Party Politics in Multi-level Systems:
party responses to new challenges in European democracies

Klaus Detterbeck  
(University of Magdeburg)  
and  
Eve Hepburn  
(University of Edinburgh)

Paper for the Joint Sessions of Workshops 2007, Helsinki  
Workshop: Exploring New Avenues in Comparative Federalism Research  
(Directors: Jan Erk & Wilfried Swenden)

Klaus Detterbeck  
Institute of Political Science  
University of Magdeburg  
Zschokkestr. 32  
39104 Magdeburg  
Germany  
Tel. (0049) 0391 – 6716674  
klaus.detterbeck@gse-w.uni-magdeburg.de

Eve Hepburn  
Institute of Governance  
University of Edinburgh  
Chisholm House, High School Yds  
Edinburgh, EH1 1LZ  
Scotland, UK  
Tel: (0044) 131-650-6347  
eve.hepburn@ed.ac.uk
1. Introduction
Over the last few years, there has been a renewed interest in the role of political parties for the workings of federal and other multi-level systems. To be sure, the parties-federalism nexus has been recognized since the writings of the ‘Federalist Papers’. Although rarely tested empirically, the classical assumption has been that political parties are important motors of national integration and coordinated policy-making. In debates on democratic theory, this assumption led liberal thinkers to look for institutional incentives to safeguard federal democracy from the ‘mischiefs of faction’ (Madison), while majoritarian thinkers applauded parties for their assumed capacities of being able to organise and execute the political will of a national (state) majority, or ‘demos’, despite federal divisions of power. Many of these arguments have been reshaped and re-adjusted in current debates (see Bednar et al. 2001; Fillipov et al. 2004; Stepan 2001).

For empirical research, however, there is good reason to review and question the classical assumption on the integrative function of political parties in federal and decentralised political systems. Both parties and political systems in Europe have gone through some tremendous changes over the last decades. Political parties in nearly all Western democracies have faced (and in many ways have also contributed towards) an increasingly volatile and sceptical electorate, a decline in party membership, an increase in internal heterogeneity and a loss of traditional bonds in terms of ideology and social networks. Federal and multilevel systems, on the other hand, have been confronted with the simultaneous processes of supranationalisation, regionalisation and deregulation. A more flexible system of multi-level governance seems to have replaced the sovereignty of national (state) political spaces, in which political decisions have been taken by elected party politicians at the state and substate levels.

Given all of these changes, what is the role that political parties are actually playing in federal and decentralised systems today? Are parties still capable of linking the political levels and providing for national (state) integration? Which factors explain the diverse capacities of parties in different federal and multi-level systems? In the first part of our paper, we will explore the changes that have affected the parties-federalism nexus in recent times. In the second part, we look at six West European multi-level systems (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK). The comparison shows that there has been a general tendency towards more asymmetry in party competition, albeit with varying degrees of intensity. In the third part, we focus on party responses to these developments. We will argue that, in general,
parties are confronted with a paradoxical situation, in which there is both more asymmetry and a greater need for policy cooperation between the different territorial levels. There are three principal ways in which parties can adapt to that paradox. Parties can either maintain traditional vertical linkages and strive for the aggregation of territorial interests, despite the increasing fragility of such attempts. Or, secondly, they can develop new forms of vertical party cooperation to provide for the accommodation of territorial interests. The third strategy would be to allow for a growing autonomy of state and substate party units. This might allow the different units to adapt and respond to dissimilar pressures resulting from party competition at different levels, and to reduce the impetus towards factionalism by accommodating substate demands. Multi-level negotiations would then arguably take on a stronger non-partisan basis („executive federalism“), although the results of electoral party competition would still have a decisive impact on federal dynamics.

2. Challenges to the Parties-Federalism Nexus

*Parties: the loss of representation*

Among the major themes of party research since the 1970s has been the crisis of parties (see Daalder 2002; Webb 2002). This crisis can be located on various levels. Most attention has been given to the *electoral level*, i.e. changes in voting behaviour. There is broad evidence for a general increase in electoral volatility in nearly all Western democracies (Pedersen 1979; Webb 2002). While Bartolini and Mair (1990) have shown that much electoral flux has taken place within parties of one political bloc (left – right), it is the individual parties that have suffered from declining levels of stable party alignments and a relatively pronounced degree of electoral instability. There is thus an increased vulnerability in the electoral fortunes of individual parties. Popular support has become much more fragile (Mair 1997: 28-33).

Second, signs of party crisis are visible at the *organisational level*. Most prominently, party membership rates have gone down nearly everywhere. In most Western countries this has been a secular trend since the 1970s, in a few cases (like Germany) the trend was more uneven; however, since the 1990s, all OECD countries reported declining membership figures in relation to the general electorate (Scarrow 2000; Mair and van Biezen 2001). At the *level of the party systems*, the effective number of parties has increased in most Western democracies. New parties, particularly of a regionalist, left-libertarian or populist right-authoritarian orientation, have become relevant players and changed the patterns of party competition and government formation (Kitschelt 1989). This is obviously not an indicator of a crisis of parties
in general but rather of a crisis of the more traditional and established parties, most of which
remain at the core of their party systems. Finally, at the level of the political system, the
capacity of parties to determine policy outcomes has been questioned. Skepticism has grown
regarding whether the model of party government in which party representatives are elected to
fulfil the political will of the people is (still) accurate. The assumption that parties have
become redundant has been linked, first, to the emergence of neocorporatism and, later, to the
debate about the policy discretion of national governments in a context of open economic

In many ways, parties have (although not everywhere) responded to these multiple crises by
making use of their privileged position within state institutions. The introduction and often
massive expansion of state subsidies to parties, plus access to other state resources, has
compensated for declining levels of societal support; the strong dominance of parties in the
recruitment of political elites and in the working processes of parliamentary bodies kept
parties important political actors. We are talking about adaptation and change rather than
about a decline of parties (see Mair 1997: 120-154).

However, there is little doubt that parties have indeed lost in some of their representative
functions. Fewer citizens are loyal supporters of any one party now or trust parties to
articulate and realize their interests. Regardless of accuracy, many people perceive few
differences between parties in policy terms, party programmes are thought to be vague and
meaningless, and party elites are seen as focused on vote-maximization and their aspirations
to power. The problem is most pronounced among the large catch-all parties which are trying
to attract support from all segments of society. Parties have a difficult time convincing voters
and supporters that they actually stand for something, that they are still representing a distinct
political orientation. In federal and other multi-level systems, this development is particularly
problematic for the established statewide parties. Such parties have traditionally claimed to
represent citizens across the country by appealing to a common political vision, based mainly
on class or religion (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). While vertical organisational linkages allowed
for territorial interest aggregation, the shared political ideology and political identity provided
the “glue” to transcend the heterogeneity of territorial interests and to unite the various
territorial party units. In that sense, it became possible to commit the party as a whole to
specific policy goals. Although specific party positions were often the result of internal
bargaining processes, the consensus on general political objectives among party representatives facilitated coordination.

With the erosion of traditional cleavages and the lack of a strong commitment to a well-defined political vision – such as the post-war consensus on state interventionism and on broad access to social welfare – parties’ representative capacities declined. Parties now find it more difficult to mobilise loyal support among the electorate. In a similar vein, statewide parties have also increased problems in maintaining internal cohesion and discipline. This seems to be particularly the case when patterns of state-level and substate party competition diverge. To put it simply: a substate party unit may have few incentives to support a statewide party line which is unpopular with the substate electorate if there is not a strong bond between the two party layers. This bond may be hierarchy, it may be social solidarity and political identity (“we” feelings) or it may be party ideology. Our argument, however, is that in many parties precisely these bonds have been eroded over the last few decades.

Thus, even without taking into account the transformations in the territorial frameworks of European nation-states, we could assume that the accommodation of heterogenous substate interests has become a more challenging task for parties. However, the processes of state decentralisation and European supranationalisation have added further frictions to the internal dynamics of multi-layered parties. It is to these aspects, that we will now turn.

The emergence of multi-level governance
The trend towards decentralisation and federalism within European states means that substate electoral arenas have gained in importance as focal points for territorial interest representation (Jeffery 1997; Hough and Jeffery 2006). In long-standing federal states such as Austria and Germany, as well as newly decentralising or federalising states in the UK, Spain, Italy and Belgium, substate tiers of government have accumulate extensive executive, legislative and fiscal powers that lie outside the control of the state. The policy-making style and programmes of substate executives with regard to their exclusive competences over social and economic policy have been shown to diverge from that of the centre, as well as from other substate entities, in order to respond to local needs and circumstances (Cairney 2006). Moreover, rather than being an end in itself, processes of decentralisation and federalism have been understood as a continual negotiation of authority with the central government to demand more powers to serve territorial policy interests (Friedrich 1968; Riker 1975). The
delegation of state competences to lower levels is considered to challenge the very essence of state sovereignty, which may be understood as ‘a plausible claim to ultimate authority made on behalf of a particular polity’ (Walker 2002: 345). Regions are becoming functional, economic, social and cultural spaces that rival state monopoly over territorial power. To some scholars, the state has lost its capacity as the only important unit of political decision-making and interest aggregation, being eroded by decentralisation from below and European integration from above (Wallace 1994). Political actors now operate within a ‘post-Westphalian’ order in which authority is dispersed among a number of territorial levels, so that there is no longer one centre of power (Linklater 1998: Keating 2001).

