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PARTY SYSTEMS AND PARTY COMPETITION IN
EUROPEAN REGIONS: A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION

First draft – comments welcome

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PARTY SYSTEMS AND PARTY COMPETITION IN EUROPEAN REGIONS:
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The process of regionalization of the Italian and Spanish states began in 1970 and 1978 respectively. After three decades and a number of successive reforms, Italy and Spain have nowadays developed well established regional institutions and party systems. Regions’ powers have considerably grown as well as the visibility of political actors at regional level. The attention of political scientists towards regional political systems have grown consequently, focusing both on political actors and policy outcomes. As far as electoral and party competition are concerned, the most recurrent framework has been the one of second-order elections, originally employed to explain voting behaviour in American mid-term elections (Goodhart and Bhansali 1970) and in the elections of the European Parliament (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Although starting from this common point, scholars have then underscored different features of the Spanish and Italian regional elections and party systems. In the Spanish case the impact of non-statewide parties (NSWPs) and that of dual voting are recurrently mentioned as the most distinctive features of this multi-level competition game (Pallarés and Keating 2003); in Italy regional elections have been described as flattened on national political issues and organizations, even though less participated and less ideological (Parisi 1987; De Mucci 1987). The Italian case is also interesting because in the nineties the political earthquake which completely re-shaped the party system, coincided with a speeding up of the process of federalization (Cento Bull 2002; Baldi 2003, 120-130), that increased the importance of regional elections and gave them a more autonomous profile. In Spain we do not have a similar watershed since the re-establishment of democracy, but also in this case the quasi-federal nature of the state is the result of successive reforms and is still open to further developments (Aja 1999, ch. 2).

Given these characteristics, a double comparative perspective is allowed (or maybe required): the first one looks at differences and similarities between the two countries, the

1 I would like to thank Marco Brunazzo for providing me with electoral data and other information on Trentino-Alto Adige, and Ignacio Urquizu Sancho for allowing me to use his comprehensive data set on Spanish autonomous governments.
second one concerns the different paths of evolution of regional party systems through time.

In the first part of this paper, after having shortly introduced the institutional setting of Spanish and Italian regional elections, I will present three synthetic indexes of regional party systems format, relative to competitiveness, effective number of parties, and differentiation among regional electoral patterns. The second part will be devoted to a closer look into the structure of electoral competition. The idea, presented by Stefano Bartolini (2002), is that electoral and party competition can be analyzed along four basic dimensions: contestability, availability, decidability and vulnerability. After a brief explanation of these dimensions and the empirical tools to measure them, I will try to apply this theoretical framework to Italian and Spanish regions, in order to see if and how this approach can be useful to get a better understanding of party systems outcome.

**Spanish and Italian regional elections: institutional settings**

Spanish Autonomous Communities where established by the constitution of 1978 as a compromise between centralist and regionalist demands. The initial arrangement of the constitution set a ‘fast lane’ for Historical Communities (i.e. those that had already voted for autonomy statutes under the Second Republic: Cataluña, the País Vasco and Galicia) to re-create autonomous institutions, and left the door open to autonomy demands from other Communities. By the mid-1980s, 17 Autonomous Communities were established, varying in size and powers, pushing the regionalization process probably beyond the initial plans of the legislator. Apart from the three Historical Communities, also Andalucia accessed to an advanced status of autonomy, proceeding under Article 151 of the constitution. Other Communities have seen their hechos diferenciales (distinctive features) recognized into the constitution or the autonomy statutes. The País Vasco, Galicia, Cataluña, Baleares, the Comunidad Valenciana and Navarra have co-official languages: Basque in the first case, Galician in the second, Catalan in the others; País Vasco, Navarra and Canarias have particular fiscal arrangements; País Vasco, Galicia, Cataluña, Navarra, Canarias, the Comunidad Valenciana and Aragón have special arrangements for common law (Aja 1999, 161). This highly asymmetric organization of territorial powers finds a correlation in the diffusion of NSWPs. Beyond the traditional nationalist mobilization of the País Vasco and Cataluña (and to a lesser extent Galicia) new regionalist/nationalist parties have emerged in all the Autonomous Communities, though with extreme variations in their levels of electoral success (Pallarés et al. 1998; Máiz
1999). As far as the electoral system is concerned, all the Autonomous Communities have approved systems that are practically identical to the national one, though normally with a higher degree of proportionality, due to the diverse magnitude of constituencies (Pallarés 1998).

