it is also being gathered.

ship is negative between support for regionalist parties and decentralization. In other words, if a country is centralized and provides a degree of devolution, then support for regionalist parties diminishes. At higher levels, though, the sign reverses and decentralization encourages support for regionalist parties. This curvilinear relationship warrants more theoretical attention.

These results suggest that a certain amount of concessions, in the form of more autonomy, do in fact subvert support for regionalist parties and their associated movements; however, beyond a certain level, further political decentralization actually increases their vote share, in line with the theoretical and empirical arguments of (Brancati 2007).

Significantly, though, decentralization yielded contradictory results at the two stages. High levels of decentralization discourage elites from entering competition but encourage citizens to support them. Perhaps, if regional elites are bought off by decentralization while citizens demand even more political representation, other, less democratic, forms of political behavior may become more attractive. This relationship demands further research.

7 Discussion

As Fearon and Laitin (2000), among others, have found, language difference is nearly a necessary if not sufficient condition for regional mobilization in Europe. Similar to previous studies, these findings demonstrate that cultural difference greatly influences whether regionalist parties compete in national elections. As one of the first truly comparative quantitative studies of when and where regionalist political parties compete in national parliamentary elections, this article confirms and extends earlier work on new or niche parties, in general, and regionalist political parties specifically.

In finalizing this paper, much work remains. Empirically, two issues reign supreme. First, I have nearly completed collecting the remaining district-level election results, which will bring the analysis up to the most recent elections. I also need to capture economic

difference data prior to 1980 so that the analysis extends further back in time.

But more significantly, I plan to model the two stages differently. Currently, I separate the two stages, and use different units of analysis (i.e. region-election year for the first stage, party-election year for the second stage). The region-election year is the only way, that I can see, that allows me to evaluate the negative cases. In other words, studying the region-election year as the unit of analysis allows me to test when and where regionalist parties compete. However, at the second stage, I focus on the party as the unit of analysis. This approach allows me to study multiple parties in a single region, and analyze inter-party dynamics. But the change in unit of analysis disallows the opportunity to do a selection model. I am now persuaded by the work of Vreeland (2003) and Selb and Pituctin (2010) that a selection model is an appropriate methodological approach for these questions. So I need to reconfigure the second stage so the unit of analysis is the region as well.

Theoretically, the conflicting results of decentralization loom large. Brancati (2007) argues persuasively that decentralization should encourage regionalist mobilization and does not model for a curvilinear effect. But Hechter (2000) provides theoretical justification for such a curvilinear effect. The results I present support neither conclusion, since the data show a curvilinear effect but the effects are different at different stages. As I noted above, decentralization warrants more theoretical attention.

Outside academia, attention is increasingly focused on the ‘Balkanization’ of Europe, led by strong culturally distinct regions like Scotland and Catalonia (Hundley 2007). Within the context of the EU, ‘Great Powers’ are increasingly seen as obsolete, while small states are safe from attack and in an even better economic position than ever before (Hundley 2007). Nevertheless, as this paper demonstrates, not just any small state will rise up. And understanding the determinants of regionalist party success could help policy-makers at the regional, national and European levels consider policy and institutional alternatives rather than premature fragmentation.

Appendix A. Regionalist Political Parties in Western Europe

Region	Political Parties (English label)	Contested Elections
Belgium		
Flanders	Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc)	1991-95
	Volksunie (People's Union)	1954-95
Region Wallonne	Front Democratique des Francophones (Democratic Front of Francophones)	1968-91
	Rassemblement Wallon (Walloon Rally)	1968-81
Finland		
	Svenske Folkpartiet (Swedish People's Party)	1951-95
France		
Brittany	Union Democratique Bretonne (Breton Democratic Union)	1986
Corsica	Union di u populu corsu (Union of Corsican People)	1986
Italy		
Northern Italy	Lega Nord, including liga veneta and Lega Lombarda (Northern League)	1983-96
Sardinia	Partido Sardo d'Azione (Party of Sardinia)	1983-87, 1996
Trieste	Associazione per Trieste (Association for Trieste)	1979-83
Southern Italy	Lega d'azione meridionale (League for Southern Action)	1996
South Tyrol	Südtiroler Volkspartie (South Tyrol People's Party)	1953-92
Valle d'Aoste	Union Valdotaïne (Valdostian Union)	1958-63, 1972-87, 1994-96
Spain		
Andalucía	Partido Andalucista and Partido Socialista de Andalusia (Andalusian Party)	1979, 1989, 1996
Basque Country	Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party)	1977-96
	Eusko Alkartasuna and Euskal Ezkerra (People's Unity Herri Batasuna (Basque Solidarity)	1989-96 1979-96
Canaries	Coalición Canaria (Canarian Coalition)	1986-96
	Union del Pueblo Canario (Union of Canarian People)	1979
Catalonia	Convergència i Unió, including Pacte Democratic per Catalunya & Unió del Centre i la Democracia Cristiana de Cataluna (Convergence and Union)	1977-96
	Coalición electoral esquerra de Cataluna (Electoral Coalition of Left in Catalonia)	1977
	Ezquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia)	1979-82, 1993-96
Galicia	Bloque Nacionalista Gallego (Galician Nationalist Bloc)	1996
Aragon	Chunta aragonesista (Aragonese League)	1996
	Partido Aragonés Regionalista (Aragonese Regionalist Party)	1979, 1986-93

Continued on next page

Appendix A. (continued from previous page)

Region	Political Parties (English label)	Contested Elections
Spain (continued)		
Navarre	Union del pueblo navarro (Union of the Navarrese People)	1979
	Convergencia demócratas de Navarra (Democratic Convergence of Navarre)	1996
Valencia	Union valenciana (Valencian Union)	1986-96
United Kingdom		
Northern Ireland	Social Democratic and Labour Party	1974-97
Ireland	Irish Independence Party	1979
	Nationalists (and Independent nationalists)	1951, 1966
	Republican Labour	1964, 1970
	Republicans and Republican Clubs	1950, 1964-66, 1974-79
	Sinn Féin	1950, 1955-59, 1983-97
Scotland	Scottish National Party	1950-97
	Scottish Labour Party	1979
	Scottish Militant Labour	1992
	Scottish Socialist Alliance	1997
Wales	Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales)	1950-97
	Mudiad Gweriniaethol Cymru (Welsh Republican Movement)	1950

Note: The list of regionalist parties is based on de Winter and Türsan (1998), Caramani (2000), and Pereira, Villodres and Nieto (2003). Included in my dataset are any parties on these lists for which district-level election data were collected by Caramani. 1997 was the last election year included in the Caramani dataset. Several parties were later incorporated into other regionalist parties or competed as part of a coalition. These parties are also included, bringing the total to fifty-seven.

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