The reconfiguration of political authority and functions across different territorial levels necessitates an adjustment to our thinking about how politics, and parties, are organised at different territorial levels. Parties can no longer pursue one strategy for office in a single statewide political arena. Instead their priorities are split between several arenas: they must adapt and respond to the creation, or strengthening, of several loci of decision-making at different territorial levels, which may or may not have diverse electoral and party systems with distinct structures of party competition. At the substate level, statewide parties must refocus their strategies for different regional contexts and address regional policies and issues. This ‘territorial dimension’ acquires salience in cases where a strong nationalist or regionalist party exists, whose goals for self-determination have won formidable support. Regional branches of statewide parties must adopt territorial strategies to defuse the threat of secession. But parties have also territorialized their strategies in party systems where no regional-specific parties are competing (Wilson 2006). There are thus other motivations for parties to nuance their strategies in multi-level arenas. Of note, the adoption of several different types electoral system within a given state has affected voting behaviour and partisan alignments at different territorial levels. People have been shown to cast votes for different parties at different territorial levels, even on election ballots held on the same day (Rallings and Thrasher 1998). Voters are therefore able to express multiple preferences in multi-level elections, especially when voting systems allow them to split their votes. This indicates the conditionality of voters’ support, and places considerable pressure on parties to respond to voter interests across different types of election (Dunleavy 2003). Therefore, as well as heralding the creation of new institutions, elites and issues, systems of multi-level governance also create ‘new electors’ whose support parties seek to win.
However, efforts to examine how parties respond to the emergence of multi-level governance are often limited by the conventions of traditional party scholarship. Most classical analyses of party systems and party competition are dominated by the view that ideological division is the fundamental axis upon which parties compete (Sartori 1976; Maor 1997), and that regional political behaviour and competition tends to replicate national (state) political behaviour and competition. This is even considered to be the case in federal and decentralised systems, where there are institutional arenas for substate electoral competition (Padgett and Burkett 1986; Roberts 2000). These assumptions are increasingly disputed by a newly emerging body of literature that examines the ‘de-nationalisation’ or ‘territorialisation’ of party systems. Territorial politics and party scholars have begun to examine how parties operate within a post-sovereign, multi-level order in which authority is dispersed at different levels (Detterbeck and Renzsch 2003; Hopkin and Bradbury 2006; Jeffery and Hough 2006).

Hopkin (2003) examines how centre-periphery tensions affect the organisation and behaviour of statewide parties. He argues that shifts in the territorial distribution of power to regions have led to the ‘denationalisation’ of party systems, so that parties must respond to substate challenges. This has led to intra-party conflict as different parts of parties (operating at different levels) diverge in the areas of elite recruitment, party programmes and campaigning, and their activities in public office. This analysis challenges the basis of the ‘nationalisation’ thesis advanced by Caramani (2004), by which the author refers to the homogenisation of political structures and processes, whereby ‘a highly localized and territorialized politics… is replaced by national electoral alignments. Peripheral and regional specificities disappear, and sectional cleavages progressively transform into nationwide functional alignments’ (Caramani 2004: 1). Based on a study of processes of ‘nationalisation’ of West European electoral politics since the nineteenth century, Caramani concludes that ‘all families tend toward the nationalization of support… with the exception of the regionalist party family’ (Caramani 2004: 162). However, the main claim of this analysis is undermined by growing evidence that in federal or decentralised states, regional electoral arenas may display different dynamics of party competition, electoral behaviour and patterns of coalition-formation. Hearl et al (1996), for instance, developed a dataset that measures the ‘denationalisation’ of party competition across EU states from 1979-1993. Those states with strong centre-periphery cleavages, such as the UK, Italy and Spain, exhibited considerable ‘regional variation’. More recently, work has been done on the adaptation of parties to multilevel settings in Germany (Detterbeck and

---

1 Caramani measures this by assessing the degree of homogeneity in the distribution of the vote in different geographical areas of a state at a given election.
Renzsch 2003) and the UK (Hopkin and Bradbury 2006), which both underlined how different party systems and patterns of competition have emerged in substate arenas. Our aim in this paper is to complement and further this research by providing a comparative analysis of the adaptation of statewide parties to multilevel governance across six cases.

3. Tendencies towards Asymmetry in party competition

Political competition in multi-layered systems has an additional territorial dimension. The strategic interaction of parties in electoral and parliamentary arenas not only takes place at the statewide level, but also simultaneously in the substate regions. If we are to study the linkages and interdependencies between these various levels of party competition, three dimensions are of particular relevance:

(a) the electoral behaviour of voters in state and substate elections,
(b) the structures and mechanics of party systems at both levels, and
(c) the processes and outcomes of government formation at both levels.

On all three dimensions, the degree of symmetry (or congruence) between the levels can be established in order to understand and explain the dynamics of multi-level party competition (Deschouwer 2003, 2006; Thorlakson 2006). Looking at our six countries, we argue that there has been a general increase in asymmetrical party competition. However, while the tendency is relatively new in some cases, it is more established and more strongly developed in other cases. Thus, we may assume that there is unequal pressure for adapting party structures and strategies to the differences between state and substate competitive arenas. But before looking at party responses let us first establish the patterns of multi-level party competition in the six countries.

United Kingdom

Party competition in the UK has been influenced by the historical impact of a two-party system, with each party representing opposing ideological poles – Conservatives vs. Liberals during the nineteenth century, and Conservatives vs. Labour in the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s this system came under pressure by the rise of smaller parties, including the newly merged Liberal Democrats, the Green Party and minority nationalist parties in Scotland (Scottish National Party) and Wales (Plaid Cymru). The LibDems became ‘third’ party in UK elections, though the single plurality electoral system used for statewide (‘General’) elections
favours the two bigger parties. However, the alleged ‘two-party’ system in the UK was seriously challenged with the introduction of constitutional reforms in the late 1990s.

In 1997-99, the UK underwent a radical transformation from being a centralised unitary (or union) state to a devolved state. In 1997, referendums were set in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (NI) for national assemblies. The different constitutional settlements reflected the desire of the central government to satisfy the minimum demand for autonomy in each of the separate parts (Adams and Robinson 2002). Whilst the Scottish Parliament was granted extensive legislative powers, Wales was given only secondary legislation and administrative powers (and Northern Ireland – not considered in this analysis owing to the fact that statewide parties do not compete here – was given provisions to join the Republic of Ireland if a majority of its inhabitants so wished). There were no attempts to impose a uniform regionalisation arrangement across the UK, but rather an asymmetrical one reflecting the demands of each nation (Keating 2001). Moreover, the new assemblies would be elected on the basis of an additional member system (AMS), though the ratios were slightly different.

Devolution accentuated the distinctiveness of party systems in Scotland and Wales, which was aided by the PR electoral systems. Scotland and Wales are multi-party systems, where a number of parties compete on a range of issues. In Scotland, six parties compete on the Left of the political spectrum (the Scottish National Party, Scottish Socialist Party—SSP, Solidarity, Labour, the Scottish Green Party and the Liberal Democrats) whilst the Conservatives compete on the Right (in addition to the UK Independence Party for the 2004 European elections). The small Senior Citizens party also compete, but without an ideological affiliation. The territorial dimension of party competition in Scotland is also significant, which cuts across the ideological dimension: four parties support independence (SNP, SSP, Solidarity, Scottish Greens), two parties support devolution (Labour, Conservatives) and one party supports federalism (LibDems). In terms of votes, centre-left parties receive over 80% of the vote, and independence-seeking parties receive 30-40%. In Wales, Plaid Cymru, Welsh Labour and the Welsh Green Party compete on the Left, with the Conservatives and UKIP on the Right. Centre-left parties receive approximately 80% of the vote, whilst the independence-seeking Plaid Cymru receives 20-30%. Owing to the size and strength of centre-left parties in Scotland and Wales and the weakness of the centre-right parties, party competition tends to take place on the Left. Moreover, the territorial dimension has become more salient in both
territories since devolution. Electoral support for nationalist parties is consistently higher at regional elections than statewide contests (Wyn Jones and Scully 2006).

Although Scotland and Wales are acknowledged to have multi-party systems, England is also far from having a bi-party system (Dunleavy 2003). In addition to Labour, LibDems and the Conservatives, the Green Party, UKIP and the British National Party (BNP) also compete in statewide elections in England (in addition to Respect, which receives less than 5% of the vote). Thus, despite having a devolved electoral arena, England does have a distinct multi-party system. But unlike party competition in Wales and Scotland, English parties tend to compete more on the Right of the ideological spectrum.

We can see that the UK since devolution thus has overlapping party systems in Wales, Scotland and England, with 5-6 parties with distinct ideological positions that are serious contenders for political office in each. Party systems in the UK are thus polarised. The same parties do not operate across the UK in a standardised fashion: the Scottish Socialists, Solidarity, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the BNP are geographically limited. Moreover, the distribution of statewide parties’ electoral strength varies across the territory. This has increased the fragmentation of party competition across the territory. Since the 1980s, there has been a territorialisation of electoral behaviour, signalled by the strength of Labour and the weakness of the Conservative Party in Scotland, Wales and northern England, compared with the weakness of Labour and the strength of the Tories in southern England (except London). The Liberal Democrats also receive less of the popular vote outside England. Finally, in Scotland and Wales, the main competitors to the dominant Labour party were the SNP and Plaid Cymru, as opposed to the Conservatives in England. The North-South was accentuated by devolution, which gave nationalist parties a new arena to compete, and undermined the integrative functions of the mainstream parties.

**Italy**

During the First Republic (1948-92), statewide politics in Italy was dominated by a bipolar contest between the ruling Christian Democrats (DC) and the opposition Communist Party (PCI). The Italian party system cannot, however, be characterised as a two-party one: the electoral system of pure Proportional Representation (PR) ensured the existence of smaller parties, including the Socialist Party (PSI) and a number of anti-system, republican, liberal and region-specific parties, which the DC alternately brought into coalition. The party system
can therefore be characterised as highly fragmented and polarised. Party competition was also influenced by socioeconomic and territorial cleavages within Italian society. The most important of these were the distinctive red-belt and white-belt subcultures of the central and northern regions (Levy 1996; Agnew 2002), and the north-south divide that contrasted wealthy northern regions with more state-dependent regions in the south (Biorcio 1991).