Italian 1948 constitution foresees special statute and ordinary regions. The first ones (Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d’Aosta, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardegna and Sicilia) were established after the Second World War (with the exception of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, established in 1964), while ordinary regions have been established only in 1970. The electoral system was a strictly proportional one until 1990. From 1995 onwards a new mixed system has been introduced. Voters are now asked to express a vote for a party in the proportional part, assigning 80% of the seats of the regional assembly, and a vote for the President of the region, supported by a party or coalition of parties. The candidate president who gets a plurality of votes is elected, and the party (coalition) supporting her/him earns the remaining 20% of the seats².

**Regional party systems: the basic features**

When comparing the format of party systems, three simple indicators are particularly useful and widely adopted in the literature: competitiveness of party system, effective number of parties (ENP) and distinctiveness of voting. Let’s have a look at each of them. By competitiveness we mean how close the two main parties are in terms of votes (and seats) percentages. The lesser the distance between the main parties, the more competitive the party system is or, in other words, the higher the probabilities that winners of one elections will become losers in the next one and viceversa. On the other hand, in a non-competitive system one party has a hegemonic position, leaving well behind all competitors. The simplest way to grasp this aspect is to subtract the percentage of votes of the second party from that of the first one. Higher values thus indicate a low level of competitiveness. This measure is reported in tables 1 and 2 for the Italian and the Spanish regions respectively, as an average of two different periods.

Let’s consider the Italian case first. The 1970-1990 period, covering five elections, shows high differences among regions. A group is distinguished by very close competition between the main political options (Christian Democracy (DC) and Communist Party

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² The electoral system is actually more complex than this, since the majority premium can vary according to the percentage of votes of the winning party (coalition). The direct election of President has been introduced only in 2000. Following the constitutional reform approved in 2001, each region is now entitled to set its own electoral system. Up to now, only Toscana and Puglia have approved new (slightly different) electoral systems. See D’Alimonte (1995; 2000).
(PCI)): Lazio, Liguria, Marche, Piemonte, Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle d’Aosta show an average distance between the first two parties lower than 10%. These are in fact the cases where DC and PCI alternately gained the first position and, consequently, centre-right and centre-left governments alternated in power (Vassallo and Baldini 2000). At the opposite end we find regions well above the national average. Molise and Veneto are the most outstanding cases, due to the hegemonic position of the DC and to the bad performance of the PCI, constantly below its national average in the whole considered period. Also Emilia-Romagna, Abruzzo, Basilicata and Sicilia are close to the ideal type of hegemonic party systems: in Emilia-Romagna the role of the hegemonic party have been played by the PCI, while the DC dominated the other regions. As far as special statute regions are concerned, they do not show a distinct and coherent pattern of competitiveness: two regions (Valle d’Aosta and Trentino Alto Adige) are among the most competitive, while the other three are close to the national average (Sardegna), or well above it (Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Sicilia).

Recent elections (1995 and 2000) are generally characterized by higher levels of competitiveness⁴. On average, the distance between the main parties decreases by 6% (from 14.9 to 8.8%), and only three regions (Valle d’Aosta, Marche and Trentino-Alto Adige) show a considerable rise of this value. Among ordinary statute regions, the traditional red belt of central Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, Umbria and, to a lesser extent, Marche) shows less competitive systems, together with the two strongholds of the centre-right Lombardia and Veneto. On the other side, the Mezzogiorno is now the most competitive area⁴: no southern region has a value close or over the national average. Two more cases must be mentioned for they surprising pattern of party system change: Molise, by far the less competitive region in the first period, is now among the most competitive⁵. Also in Basilicata the collapse of the DC, dominant party until 1992, has brought about unpredictable changes, but in these case the high level of competitiveness reported in table 1 is misleading. The first two parties (Left Democrats and Popular Party/Margherita) are in fact both part of the centre-left coalition, while the main centre-right parties perform

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⁴ Given the new electoral system, since 1995 many observers concentrate their attention on the competition among coalitions in the majoritarian part, as this one is determinant to the electoral outcome. In this work I keep the focus on the proportional part (which means on single parties), in order to make comparisons between the two periods easier.

⁵ Not only in regional elections. Also in general ones this area is usually where most marginal seats are located, at least until 2001 elections (Bartolini and D’Alimonte 1995; D’Alimonte and Bartolini 2002).

⁶ On the evolution of party system in this region see Petrarca (2000).
markedly worse than at national level. This makes this region one of the less competitive of the whole country, in spite of the equilibrium of the two main parties.

Coming to special statute regions, the new situation is an exactly mirror image of the previous one: Valle d’Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige are now among the less-than-average competitive regions, while the other three regions are decisively competitive. These results are only apparently paradoxical. Valle d’Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige are the only two special statute regions where the party system is clearly distinct from the national one, as an effect of two hegemonic ethnoregionalist parties, the Union Valdôtaine and the Südtiroler Volkspartei respectively. The disappearance of the DC and the dispersion of its voters in a number of heir parties have amplified the distance between dominant parties and their competitors\(^6\). The other three regions, having party systems closer to the national one, have followed the general trend toward higher competitiveness and, we will see, a lower ENP.

ENP is another classical tool of party systems analysis, giving a synthetic measure of the number and weight of the subjects included in electoral competition (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Looking at the first period we find a picture similar to the one of competitiveness. Hegemonic party regions (both the ‘red’ ones: Toscana, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and the ‘white’ ones: Molise, Abruzzo, Basilicata, Veneto) show, not surprisingly, the lowest ENP. On the contrary, more competitive regions are characterized by higher ENP. special statute regions are all above the national average, as a consequence of the presence of regionalist parties in addition to the statewide ones. Again, Valle d’Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige have values much higher than the other three special regions.

In the recent period ENP, already high, has literally exploded. National average is 6.1, but in several regions this value goes well beyond 7 and even reaches 8.1 in Campania. All the regions but Valle d’Aosta increase the number of parties, and in four cases (Abruzzo, Basilicata, Campania, Molise) this index has now doubled, if compared to the 1970-1990 period. In large part this phenomenon is due to the dissolution of the two traditional protagonists of Italian politics, the DC and the PCI. Especially the first one has left a void space, only partially filled by the birth of Forza Italia (FI) and the Lega Nord (LN). A number of small centre parties have emerged: the Centro Cristiano Democratico

\(^6\) In the case of Valle d’Aosta the Union Valdôtaine has actually increased its position rising from 16.6% in 1968 to 42.6% in 1998. In Trentino-Alto Adige things are more complex, since within this region two distinct party systems exist (Brunazzo 2000). In Trentino (autonomous province of Trento) the DC was a dominant party since its dissolution, while in Alto Adige (autonomous province of Bolzano) the Südtiroler Volkspartei has kept its hegemony, getting percentages constantly higher than 50%.
and the Unione di Centro, then unified in a single party; the Partito Popolare, Rinnovamento Italiano, i Democratici (now gathered under an umbrella organization called la Margherita), the Unione dei Democratici Europei (Udeur). On the left side of the political spectrum, the Democratici di Sinistra have kept only part of the votes of the PCI, while other neo-communist parties have emerged: Rifondazione Comunista and, more recently, the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, as a result of a further split of the latter. On the opposite side, Alleanza Nazionale (AN), heir of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano, has reached the dimension of a mid-sized party.

In the Spanish case we do not have a turning point as clear-cut as we do in Italian political history. Nonetheless it is useful to divide the history of autonomous elections into two periods, in order to take into account possible evolutions of party system formats. The best cutting point seems to be again the half of the nineties, when the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) lost its ten-years-long hegemony giving the way to the Partido Popular (PP) in 1995 Autonomous Communities elections and in 1996 general elections.

Looking at competitiveness in the first period we notice exceptionally high values – that means, again, low levels of competitiveness – in Andalucía and Extremadura, due to a strong PSOE and a slow rise of the PP. In other Communities (Castilla-León and La Rioja above all) we find the opposite situation: a stronger than average PP is more capable to contrast the leading position of the Socialists.