In terms of regional voting, the ‘red’ regions (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria) were dominated by support for the PCI, whilst the ‘white’ regions (Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige in the North and Abruzzo, Basilicata and Molise in the South) supported the DC. The remaining regions were approximately divided into left-supporting north-central regions and right-supporting southern regions. There was therefore significant regional variation in electoral behaviour, despite having the same statewide parties operating across the territory (though with territorialized levels of support) facing the electoral challenge of region-specific parties representing various cultural and linguistic minorities in the North and the island regions of Sardinia and Sicily.

In the early 1990s, the Italian party system underwent a meltdown. A group of judges in Milan uncovered widespread corruption amongst high-ranking members of government, a phenomenon called Tangentopoli (‘bribesville’). The DC and PSI were dissolved. This was followed by the break-up of the Communist Party after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was succeeded by a Party of the Democratic Left (DS) and the smaller Party of Refounded Communists (RC). Concurrently, regional ‘leagues’, which had emerged in Northern Italy, united in 1991 to form a Northern League (LN), which successfully contested statewide elections. Also, a number of parties were formed on the right of the spectrum, including a new party formed by billionaire Silvio Berlusconi, called Forza Italia (Go Italy!), the populist National Alliance (AN), and the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). Following the collapse of the old political system, a mixed majoritarian-PR electoral system was introduced, designed to reduce fragmentation. The result was a less fractionalised and bi-polar party system, based around competition between a centre-left coalition and a centre-right one (the first with tentative RC support, the latter with the LN).

Some scholars have argued that statewide party competition is replicated at the substate regional level in Italy (Loughlin and Bolgherini 2006). This assertion is contested by research on the denationalisation of the territorial coverage of Italian parties (Wilson 2006). Before
addressing this argument, it is necessary to give an overview of the evolution of the ‘regional’ state in Italy. In the Italian constitution of 1947-8, twenty regions were established as administrative entities with limited legislative powers, of which five enjoyed ‘special autonomy’ – Sardinia, Sicily, Valle d’Aosta, Trentino Alto-Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The reasoning behind the separation between ‘special’ and ‘ordinary’ regions seemed to be political: those receiving favourable treatment had exhibited separatist, irredentist or autonomist tendencies. Contrarily, the ‘ordinary’ regions had to wait until the sweeping social and political transformations of the late 1960s for their institutions to be put into place. In the 1970s, the regional system was properly established, but the arrangements made for regional authorities in 1970 showed only the barest signs that decentralization had taken place, as few legislative powers were devolved and the regions had little financial autonomy. Ordinary regions would have to wait until 2001 and the reform of Title V of the Constitution before their administrative powers were increased, which also precipitated a crisis of identity in the five ‘special regions’, who were stripped of their specialità and more-or-less placed on the same level as other regions.

Given the lack of administration at the regional level before 2001, regional assemblies tended to reflect the perspectives of the national parties. The DC in particular was wary of delegating authority to the regions and assigned local party bosses to ensure that the regions towed the national line (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001). Despite this, the regional dimension of Italian politics has remained strong throughout the post-war period, with regional parties operating in almost every territory and regional voting behaviour patterns were evident (Cento Bull 1996). Furthermore the statewide parties were sufficiently ‘fragmented’ to give regional demands leverage within the party organisation (Hine 1996: 115).

With the reforms of the 1990s, the territorial dimension has increased in salience (Loughlin and Bolgherini 2006). Regional elections since 1995 were conducted on the basis of the mixed-majoritarian system at the state level, with the addition in 1999 that Regional Presidents were directly elected. Since then, regional party systems have differed from the statewide one, and from each other. Whilst 20 parties (four of which were region-specific) won seats in the state House of Representatives in 2001, electing a centre-right coalition, and 18 parties (four region-specific) won seats in 2006, electing a centre-left coalition, regional elections were markedly different. Parties elected to specific Regional Councils averaged at 11% in 2001 and 2006 (Wilson 2006). Thus, fewer parties won seats in regional elections than
state elections. This is because many ‘statewide’ parties did not compete in all of the regions. For example, Udeur only wins seats in the southern regions, whilst LN is represented in 5 northern regions (though with varying levels of support). In all, according to Wilson’s (2006: 10) research, only 6 parties gained full territorial coverage in the 2005 elections. Moreover, regional party competition continues to vary according to the red and white subcultures, with the addition of a strong territorial dimension in the Northern and island regions. However, at regional elections there is a tendency to focus campaigns on statewide cleavages and issues, which is partially the result of timing: regional elections are held on the same day as statewide elections in the 15 ‘ordinary’ regions of Italy. The same is less true of the special regions.

Spain
Since the death of Franco in 1975, and the introduction of the first democratic elections in 1977, the Spanish party system evolved towards a two-party model. Following the trend amongst West European states, party competition polarised on the left-right dimension, with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) dominating the Left and the Partido Popular (PP), successor to the Francoist Popular Alliance, uniting conservatives, liberals and Christian Democrats on the Right. The PSOE’s success was aided by the decline of the Communists, who are now represented in the United Left (IU) party, whilst the PP’s birth and electoral rise was precipitated by the collapse of the Union of the Democratic Centre in the early 1980s. The type of electoral system chosen in Spain – PR mixed with provincial party lists – tends to favour the three statewide parties and those with a pronounced territorial concentration. The PSOE formed the government at the statewide level in 1982-93, 1993-96 and 2004-; whilst the PP was elected to office in 1996-2000 and 2000-04.

However, bipolar left-right competition in the Spanish party system is circumscribed by a strong territorial dimension. The creation of seventeen ‘autonomous communities’ in the 1978 constitution created multiple arenas for political competition. Statewide parties must therefore adapt their strategies to different contexts, and in response to the electoral challenge of non-statewide parties (NSWP). With the exceptions of Madrid, Castile-La Mancha and Castilla-León, minority nationalistic and regionalist parties operate throughout Spain, and have won a proportion of the statewide and regional vote in individual elections ranging from 1% to 60% (Liñeira 2006: 11). Overall, they receive 12-20% of the vote (Pallarés and Keating 2006: 117). That number is higher in the ‘historical communities’ of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, which have their own ‘autonomy statutes’ and where the most prominent
nationalist parties exist. Statewide parties face competition from the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and the Convergence and Union Party (CiU) in Catalonia, which formed the party of regional government 1980-2006; the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), Eusko Alkartasuna and Batasuna in the Basque Country; and the Galician Nationalist Bloc in Galicia. Each party advocates a distinct form of autonomy, ranging from more decentralisation within Spain, to separation; and the parties also sit on the Left and Right. Statewide parties also face strong competition from the Coalición Canaria in the Canary Islands, and smaller territorial parties who only compete in regional elections. As well as encouraging a fragmentation of the party system, it can be said that NSWP have also contributed to the integration of regions into statewide politics: by providing a channel for representing territorial interests at the centre through participation in Spanish politics, and by forming coalitions with statewide parties.

Whilst there is some evidence that there has been a ‘nationalisation’ of electoral behaviour in the ‘ordinary status’ regions (Caramani 2004), it is apparent that the four historic regions, with the addition of the Canary Islands, have distinct patterns of party competition. Here, the statewide parties have failed to dominate regional politics. Moreover, statewide parties have a territorially differentiated support base: the PSOE, for instance, is the largest party in Andalusia, Extremadura and Castilla-La Mancha, whilst the PP has always won in the Balearic Islands and Galicia. Most ACs are dominated by one party (Pallarès 1994) – and in the Basque Country this is the PNV, whilst in Catalonia it has been the CiU. The electoral system helps explain the distinct patterns of party competition. Although the ACs were given the constitutional right to adopt their own electoral systems within the PR formula, few have strayed from the statewide model – the exception is the Basque Country. Despite this, the AC electoral system tends to be more proportional. Another factor is the timing of elections: for the ordinary regions, regional and statewide elections are held on the same day – thus contributing to some homogeneity of votes – whilst the historic communities and Andalucia can set their own elections (as stipulated in Article 151 of the constitution), and results in greater variation in voting behaviour (Pallarès 1994). In particular, it has been demonstrated that statewide parties tend to perform best in statewide elections, and worse in regional elections, while opposition and NSWP do better (Pallarès and Keating 2006). There is thus strong evidence of dual voting and differential abstention in Spanish voting behaviour.


Austria

For decades, the symmetry of party competition has been a strong feature of the Austrian federal system, which is highly centralized. On both political levels, two major parties (ÖVP and SPÖ) as representatives of all-encompassing social segments (Lager) dominated the vote and controlled a corporatist party state which deeply penetrated society; a smaller third segment, represented by the German-national FPÖ, existed rather at the margins of party competition (Luther 1992). At the federal level and in all nine Austrian Länder, the aggregate vote share of ÖVP and SPÖ almost continuously amounted to more than 80% between 1950 and the early 1980s (Fallend 2004: 84-87). Electoral behaviour built on strong party alignments and was therefore both very stable and relatively undifferentiated between the political levels. Land elections were often seen as little more than duplications of the statewide results in each particular Land (Abedi and Siaroff 2006: 157). While the SPÖ had her traditional heartland in Vienna, the ÖVP was strongest in Western Austria (Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Salzburg). With respect to government formation, the Grand Coalition (1947-66) was (temporarily) replaced by single-party governments (1966-83) or small coalitions (1983-87) at the federal level, but continued to be the dominant pattern in most of the Länder as a result of the constitutional mechanisms of Proporz governments, the proportional allocation of cabinet positions (Fallend 2004: 90-93).

Since the 1980s, a relatively symmetrical party system change has taken place at both levels of the Austrian system. The most remarkable feature here is the deconcentration of the party systems. At both levels, SPÖ and ÖVP lost support to the FPÖ, which had embarked on a right-wing populist course under Jörg Haider, to their liberal splinter, the Liberales Forum, and to the Green Party. In the federal election of 1999, the aggregate share of SPÖ and ÖVP fell to 60% and for the first time the FPÖ (26,9%) ended up in second place; the subsequent ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, which replaced the Grand Coalition (1987-2000), met with harsh protest both in Austria and in Europe. Since then, the major parties have been able to reconsolidate their political dominance with some 75% of the vote; the Greens have established themselves as a stable political force, while the internal feuding of the FPÖ has lead to another party split (the Haiderian BZÖ) and declining electoral success.