In the second period the deviant case is that of Galicia, where the index of competitiveness raises from a close to average value of 13.6 to 28.1. This can be explained by two parallel factors: on the one side the PP, already stronger than at national level, increases its votes up to an absolute majority in 1993 and keeps this result in 1997 and 2001 elections. On the other hand the opposition, initially dominated by the Galician branch of the Socialist Party (PSG-PSOE, Partido dos Socialistas de Galicia - Partido Socialista Obrero Español), is gradually challenged by the nationalist Bloque Nacionalista Galego. Given this structure of competition, it is not difficult to understand how the distance between the two main parties has reached 29% in 2001 elections.

This extremely synthetic review of the evolution of the Italian party system is far from being exhaustive, especially regarding the diaspora of the Christian Democrats. A detailed description, mainly focused on coalitions, can be found in Di Virgilio (2002).

In 1991 Autonomous Communities elections the PSOE was the most voted party in 10 Communities, while the PP led only 3 of them. Four years later the situation was reversed: 11 Communities gave the majority to the PP and only 3 to the PSOE.
Let’s now turn our attention to the effective number of parties. The first evidence to be underlined is that nationwide average is much lower than we had seen for Italy, and much closer to ‘normal’ levels of western European democracies. This is even more noteworthy, if we consider the wide diffusion of NSWPs in Spanish Autonomous Community elections, that, with few exceptions, are absent in Italian regions, if we exclude a few exceptions. Looking at single Communities the País Vasco shows, not surprisingly, the highest number of parties in both periods. In general, table 2 confirms our expectations that Communities with relatively high ENP are those where NSWPs are more successful (Canarias, Navarra, Aragón, Cataluña).

While competitiveness and the number of effective parties may be used to analyse party systems in general, the index of distinctiveness (Lee index) is specifically employed in regional, or anyway subnational, party systems, to measure to what extent regional voting deviates from national. Figures 1 and 2 show the distinctiveness of each region in Spain and Italy, as an overall average of considered elections. In Spain the three Historical Communities have the highest scores, together with Navarra and Canarias. In other words, we find here a confirmation that NSWPs are the main source of regional distinctiveness of voting.

[FIG. 1 HERE]

In Italy the situation looks quite different. Two regions emerge as absolutely exceptional, Valle d’Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige, while the others are all relatively close to national average. It is sufficient to say that the score of the third more distinct region, Emilia-Romagna, is about half of that of Trentino-Alto Adige. The source of such an exceptionality is to be found in the strength of the two regionalist parties active here, as we have already noticed.

[FIG. 2 HERE]

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9 In the 1971-1996 period this index is equal to 3.5 in France, to 2.8 in Germany, 3.5 in Sweden, 2.7 in Austria. 2.2 in UK (Lijphart 1999, Appendix 1).

10 The formula employed for the index is: $\Sigma|v_i(r) - v_i(n)|/2$, where $v_i(r)$ is the percentage of vote of party i in each region and $v_i(n)$ is the average percentage of vote of the same party in all regions, dividing by 2 to eliminate double counting. The index has been originally proposed by Adrian Lee (1988). See also (Hearl et. al 1996).

11 The datum of Navarra is anyway partially biased by the merge of the Unión del Pueblo Navarro (UPN) with the PP in 1993. I considered the UNP-PP as a non-statewide party and this raises the index considerably.
The evolution over time of voting distinctiveness shows other interesting differences between the two countries. Figure three presents this evolution for Italy and Spain as a whole, and for Italian special statute Regions and Spanish Historical Communities separately.

[FIG. 3 HERE]

Up to the beginning of the nineties Spain shows higher levels of distinctiveness than Italy, as happens to Spanish Historical Communities in comparison to special statute Regions. This picture will change in 1995, as a consequence of a sharp rise of Italian scores. Voting distinctiveness is in fact extremely stable in Spain, slightly below 25, and only a smooth decline may be observed in Historical Communities between 1983 and 1987 elections. On the contrary, in the Italian case voting distinctiveness increases slowly until 1990, and then more suddenly in 1995, to remain substantially stable in 2000. special statute Regions follow a similar pattern, but the distance between them and the national average, initially limited to 5.3, grows up to 21.3 in 1995, to decline again to 14.4 in the last considered elections.

Contrasting the last two indexes in the two countries allows some other interesting considerations. Figures 4, 5 and 6 present very different – if not opposite – relations between regional distinctiveness of voting and the number of effective parties.

[FIGURE 4, FIGURE 5 AND FIGURE 6 HERE]

Let’s consider the first period, 1983-1991 in Spain and 1970-1990 in Italy. In Spain there is a clear positive relation between the two dimensions: higher effective number of parties leads to higher distinctiveness of voting. A closer look at figure 4 indicates also (as we already know) that higher effective number of parties means actually higher diffusion of NSWPs. The Autonomous Communities where voting behaviour deviates the most from national average are those where most NSWPs are active: the three Historical Communities (among which Galicia emerges clearly only in the second period) plus Canarias and Navarra. In Italy the first remarkable aspect is, again, the exceptionality of Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle d’Aosta, both in terms of voting distinctiveness and of effective number of parties (fig. 5). Once these two extreme cases have been removed (fig. 6), a clear pattern emerge. First, the relationship between the two dimension is
reversed if compared to Spain: higher levels of voting distinctiveness are associated with low effective number of parties. Second, and more important, the cluster of regions scoring higher on voting distinctiveness and lower on effective number of parties (on top left of the graph) are those where the ‘red’ and ‘white’ subcultures are more deeply rooted: Toscana, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria on one side, and Molise, Veneto and, to a lesser extent, Basilicata, on the other. In other words, while in Spain regional distinctiveness of voting is originated by the diffusion of NSWPs, in Italy, at least until the 1980s, regional specificities are the consequence of special linkages between the two main parties and different portions of territory, where the dominance of the PCI or the DC are a reflex of deeper differences in political cultures and models of social relations (Diamanti 2003, ch. 2). The dominance of one or the other party is what links regional distinctiveness to low number of parties (i.e. high concentration of vote), whereas in Spain regional distinctiveness is linked with the strength of local parties.

In the second period, Spain does not present major changes. Five Autonomous Communities are again well distinguished from all the others. Galicia shows an increased distinctiveness, due to the birth and fast rise of the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG), which at the end of the nineties contends to the Socialists the leadership of leftist opposition to PP. On the specificity of Navarra we have already made some remarks above (see note 9). Canarias are another case of regional distinctiveness explained by the rise of a strong regionalist party, the Coalitión Canaria (CC). In Italy the comparison between the first and the second period is more telling. Once excluded the two outliers Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle d’Aosta, the relation between regional distinctiveness and number of parties disappears. In post-1992 Italy regional distinctiveness is indeed higher than before, as we showed in figure 3, but is no more a peculiarity originating from territorial subcultures. It is instead spread over the whole country. The idea that territory has lost part of its significance in recent Italian politics (Chiaramonte 2002; Diamanti 2003, ch. 4) finds a clear support here.

Figure 6 reveals another important transformation in Italian regional party systems. In 1995 and 2000 elections the effective number of parties is systematically higher in southern Regions. 6.1, the national average value is at the same time the lower score we find in southern Regions (Lazio) and the highest of northern Regions (Marche). This was not the case in 1970-1990 elections, where we find high ENP, for instance, in Piemonte

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12 The high position of Friuli-Venezia Giulia is somewhat misleading, as a consequence of different election timing. The first elections of the second period were held here in 1993 (not 1995, as in ordinary statute Regions). At that time the “Clean Hands” operation and the disintegration of the old political system were at the first stages. Thus, in 1993 the DC still contested elections in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, getting 22.3% of the votes, which increases markedly (and somehow artificially) the score on Lee index. If these elections were held in 1995 simultaneously to ordinary Regions, the score would probably be much lower.
and Lombardia and low ENP in Abruzzo and Molise. This is even more striking if we consider the presence of an important actor as the LN, obviously absent in southern Regions.