In the Länder, the picture has been generally the same. The losses of the two major parties corresponded to the rise of the FPÖ and to a lesser degree, the Greens. No regionalist parties emerged (see Fallend 2004: 87-88). While the FPÖ has been successful across the country, it
developed a particular stronghold in Carinthia, where the party won her first relative majority in any Land election in 1999 and where Haider became Prime Minister. Despite the general downward trend that the FPÖ had to face over the last few years in Land elections, the party managed to defend its position in Carinthia in 2004 with 42% of the vote.²

The second feature of party system change in Austria has been an increase in differences between state and substate voting patterns. With the decline in stable party alignments, growing volatility and political dissatisfaction, the latter being heavily exploited by the FPÖ, the electoral market became more open. As elsewhere, Austrian voters are now more likely to change their mind between elections (see Müller et al. 2004). One important element to be discerned could be anti-government voting in Land elections. By calculating indices of dissimilarity, Abedi and Siaroff (2006) have shown that during the 1990s the ÖVP has significantly done better (or at least, less worse) in Land elections than in the closest national election in that Land; for the SPÖ much the opposite has been true in most regions. Thus, while the senior partner in the federal coalition has been punished by the voters at the regional level, the junior partner of the Grand Coalition, the ÖVP, was not affected negatively. Interestingly enough, during the 1990s the ÖVP has been ‘provincially stronger’ first and foremost in their strongholds in the West. Thus, the organisational resources of these Land parties have obviously been important in blocking negative trends (see below).

However, looking at the most recent round of Land elections, the ÖVP – now the senior partner in coalition with the FPÖ – was indeed facing a government malaise, and even losing its traditional leading position in Salzburg (2004) and Styria (2005) to the SPÖ. Unpopular reforms of the federal government, concerning pensions for example, as well as domestic failures contributed to weak electoral performances of the regional ÖVP units (Ulram and Sommer 2005; Abedi and Siaroff 2006: 173-74).

The Grand Coalition, which returned to power at the federal level in 2006, is also the most favourite model of government formation in the Länder. Five Länder, two of them obliged by constitutional Proporz rules, are governed by SPÖ and ÖVP; in the other 4 Länder, the SPÖ governs alone in Vienna, there is a long-standing ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in Vorarlberg and

² In the federal election of 1999, the FPÖ also became the strongest party in Carinthia with 38,6%; however, in the next election to the federal parliament in 2002, when the party was already engaged in factional fighting, both SPÖ (38,3%) and ÖVP (30,5%) moved past the FPÖ (23,6%) in Carinthia.
Proporz government including another party beyond SPÖ and ÖVP, namely the leading FPÖ in Carinthia and the Greens in Upper Austria (see Fallend 2006).

In sum, symmetry is still the basic feature of multi-level party competition in Austria. However, the stability of the two major parties has been eroded over the last decades. Elections to the state parliament and the Land parliaments are characterized by increases in volatility and fragmentation. More voters are available, but they are also potentially open to other competitors. There is less predictability about voters supporting a party at more than one political level. Obviously, this is both a risk and a chance for Austrian parties.

**Germany**

Regional party competition has become more distinct since German unification in 1990. While it was always the case that parties had regional strongholds and diasporas in Germany, there is now a rather clear divide between East and West Germany with respect to the political relevance of specific parties. This development has challenged the classical pattern of the ‘Bonn Republic’ (1949-89), which had been characterized by symmetrical multi-level party competition and vertically integrated parties (see Lehmbruch 1976, 2000).

Before 1990, although the parties varied in regional strength – most particularly a conservative South and a strong SPD in Hamburg, Bremen and North Rhine Westphalia – the same pattern of party competition applied across the country. The famous two-and-a-half party system operated at both federal and Land level from the mid-1960s onwards. The same three parties, which held 97% of the vote in national elections between 1961 and 1980, became the only relevant players with respect to parliamentary decision-making in the Länder. Smaller parties of a regionalist (Bayernpartei, Deutsche Partei) or single-issue (Block der Heimatvertriebenen) provenience, which had some success in the 1950s, gradually disappeared from the Bundestag and the regional parliaments.³ In the 1980s, the Green Party entered the Bundestag and most regional parliaments. With the Greens, the patterns of competition (slowly) changed towards a two-bloc logic; however, as this happened at both political levels similarly, the symmetry between federal and Land party competition was not threatened. Political developments at the federal level set important parameters for voting behaviour and coalition-building at the Land level (see Detterbeck and Renzsch 2003).

³ Apart from the ‘South Schleswig Electoral Coalition’ (SSW) in Schleswig-Holstein, the representation of the Danish and Frisian minorities there, which is exempt from the electoral threshold and usually wins between one and three seats in the Landtag in Kiel.
If we want to account for these patterns of symmetry, the interlocked federal system - in which most major policies are taken at the state level but involve political bargaining and compromise-building between the political levels – will have a prominent place. Joint federalism blurred the distinction between the state and substate electoral arenas; the more so, as Land elections directly determine the composition of the strong second federal chamber, the Bundesrat. In addition, many voters held rather stable party alignments across the political layers. Looking at political cleavages, there was little to challenge the predominance of the left-right divide (at least, before post-materialism became important) in a relatively homogenous society in which regional differences in socio-economic standards and socio-cultural values had lost saliency in the post-war period.

The only partial exception to the lack of (successful) non-statewide party in Germany, next to the SSW, is the CSU. The Christian Social Union competes only in Bavaria at both federal and Land elections. It is extremely successful in Bavaria, being the largest party in Bavaria at Bundestag elections and governing alone at Land level since 1962. The CSU runs a separate party organisation, but is in permanent alliance with its sister party, the CDU. There is a common party caucus of both parties in the Bundestag and a permanent exchange of political positions and strategies among the leading politicians of both parties. Thus, in many ways, the CSU can be seen as an unusually autonomous regional sub-unit of the CDU; to put it less contentiously, the CSU is part of the statewide political camp of Christian Democracy. In political terms, the CSU has always been more inclined to find federal solutions – through both Bundesrat and Bundestag - that would suit Bavarian interests rather than to pursue separatist policies (see Mintzel 1998).

In a nutshell, before 1990 federal and regional party systems in Germany were highly symmetrical. The same alignments, alternatives and cleavages determined voting patterns and parliamentary dynamics.
Table 1: Party systems in the reunified Germany – Election results at the federal level and in the Länder (in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Federal elections (Bundestag)</th>
<th>Länder West (Landtage)</th>
<th>Länder East (Landtage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDS/Left Party</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Aggregate results of the last three Bundestag and Land elections (in percent of the popular vote) until December 2006. ‘Länder West’ includes the ten substate parliaments of the former FRG, excluding Berlin. ‘Länder East’ includes the five substate parliaments in Eastern Germany, again excluding Berlin.

Source: Own computation from official election results; available from: www.bundeswahlleiter.de

As Table 1 indicates, there is now a five party system at the federal level. The pre-unification „two-bloc“ mechanics (SPD/Greens vs. CDU/CSU/FDP) along a left-right division are still working, with the PDS/Left Party however not being accepted as coalition partner by the SPD and Green Party. At the Land level, there is the old West German party system with four relevant parties in the West and a specific East German pattern with three major parties (CDU, SPD, PDS/Left Party) and occasionally some space for additional parties (FDP, Green Party, DVU, NPD).

Looking at the aggregate results, asymmetrical party competition is primarily related to the position of the ‘smaller parties’. The post-socialist PDS/Left Party is a major force in the East at both federal and substate elections, capturing some 20 to 25 percent of the vote there. In the West, however, the party runs a rather minuscule organisation and is only a marginal force at elections.\(^4\) The party successfully articulated the new territorial cleavage between East and West Germany (see Hough 2002). Over the last few years, the PDS focused on the protest against welfare state reforms (e.g. the protest against the ‘Hartz IV’ reform by the Schröder

\(^4\) The PDS has renamed itself „Left Party“ in 2005 and is currently about to merger with a new political party called ‘Electoral Alternative for Employment and Social Justice’ (WASG), consisting mainly of dissatisfied former Social Democrats and trade unionists. Although the WASG is organized state-wide, her strongholds are in West Germany. Thus, there is a strategic option for the Left Party to overcome the regional bias of the PDS and to exploit the political vacuum on the traditional political left (with the SPD pursuing rather modernist, ’third way’ policies).
government). This protest is particularly strong in the new Länder as a reflection of political attitudes and the severe economic crisis of large parts of East Germany.

In contrast to the PDS/Left Party, both FDP and Green Party are rather weak in the East of Germany, lacking the social milieus that support them in the West. The FDP faces limited preferences for policies strengthening the liberal market economy in the East; the Greens represent post-materialism, ecological concerns and feminist interests in a strongly West German tradition. Both parties were absent form the Eastern Landtage between 1994 and 2002; until today, success in the East for both parties is difficult to achieve and fragile to keep. Since 1990, party competition at the Land level has been further diversified by the temporary inroads of three right-wing extremist parties (DVU, Republikaner, NPD) in some Eastern and Western parliaments, and the sporadic successes of three centre-right protest groupings (Statt Partei, Arbeit für Bremen, PRO) in the city-states’ parliaments of Bremen and Hamburg.

One of the most distinct features of regionalised party competition after 1990 is the heterogeneity of government formations in the Länder. After 1969, when the SPD/FDP government took federal office, either single-party governments or coalitions that matched the federal government-opposition dichotomy were formed in the Länder. Due to the increased distinctiveness of regional party systems after 1990, substate coalition-building has become both more autonomous and more heterogenous. Next to single-party governments, which are still important at the Land level, there now is a rather flexible patchwork of Grand Coalitions, red-green and bourgeois (CDU/FDP) coalitions, cooperation between the SPD and PDS or FDP as well as rare coalitions with three partners. Currently, with the predominance of the CDU at the regional level – holding 45% of all seats in the 16 Landtage and leading 11 governments, compared to 32% for the SPD with 5 regional prime ministers – heterogeneity is temporarily restricted. During the 1990s, however, there has been a flourishing of Land coalitions that allied parties which were political opponents at the federal level (incongruent coalitions) or alternative coalitions, which consisted of federal opposition parties only (see Sturm 1999; Detterbeck and Renzsch 2003).

---

5 At the moment, there are 5 Grand Coalitions and 6 single-party governments. In four Länder, a CDU/FDP coalition holds office and in Berlin, a SPD/PDS coalition governs. The latter five would qualify as incongruent coalitions, trespassing the federal border between government and opposition.
Belgium

Both the Belgian state and Belgian party politics have undergone tremendous changes over the last decades. Since 1970, several state reforms transformed a unitary system into a federal one with a highly complex structure at the substate level, based on three territorial regions and three socio-linguistic communities. Although a dual federalism in legal theory, multi-level interdependencies and a strong need for coordination characterises the Belgian system (Deschouwer 2000; Swenden 2002; De Winter 2006: 78). In party politics, the division of the major parties (between 1968 and 1978) into separate Flemish and Walloon organisations has given rise to the peculiar situation that no Belgian party fights elections throughout the country, thus all parties are regionally based and non-statewide. On the other hand, all Belgian parties are multi-level organisations, being active at the federal level and their respective substate entities at the same time (De Winter 2006: 80-83).

Until the 1960s, the Belgian party system was highly concentrated and very stable. In a two and a half party system, competition was basically confined to the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the smaller Liberals. As all three of them were rooted in a densely organised subcultural pillar, which they politically represented, competition for votes was also rather limited. With the prevalence of class and religion as salient cleavages, the traditional parties managed to aggregate territorial conflicts between Flemish and Walloons within their own ranks. The Belgian party state (‘partikratie’), which deeply penetrated society, resolved conflict between the pillars by the consociational means of segmental autonomy, proportionality, elite compromise and power-sharing (Dewachter 1987; Deschouwer 1999). Since then, the Belgian party system has changed significantly. The erosion of the traditional subcultures, the rise of territorial conflicts and regionalist parties and the linguistic divorce of the traditional parties (as well as of the newly emerging Greens in the early 1980s) provide the background for the new patterns of party competition in Belgium (see De Winter and Dumont 1999). The changes can be summarised in three respects.

First, there are now two distinct party systems in Flanders and Wallonia, which only overlap in the Brussels constituency for federal elections and in elections for the Brussels regional parliament. Only there, Flemish and Francophone parties compete, potentially, for the same set of voters. In terms of political cleavages, the parties compete over socio-economic,

---

6 In the (small) German-speaking community, most parties are aligned to their respective Wallonian mother parties. However, there is also a regionalist parties, the PDB, represented in the community council, next to Socialist, Christian Democrats, Liberals and Greens (see Förster et al. 2004).
religious and other issues in both sub-electorates; at the federal level, polarisation arises from
the linguistic/regional cleavage, with all Flemish parties articulating self-defined Flemish
interests and all Francophone parties claiming representation for Francophone/Walloon
interests; only the two Green parties differ from this pattern (De Winter 2006: 82-83).

Second, fragmentation has increased significantly since the 1960s. With a maximum of 14
parties in the federal parliament in 1981, the effective number of parties rose from around 3,0
in the 1950s to 7,7 in 1981 and 9,1 in 1999 (2003: 7,0). The duplication of the traditional
parties, the success of ethnoregionalist parties (Volksunie, FDF, RW) from the mid-1960s and
the emergence of new parties, especially the Green parties and the right-extremist Vlaams
Blok, at the end of the 1970s account for the very strong deconcentration of Belgian party
politics (De Winter 2006: 80-82). Third, asymmetry in party competition is a valid feature but
it is arguably less pronounced than the separation of subnational electorates and the degree of
party system fragmentation would suggest. If we look at ideological party families rather than
at individual party organisations - and this seems to make sense it terms of coalition patterns
and inter-party cooperation (see below) -, we find that at the core of the party systems across
the levels and across the regional divide, there is quite a good deal of symmetry (see Table 2).

The three traditional party families are still very much at the centre of Belgian party politics,
accumulating some 70% of the vote in federal elections, somehow less at the Flanders
regional level (64%) and more at the Wallonian regional level (77%). This is of course mainly
attributed to the success of the Vlaams Blok (now Vlaams Belang) in Flanders, which can be
seen as the most salient feature of asymmetrical competition in Belgium nowadays. The
extreme right is significantly more present in Flanders (VB) than in Wallonia (FN).

The ethnoregionalist parties have basically faded away, victim of their own success (regional
autonomy) and the strategic decision of the traditional parties to adopt the issues that the
regionalists once occupied. The disappearance did not take place simultaneously. While the
Wallonian RW fell into insignificance already in the early 1980s, the Brussels FDF decided to
escape the same fate by joining forces with the Francophone Liberals in 1991. Despite gradual
electoral decline, the Flemish Volksunie maintained some importance until the party split in
2001, with the majority forming an electoral coalition with the Flemish Christian Democrats
(De Winter 2006: 82). Thus, we have another incidence of asymmetry in party competition,
which, however, lost importance in the last elections: in Flanders, the ethnoregionalist appeal
started earlier, was more pronounced and died later than in Wallonia or Brussels (see Deschouwer 2004).

**Table 2: Party systems in Belgium – Election results at the federal and at the regional level (in %)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>Federal level</th>
<th>Flanders regional level</th>
<th>Wallonia regional level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberals (PVV/PRL-FDF)</td>
<td>24,9</td>
<td>20,7</td>
<td>24,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialists (BSP/PSB)</td>
<td>24,0</td>
<td>18,0</td>
<td>33,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democrats (CVP/PSC)</td>
<td>21,3</td>
<td>25,1</td>
<td>18,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens (Agalev/Ecolo)</td>
<td>9,4</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td>12,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volksunie (NVA)</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>6,1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlaams Belang (VB)</td>
<td>9,8</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front National (FN)</td>
<td>1,9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>4,0</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Aggregate results of the last three federal and regional elections in 1995, 1999 and 2003/2004*
*Sources: Van Assche 2003; Swenden 2005: 312-313; De Winter 2006: 81.*

Finally, as has traditionally been the case in Belgium, the strength of the major parties varies between Flanders and Wallonia. In the latter, the Socialist have basically retained their leading position, while in Flanders, the Christian Democrats have lost much of their former predominance but remained the strongest party in federal elections as well as in the three substate regional elections held so far. Symmetrical party competition has been one of the most outstanding features of the simultaneous national and regional elections held in 1995 and 1999. In both years, the individual parties received nearly identical shares of the vote at both levels. For the parties, this allowed to form congruent coalitions at federal and substate level in order to make the complex Belgian political system work (Swenden 2002 and 2005).
When in 2004, the regional elections were held one year after the federal election of 2003, mid-term effects were to be observed: the parties in federal opposition gained votes in both Flanders and Wallonia, while the governing Liberals lost in both parts of the country. For the governing Socialists, the results were more unequivocal, with the Flemish BSP losing support and the Wallonian PSB confirming her good result of the federal election. The regional election campaigns were mainly fought on national issues and the record of the federal government (Detterbeck 2006: 41-46). However, with vote swings between federal and regional elections in the distinct sub-electorates of Flanders and Wallonia, Belgian parties now face problems in maintaining patterns of congruence in coalition-building and informal cooperation practices (see Swenden 2005).

Surprisingly enough then, the electoral strategies of the (non-statewide) Belgian parties did not reflect the strong decentralisation of the federal state. The (multi-level) parties opted for campaigns that revolved basically around federal issues and made little distinction between the competencies and situations of the different political layers. For understanding this, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is one identical party organisation (for Flanders or for Wallonia) that selects candidates, issues programmes and designs campaigns for both federal and regional elections. Thus, making a clear separation between the different political arenas is obviously a rather difficult task for Belgian parties.


In response to the increasingly asymmetrical character of party competition across the cases, parties are confronted with a paradoxical situation; in order to maintain their integrative functions, there is a need for policy cooperation in the face of asymmetry. Our next task is to measure the degree of vertical integration within party organisations. Indicators of integration include formal and informal linkages in organisation, personnel, finances and political programmes. We argue that there are three ways in which parties adapt to that paradox, which differ across countries, party systems, and parties themselves. The first strategy may be defined as a traditionalist strategy. Here, parties will seek to maintain integration and strive for aggregation in the face of multi-level governance and asymmetrical party competition. The second strategy may be defined as modernist. Although parties seek to maintain integration, they also allow for a degree of flexibility of substate units, thus allowing for new forms of coordination. The third strategy that may be employed by parties is an autonomist
strategy. Statewide parties grant autonomy to each party level in order to respond more effectively to substate territorial competition.

In the brief overview to follow, we will look at the most important parties within our six country sample and classify them into one of our three models of strategic party responses. Note that in some cases, we are talking about the major parties within a country in plural, whereas in other cases we are dealing with parties individually. The logic behind this approach that to our mind there are countries where parties have adapted quite similarly to recent challenges. In other places, various statewide parties within one country have responded quite differently.

(a) Traditionalist strategy (Forza Italia, Partido Popular, Austrian parties, German parties)

Forza Italia

As the dominant party in the centre-right ‘Pole of Liberty’ alliance, Forza Italia (FI) has substantial electoral support throughout Italy, with the exception of the ‘red’ central-belt regions. In the 2000 regional elections, for instance, FI received 25.4% of the PR vote (the centre-right coalition as a whole received 54.5%) – the highest of any party. FI is a highly centralised party with a strong leadership role for Berlusconi, who contributes large amounts out of his personal funds to party coffers. The state leadership is responsible for appointing Regional Coordinators, who are often known to Berlusconi through membership of his business enterprises (Hopkin and Paolucci 2003). Members of regional branch party organs, including the Regional Executive and Regional Committee, are not elected by party members, but rather appointed by the Regional Coordinator or his nominees. The party organisation structure is thus highly undemocratic, and elected regional councillors have pressed for unelected Regional Coordinators to be replaced (Wilson 2007).

There is a strong drive towards uniformity in campaign strategies and policy programmes in the regions. RCs tend to follow the campaign guidelines set out by the state leadership and rarely take an independence stance (Loughlin and Bolgherini 2006). Despite this, the party does take the territorial dimension into consideration in some regions. In Sardinia, the branch is called Forza Italia Sarda, and elected members of the Regional Council have a more strongly federalist orientation that the state leadership and recognise the specialità of the territory (Hepburn 2007). However, regional branches have a weak basis upon which to dispute or diverge from party policy, as there are few mechanisms for regional branches to
influence state decision-making. The exception to this is the Conference of Regional Coordinators, which is responsible for ensuring the conformity of regional branches to state leadership decisions and policy. However, it has little influence itself over the Presidential Committee. With regard to candidate selection, the Regional Coordinator must approve lists drawn up by the state leadership for European, Italian and regional elections (in addition to seeking the approval of the Conference of Regional Coordinators for the latter).

**Popular Party (PP)**

In contrast to the other statewide parties in Spain – the PSOE and IU (United Left), the PP has refused to decentralise its decision-making structures in response to multi-level governance. Instead, the party continues to espouse a unitary vision of Spain, which is reflected in the centralisation of the party. The PP, despite having local, provincial and regional levels, has given them only limited autonomy to act. The internal organisation of regional party units is decreed by statewide party statutes; they are obliged to comply with the decisions of the state party leadership, they have limited control over candidate selection (they may propose lists for regional elections only, but these must be ratified by the statewide electoral committee) and no control over leadership selection – regional presidents are proposed and ratified by the National Executive Committee, a body comprised of the state party leadership, elected members, and regional and provincial party leaders. Regional units also have limited influence over statewide decision-making. Party organs are centralised around the President of the statewide party, are top-down and ‘pyramidal’ in nature. The President has considerable leverage over leadership and candidate selection, sometimes going against the wishes of the majority of the parliamentary party. The President is also responsible for issuing proposals on organisational decisions, which is ratified by the National Executive Committee.

Within the context of regionalisation in Spain, it is important to note that the PP was vigorously opposed to granting the regions more autonomous powers, as promised by Zapatero’s PSOE government in the early 2000s. To that end, it has taken a particularly anti-nationalist line in both the Catalonia and the Basque Country, where it trails behind the NSWPs and the affiliated PSOE parties in the popular vote. Yet this has not prevented the party from engaging in territorial politics where it there are benefits, and votes, to be had. Interestingly, the PP has made alliances with, or alternatively had absorbed, a number of smaller, right-wing territorial parties in certain regions. For instance, in the region of Navarra, the PP had developed an electoral alliance with the Union del Pueblo Navarro (UPN), an anti-
Basque nationalist party, with which it formally merged in 1993. The UPN has a ‘pact of collaboration’ with the PP, and substitutes for the statewide parties in elections there. The UPN thus has organisational autonomy, but has institutional linkages to the PP. In addition, the PP has an electoral alliance with the Partido Aragonés in Aragón; and it managed to win over the territorial vote for the Unidad Alavesa in the Alava region of the Basque Country, and the Unió Valenciana in Valencia (Pallarés and Keating 2006). The PP has thus differentiated its electoral and coalition strategies in different regions, despite the lack of formal organisational autonomy for substate units. Moreover, it is important to mention that there has been a trend of substate leaders seeking office in the statewide party (current President Aznar was previously regional president of Castile-León), whilst other central ministers have often returned to their regional power bases after their time in Madrid.

**Austrian parties (SPÖ and ÖVP)**

The **Austrian Social Democrats (SPÖ)**, which have traditionally been a strongly centralised party, became more federalised during the 1960s. On the one hand, the different Land organisations gained a more equal representation in the federal party leading bodies (against a former predominance of politicians from Vienna and Lower Austria). On the other hand, the Land parties were allowed more political freedom in regulating their own regional affairs (Dachs 2003: 81-84). However, the SPÖ managed to uphold a high degree of internal cohesion, with the substate party units being involved and strongly supportive of the federal SPÖ single-party governments in the 1970s. High levels of vertical integration allowed the different party levels to find common solution for most problems. Only from the 1980s onwards, conflict between the federal party and the regional units became more apparent. The Land parties, facing fiscal crises and an increased political competition in a more volatile environment, became more willing to distance themselves from the federal party in election campaigns and policy debates. The gradual erosion of the strong state interventionism and of consociational practices in Austria, both of which can be seen as the political project of the post-war SPÖ, contributed to the loosening of ideological bonds within the party (see Müller 1994). There were several instances, where Land parties allied to call for a stronger representation of their specific interests within the federal party (Dachs 2003: 87-90). Therefore, the SPÖ lost in internal cohesion over the last few decades.

However, both in formal structures and informal practices the SPÖ maintained the close interconnectedness of federal and substate party units. According to SPÖ rules, all nine
regional party presidents (Landesparteiobmänner) are either elected or ex officio members of the national party executive. In 2004, for example, five regional party leaders served as elected vice presidents of the national party. Thus, they are part of the inner circle of the federal SPÖ. In that year, seven out of nine regional party presidents were simultaneously prime minister (Landeshauptmänner) or deputy prime minister at the substate level. In terms of personnel, then, the vertical integration of the SPÖ is organised around a group of 10 to 12 persons that accumulate leading positions in the statewide party, the regional parties and the substate governments (see Detterbeck, forthcoming).

The Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) has a more complex organisational structure than the SPÖ due to the strength of her functional subdivisions (Bünde). Next to her territorial structure, the ÖVP is made up of six sub-organisations, each of which has a territorial dimension as well.\(^7\) The complex structure of the ÖVP leads to a diffusion of power and thus makes co-ordination a difficult yet pre-eminent task (see Abedi and Siaroff 1999). For example, it is not by chance that the composition of the national party executive is heavily determined by ex officio membership.

As with the SPÖ, the Land parties were placed on a more equal footing within the federal party in the 1960s. Even more important, the balance of power within the ÖVP shifted towards the regional party units after 1970 with the federal party being in opposition. With the regional party units having access to government resources in most Länder, regional party barons more clearly became spokespersons for the party as a whole; they were also playing an active role in the replacements of federal party leaders in 1989 and 1995 (Dachs 2003: 97-103). In the 1990s, regional election campaigns quite often saw ÖVP Land parties in critical distance to the policies of the Grand Coalition at the federal level; obviously, with some electoral success the Land parties thereby managed to escape punishment by regional electorates (see Müller et al. 2004; Abedi and Siaroff 2006). The patterns somehow changed after 2000, with the Land parties being less successful in electoral terms and Chancellor Schüssel less willing to consult regional party leaders when devising federal policies.

However, while the balance between federal and regional party levels thus shifted over time, the strong inclusion of regional leaders in the federal ÖVP leadership has not been altered.

\(^7\) The six functional sub-organizations of the ÖVP are three corporatist associations (Farmers’League, Business League, Workers’and Employees’League) and three organizations representing the youth, the women and the elderly in the party.
All regional party presidents and all ÖVP substate prime ministers are ex-officio members of the state-level executive. As in the SPÖ, vertical integration is basically organised around regional party elites who combine party offices at both levels and/or public offices at the Land level (see Detterbeck, forthcoming).

**German parties (SPD, CDU)**

Much of what has been said for Austria also applies to Germany. During the 1960s, the formerly distinct organisational models of a rather confederal type in the case of the CDU and a rather centralised type in the case of the SPD converged into a more strongly federal model (see Gabriel 1989; Poguntke 1994). The regional party units were now more strongly represented in the federal party executive, while retaining some organisational autonomy for regulating Land affairs. There is also a tendency for having a stronger role of the Land parties in times of federal opposition, as have been seen in Austria as well.

The overall pattern of a high level of vertical party integration has been put under increasing stress since German unification. Political conflict between the party levels or between different Land parties in terms of political strategies (for example, with respect to coalition formation in the Länder) or policy positions (for example, with respect to fiscal federalism between Land parties in richer and poorer regions) have become more widespread. In election campaigns, we find quite a number of incidences of Land parties seeking distance from their colleagues at the federal level (see Detterbeck and Renzsch 2003). However, and this is what we call the traditionalist strategy, as in Austria, there have been basically no changes to the formal multi-layered organisational structures of the German parties. With respect to formal linkages, the Land parties have not sought more independence from their federal parties.

All CDU substate prime ministers (Ministerpräsidenten) are, if not elected directly by the party conference, ex officio members of the federal leadership bodies. The same goes – if they are CDU members - for the Federal Chancellor, the Speaker of Parliament, the leader of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag and the leader of the EVP group in the European Parliament. In addition, all regional party presidents (Landesvorsitzende) and the leaders of the affiliated organizations are ex officio members of the wider leadership body (party executive). At present, 12 of the 24 members of the federal party executive committee (Präsidium) are representatives of the Land level, 10 of them being substate prime ministers and three of them (Koch, Wulff, Rüttgers) have been elected as federal deputy party leaders.
Within the SPD, representation of the regional party units is currently weaker reflecting a temporary lack of government resources and profile at the Land level. In the present SPD executive, elected after the formation of the federal Grand Coalition in November 2005, 15 of the 45 members (33.3%) are representatives of the regional party level. With 22 members (48.9%), federal government ministers and parliamentarians have remained predominant within the federal party leadership. However, both the new federal party leader, Kurt Beck, and the first deputy leader, Jens Bullerjahn, are Land (government) politicians.

Looking at patterns over a longer period of time, we find the regional party units to be more powerful at the federal party level when the party is in opposition at the national level. This goes for the CDU in the 1970s as well as for the SPD in the 1980s and 1990s. As federal opposition, the German parties strongly depend on their regional party barons for resources and profile; when the federal government, the parties are strongly biased towards the federal party in public office (see Detterbeck, forthcoming). In Germany, there is also a very important intergovernmental dimension to the interlocking of federal and regional party units. The parties have established strong informal mechanisms of vertical intra-party coordination in organising Bundesrat decision-making processes. In order to determine common positions on legislation, representatives of SPD-led Land governments (“A-Länder”) and representatives of CDU/CSU-led governments (“B-Länder”), both ministers and civil servants, meet in separate rounds with leading members of the Bundestag caucus and, if the party is in power, with members of the federal government (see Renzsch 1998; Leonardy 2004).8

(b) Modernist strategy (Belgian parties)

The three traditional party families in Belgium (Christian Democrats, Socialists and Liberals) as well as the Green parties in Flanders and Wallonia are prototypes of a modernist response to the recent challenges of the parties-federalism nexus. On the one hand, strongly driven by internal fighting and the competitive pressures of the ethno-regionalist parties, the established parties opted for a radical solution by splitting their organisations along the linguistic-regional cleavage. Each regionally based party now has distinct party statutes and leadership bodies,

8 In Austria, the intergovernmental dimension of vertical party integration is not as important as in Germany due to the weakness of the Austrian Bundesrat. However, an informal round of regular meetings of regional first ministers (Landeshauptmänner-Konferenz) has acquired more importance since the 1970s. In particular, the ÖVP first ministers at Land level have been successful in making their position heard vis-à-vis federal governments in which the ÖVP participated (see Bußjäger 2003).
political programmes and policy positions, electoral strategies and fortunes (De Winter 2006: 76). Rather than seeking to maintain interest aggregation, the Belgian parties allowed for the formal separation of ideological party families. On the other hand, Belgian parties developed new forms of intra- and inter-party cooperation among sister parties which allowed them to organise cooperation between the political levels and substate entities. In this sense, Belgian parties maintained their traditional role as brokers between differentiated segments (once ideological pillars, now territorial entities) by inventing new mechanisms of coordination.

Three mechanisms are particularly interesting for our analysis. First, within each territorial subsystem (Flanders/Wallonia) multi-layered parties are operating. Within one organisational structure, all-important activities of the party – ranging from candidate selection to electoral campaigns and policy positioning – are coordinated by one party apparatus under one party leadership. We may thus expect that there is a permanent link and exchange between the federal and the regional arena. One of the most visible manifestations here is the phenomenon that under the system of simultaneous elections many party candidates appeared on different party lists (federal/regional) and a number of government ministers were even elected on the ‘wrong’ political level (Fiers and Noppe 2007). Intra-party coordination occurs in regular meetings of the party president with the chairs of the various parliamentary groupings (Flemish parties have up to four parliamentary groupings, Walloon parties even up to six); through the inclusion of these parliamentary chairs as well as most federal and regional ministers of that party in the party executive; through policy-specific working groups and study commissions (De Winter 2006: 83-85).

Second, inter-party coordination among sister parties takes place on formal and informal channels. In the traditional Belgian parties, most formal institutions such as common research centres and joint parliamentary caucuses, which were installed after the divorce, became defunct after some time. Nowadays, only the two Green parties uphold important institutional fora – a joint federal executive and joint parliamentary group meetings, in particular. At the informal level, however, there is frequent coordination among the party leaders and the policy experts of the Flemish and Walloon Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberals or Greens. This is especially relevant at the governmental level (ibid.).

Third, at the governmental level parties that belong to the same party family have most often remained together in cabinet or in opposition. Whenever possible, congruent coalitions have
been built at the federal and the substate level (Swenden 2005). Intergovernmental relations thus have strong party-based overtones, with party leaders summits as a form of inter-party coordination being important means of making a complex federal system work.

(c) Autonomist strategy (Labour Party, Conservative Party, DS, PSOE)

**Labour Party**

Labour was the dominant party in Wales and Scotland in the postwar period. Traditionally, the Scottish and Welsh Councils of the Labour Party had constituted administrative branches of the unitary UK Labour Party whose overriding aim was to gain power at Westminster. These regional branches enjoyed little more autonomy than, for example, the East Midlands Labour Party. However, a number of developments forced Labour to reconsider its centralist strategy. First, Labour needed to respond to the North-South polarisation of Labour and Tory support that peaked during the 1987 election. Second, there was a strategic need to combat the resurgence of political nationalism in Wales and Scotland, which Labour did by supporting a programme of devolution (Hepburn 2006). And third, there were tensions emanating from its Scottish and Welsh ‘regional councils’ for more programmatic and organisational autonomy. In Scotland, a breakaway party was formed that sought to fuse socialism with nationalism, and other factions within the party have been vociferous in their calls for greater Scottish autonomy and a more distinctive identity. Labour found it necessary to devise ‘strategies to accommodate distinctive territorial identities within the party and the state in order to minimise support for nationalist parties and secessionist claims’ (McEwen 2004: 1). In 1994, a degree of autonomy was granted to the Scottish branch, which changed its name from the Scottish Council of the Labour Party to the Scottish Labour Party (SLP). Both the SLP and Labour Party Wales had their own headquarters, executives and annual conferences, but they had little real decision-making power. Party policy, personnel functions, candidate selection rules and campaign strategies were decided by the British leadership and the regional General Secretaries were directly responsible to the National Executive Committee in London. Even though there was little interference in the day-to-day running of the Scottish and Welsh parties, there was considerable formal centralisation. Moreover, many Scottish politicians in particular made their career in the UK party and comprised the ‘leading lights’ of the party executive. Few returned to the Scottish arena when the Parliament was established.

In the early years of devolution, Labour transferred a number of powers to the Scottish and Welsh branches. These included control over internal party decision-making such as
leadership selection for Scottish and Welsh leaders in the devolved legislatures and candidate selection procedures (though this is to be done within the framework of centrally prescribed principles); control over campaign strategy in devolved elections; and control over policymaking procedures and programmes at the devolved level (Bradbury 2006). The latter function would allow Labour to develop a policy programme more attractive to Scottish and Welsh voters, which was particularly important in the context of Labour’s transition to ‘New Labour’. This move had been motivated by the need to appeal to the middle-class Conservative vote in southern England, and did not apply in the Celtic nations, which had strong working-class support for Labour. But whilst the Scottish Labour Party was relatively comfortable with the New Labour discourse, in Wales this was vigorously resisted. In 2000, the Welsh leader Rhodri Morgan rebranded the party ‘Welsh Labour’ to contrast with New Labour, and reasserted Welsh Labour’s commitment to what may be considered as ‘Old Labour’ values such as maintaining the state as the direct provider of public services (rather than introducing private provision of public services such as healthcare and education).

Meanwhile, Scottish Labour pursued a number of policies distinct from the British Party, such as free care for the elderly and the abolition of up-front university tuition fees. These policies were largely the result of Scottish Labour’s coalition partnership with the smaller Liberal Democrats, who pushed for both policies. These were accepted by the British leadership, and indeed Welsh and Scottish Labour’s governing coalitions with the LibDems did not create any tensions within the party organisation. Indeed, some forms of cooperation between Labour and the LibDems had taken place at the devolved and statewide levels prior to devolution. Thus, the British leadership was comfortable displaying their different policy orientation in General Elections from that pursued at the devolved level. This can largely be seen as the result of Labour’s continue shared identity and ethos across the territorial levels.

**Conservative Party**
The Conservative Party, despite its distinctive roots in Scotland, was in the years leading up to devolution perceived as an English, anti-Scottish and anti-Welsh party (Seawright 2002). Followings its election defeat in 1997, where it failed to elect any candidates in either Scotland or Wales, the party struggled to accommodate the territorial dimension in its organisation and policies. The party was highly centralised, owing to former UK Party Leader Margaret Thatcher’s efforts to bring the Scottish branch into line as a ‘regional unit’ by assuming control over its personnel, finance and political office, so that ultimate authority was exercised by the British leadership. Previously, the Scottish party, known as the Scottish
Unionist Party 1912-1965, had been constitutionally separate from its English counterparts, in contrast to the Welsh branch, which was managed from London. It was, under Thatcher’s rule, perceived to be assimilationist (Mitchell 1990). Yet, like Labour, the Conservative party in Scotland and Wales also harboured some elements that desired greater autonomy in order to overturn the dominant role of England, and the demands of the English electorate, in Conservative party deliberations (Bradbury 2006).

With devolution, these in Scotland voices received their chance to adapt the party to territorially differentiated needs and interests (Hepburn 2006: 236. In addition to agreeing not to seek to overturn the devolution settlement, which the Conservatives had opposed in the 1998 referendums, the Scottish party held a number of internal discussions on how to respond organisationally to the devolved legislatures and to win back electoral support. The outcome was a decision to transform the branch into a more ‘Scottish’ party by granting it constitutional independence, though it was still affiliated to the British party and exhibited a Conservative identity. This allowed the party to control procedures for candidate and selection, campaign strategies and policy programmes. The resulting confederal relationship between the Scottish and British parties was not extended to Wales, where there was little development towards autonomy. Despite this, the British leadership did allow the Welsh party room for manoeuvre (Bradbury 2006: 142). The greater problem was a shortage of good Scottish- and Welsh-based candidates to contest the devolved elections, and the knowledge that they had little hope of forming an administration at the regional level.

Moreover, the Scottish party, and the Welsh party even more so, are still strongly tied to the British party in UK elections. They often issue election manifestos with identical text (though with different covers and introductions). Moreover, the Scottish party chairman is still appointed centrally, whilst Scottish and Welsh party members themselves have little participation in the British (seen as English) leadership. There may be a real possibility of formal separation in the future. There have been calls within the party to achieve the organisational autonomy that the pre-1965 Scottish Unionist Party once had. For instance, Brian Monteith MSP suggested that the Scottish Tories should adopt a relationship with the English Conservatives like the Christian Social Union in Bavaria has with the CDU. It remains to be seen whether the party will go down this route, especially as many of their members remain hostile to autonomy, either for Scotland, or the party itself.
Democrats of the Left (DS)

As the main successor to the PCI, the DS received the largest share of the vote in the centre-left alliance, and comes second to Forza Italia in the statewide popular vote (in the 2000 elections, the DS received 19.5%, whilst the centre-right gained 44.7%). Its main heartlands lie in the northern-central Italian regions. Out of all the statewide Italian parties, the DS has endowed the regional level of the organisation with the highest degree of autonomy. The party adopted a federal constitution in 2005, responding to the constitutional reform of the Italian state, which it was responsible for driving. Regional ‘Unions’ have now assumed control over internal decision-making, candidate selection (using a system that must be verified by the National Directorate for adherence to procedure rules), the capacity to develop their own policies and programmes in response to regional particularities, autonomy over campaign strategies, and control over sub-regional levels of the party. Regional Unions are organised into a federal network across Italy, and are obliged to develop ‘pacts’ with the statewide party. The only threat to their autonomy is the possibility of federal intervention in the case that the branch causes serious damage to the federal party – though even this must be approved by two-thirds of National Directorate members (Wilson 2007: 12). Regional branches, however, exercise only marginal influence over state decision-making. Although some scholars argue that the party now has dual structures of national decision-making, with two party leaders (Secretary and President), the regional branches have little input into the selection of party leaders or national decision-making (Gianetti and Mule 2006). One way to offset their lack of influence at the centre is for regional branches to use the ‘subsidiarity warning mechanism’ that forces the state leadership to re-evaluate a political or policy decision that undermines the principle of subsidiarity or threatens the regional branches’ prerogatives.

Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)

Despite being committed to the vision of a unitary Spanish state, the PSOE has made strong efforts to adapt its strategies and organisation to the multi-level setting in Spain. The party transformed itself from a centralised party in the 1980s to a ‘federal’ party when it began to lose ground to the PP in the 1990s. A partial explanation for this was that when it lost office in 1996, the so-called ‘regional barons’ took the opportunity to expand their local power bases and reassert their role and influence at the centre. Since then, the regional units of the PSOE, called ‘federations’, have considerable organisational autonomy, as well as influence at the statewide level. They are responsible for their own internal organisation, decision-making
structures, and institutional resources; manifestos, policy and campaign strategies; post-electoral alliances; and control over candidate selection for regional elections. Moreover, they have the ability to formally influence statewide decision-making through the mechanism of the ‘Territorial Council’, which comprises the Secretary-General and the regional party leaders. Although it was created in 1997 as an advisory body, it also has a degree of political clout – demonstrated during the leadership crises of the 1990s. Regional units are also able to influence the party leadership informally, though this varies with the strength of individual regional party barons. The most powerful regional party leaders also sit on the Federal Executive Commission (Wilson 2007).

The PSOE has also responded to individual pressures for territorial differentiation within its structures. Most notably, the PSOE has a special ‘pact of federation’ with the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), which predates the federalisation of the party in the late 1990s. This relationship was formalised during the Second Republic in the 1930s, and furnishes the PSC with far more autonomy than the other regional units, as well as influence within the statewide leadership structures. In 2006, the PSC formed a coalition government with the Republican Left (ERC) and the radical left and green coalition, ICV-EUiA. Interestingly, the EUiA broke formal linkages with the Spanish Communists in the 1990s, and now sits with its Catalan governing partners in the Spanish Parliament as a left-of-centre Catalan bloc. The PSOE also has a pact with the PSE in the Basque Country, though this unit was given less autonomy. The affiliated Catalan and Basque parties allow the PSOE to give the Spanish socialist movement a more territorial focus and respond more effectively to nationalism there.

**Conclusion: Adapting to a paradox**

Statewide parties in European democracies have developed a range of different responses to the increasingly asymmetrical nature of party competition in federal or decentralised states, which has resulted from parties’ changing functions and the emergence of systems of multi-level governance. These strategies – which we identified as traditionalist, modernist and autonomist – have varied across countries, as well as across parties themselves. First, in Austria, Germany and Belgium we see relatively similar organisational and strategic responses of statewide parties to multi-level politics: the traditionalist strategy is favoured in Austria and Germany, and the modernist strategy has been adopted by Belgian statewide parties. In contrast, statewide parties competing within Spain, Italy and the UK have tended to pursue their own individual strategies. In many cases, the type of strategy adopted by the
party in question has correlated with their constitutional aims. To take some examples, the LibDems in the UK are a federal party supporting federalism in the UK; the devolution-supporting Labour Party has a devolved party structure; the pro-regionalisation PSOE in Spain has a regionalised party structure; and the FI in Italy remains centralised in accordance with its own constitutional preference for Italy. The correspondence between the constitutional aims of the parties and their organisational adaptation to multilevel governance may in part explain why parties in Austria, Germany and Belgium have adopted similar strategies across the party system: these are three well-established federal states where the constitutional future of the state in question is not as contested as it is in Spain, the UK and Italy – which are a federalising, devolving and decentralising state, respectively. Rather, statewide parties in Austria, Germany and Belgium generally support the current form of federalism in their respective states.

Second, there is evidence of variation in strategies within the statewide parties themselves, as well as across the party system as explained above. This is most evident in the UK. Here, the Conservative Party has adopted a clear autonomist strategy in Scotland – endowing the party with organisational and programmatic autonomy – whilst in Wales the strategy is more akin to the traditional strategy, whereby party policy and finance is decreed from London. Similarly, the Labour Party has responded differently to regional party competition in Wales and Scotland: whilst in Scotland there is more evidence of vertical coordination and conformity of the Scottish branch to statewide party policy, in particular in the New Labour public services reform agenda, in Wales the regional branch has shown greater resistance to New Labourism, and the party has sought to develop a stronger, more independent voice and policy profile that is in keeping with ‘Old Labour’ values. We can also see evidence of internal party variation in strategies elsewhere: in Spain the PSOE has allowed the development of an affiliated Catalan party with maximum autonomy – the PSC; in Italy FI has allowed the creation of a more autonomous Forza Italia Sarda in Sardinia; and in Germany, the Christian Social Union has developed as an independent party from the CDU, but which is affiliated in terms of its policy and ideological position. There is thus evidence that parties differ in strategies across party systems as well as internally.

These findings have furthermore shown that, despite the fact that there are centralising and decentralising traditions in all of the main party traditions, be they centre-left or centre-right, in decentralised systems the Left are more likely to adopt autonomist strategies (as has been
the case for the Labour Party in the UK, the Democrats of the Left and Refounded Communists in Italy, and the PSOE and United Left in Spain), whilst the Right have tended towards traditionalist strategies (including here the Partido Popular in Spain, and Forza Italia and the National Alliance in Italy). An exception is the Conservatives in the UK, mentioned previously, which have tended towards the autonomist strategy in Scotland (where the party has distinctive historical roots), though its strategy in Wales appears to be more traditionalist (where there are no Welsh roots). However, in the federal systems of Austria and Germany we find that the pattern is rather different. The tendency for all statewide parties is towards a traditionalist strategy. This may be explained by the federal context in both countries, where most policy areas are legislated at the national political level. Regions and regional party units are thus strongly interested in having a voice in federal politics. In both Austria and Germany, the major parties have been trying to maintain high levels of vertical integration and to deal with their increasing internal territorial heterogeneity. Finally, in Belgium, despite the absence of statewide parties, there are a number of intra-party and inter-party mechanisms that ensure the capacity of parties to have a strong coordinating role in a highly complex federal system. Parties have developed vertical cooperation across territorial levels, in order to bring together state and substate elites, and thus to avoid fragmentation or centralisation. Here, there are regular meetings of party leaders and policy experts to negotiate political strategies and policy positions across the territorial levels, in order to maintain cooperation. As mentioned, there are also some signs of this in the Labour Party, where the statewide party leadership has sought to obtain Scottish (less Welsh) conformity to the London-driven New Labour project. Yet this is not institutionalised: rather it is sought through informal party networks.

This paper has argued that political parties in West European democracies, once instruments of national integration and coordinated policy-making, are now faced with the challenge of denationalisation and policy divergence. Parties (and different parts of parties) in Germany, Austria, Belgium, the UK, Spain and Italy have responded differently to these challenges. Whilst some have sought to reflect new divisions of powers and authority within the state in their own organisational format and strategies, others have held on to the belief that a united party will underpin a unified state. In many cases, and in particular within the more contested constitutional arenas of Spain, Italy and the UK, it is a desire to maintain the territorial integrity of the state from threats of secession that has motivated the strategies of statewide parties. But whilst some parties – especially those on the Left – believe that granting concessions, a degree of autonomy, and representation of territorial interests to regional
subunits is the best method for warding off the threat of independence from minority nationalist parties and for dampening the tendency towards factionalism within their own ranks, other parties – many on the Right – take the opposite view. It is believed that any move towards granting autonomy to regional subunits will lead to the break-up of the party, the dissolution of the party system and the collapse of the state. Instead the emphasis is on retaining an inflexible united front in a unified state. This reveals that protracted debates on the constitutional future of the state are, on a micro-level, also evident within the parties themselves: parties are struggling as much with the implications of state structural change resulting from the emergence of multi-level governance in their internal organisation, programmes and strategies as much as their responses to new divisions of state powers.
Bibliography


De Winter, L. (2006), Multi-level party competition and coordination in Belgium, in: D. Hough and C. Jeffery (eds.), Devolution and electoral politics (Manchester: Manchester UP), 76-95


Hopkin, J. (2003), Political decentralisation, electoral change and party organisational adaptation. A framework for analysis, European Urban and Regional Studies, 10(3).


Lehmbruch, G. (1976), Parteiennwettbewerb im Bundesstaat (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer).

Lehmbruch, G. (2000³), Parteiennwettbewerb im Bundesstaat. Regelsysteme und Span-nungslagen im Institutionengefüge der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag).