An alternative view: Bartolini’s approach to the study of party competition

The second part of this work proposes an alternative – but not necessarily competing – perspective on regional party systems. The theoretical framework for this approach is provided by Stefano Bartolini (2002, see also Bartolini 1996). The main goal of his essay is to give a better understanding of what ‘competition’ is in politics, and why it is not possible to reduce it to an uni-dimensional phenomenon (more or less competition, open or close competition), as we usually do borrowing the concept from economics. In economics, when we talk of competition we basically look at the supply side (more competition means more actors offering the same good); and the maximization of competition (‘perfect’ competition) is recognized in many cases to be the most desirable situation to achieve beneficial effects, like price reduction. Since the classical work of Anthony Downs (1957), this model has often been exported to politics, looking at parties as actors offering public policies and aiming at gaining the largest share of the electoral market. Bartolini challenges this widely accepted view, stating that when it comes to politics, “the conditions of competition [...] are manifold; they do not co-vary; and their maximization does not point to or reach ‘perfection’” (Bartolini 2002, 84).

Bartolini suggests that party competition should be instead studied along four distinct and independent dimensions: contestability, availability, decidability, and vulnerability. Let’s see each of them in some more detail. The dimension of contestability (ibidem, 90-93) refers to the openness of the electoral market on the supply side. In fact, if democracy theoretically offers to everyone the possibility to participate the electoral competition, in practice, this possibility is heavily affected by at least two kinds of barrier: first, the requisites actors (parties and/or candidates) must meet to enter the competition (gathering a certain number of signatures, paying a deposit, ...); second, and more important, the obstacles posed by electoral systems (proportional or first-past-the-post, thresholds, magnitude of constituencies, ...).

The dimension of availability (ibidem, 93-94) refers to the openness of the electoral market on the demand side. Looking at availability we basically ask how many voters are inclined to change their preferences in successive elections or, to go back to economic terminology, the elasticity of vote. The importance of voters availability derives from its
being at the base of rulers’ responsiveness toward their electorate, via the anticipated reactions mechanism. If no voters are disposed to change their preference anyway, no anticipated reactions may be expected from those in government.

Decidability (ibidem, 95-97) concerns again the supply side of the electoral market. Stated that the electoral market is not closed (i.e. elections are at least to a certain extent contestable), the remaining point is: do parties/candidates admitted to it really offer different products among which voters can choose? And how different? In other words, in order to have competition, contestability is only a necessary but not sufficient condition. There must be also some degree of differentiation among party proposals, and this differentiation must be visible to voters.

Finally, vulnerability (of the elected) represents “the possibility for an incumbent government to be ousted and replaced or otherwise modified in its composition as a result of changes in voters’ partisan preferences” (ibidem, 102). Differently stated, we are observing here the conditions that allow, at least potentially, to the opposition to become government and vice versa. In principle, democracy should always guarantee that government will emerge out of voters’ preferences, but this can be hampered if the line of distinction between government and opposition is blurred, as it happens with oversized majorities, minority governments or frequent change of government composition during the legislature. If the incumbent government is invulnerable (de facto, if not de jure), elections lose much of their significance, and the mechanism of anticipated reactions cannot take place. Table 3 summarizes the meaning of the four dimensions of electoral competition.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

Translating these concepts into usable empirical tools is by no means an easy task. In the last row of fig. 3 I propose indicators for each of the four dimensions, well aware that none of them is sufficient to entirely reflect the complexity of the indicated concepts. Contestability has been operationalized by disproportionality of the electoral system (Gallagher 1991), a measure indicates how much the distribution of seats reproduces the distribution of votes. The higher the disproportionality, the more difficult is for new potential actors to enter the electoral market.

Availability is fairly measured by aggregate volatility (through Pedersen index), provided that we keep in mind that this measure underestimates the real number of voters who change party preference through time, since “aggregation cancels out two-way flows
between parties. In addition, [...] actual shifts of electoral preferences [...] underestimate the magnitude of potential availability, since they count only those within the ‘available’ sector who actually decide to change their electoral preferences, leaving aside potential switchers who do not. Thus, aggregate volatility underestimates individual voting shifts, and the latter underestimate actual electoral availability” (Bartolini 2002, 94).

The concept of decidability recalls the one of polarization, measuring the ideological distance among parties\textsuperscript{13}. It is noteworthy to say that ideological distance is not the only way in which polarization has been defined. Some have operationalized the concept of polarization looking at policy distance (Laver and Hunt 1992). It is not a minor distinction: it has been pointed out that the two are not interchangeable. On the contrary, they have been found to be inversely correlated (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 199).

The indicator of vulnerability, finally, should tell us how probable is that elections will be decisive in selecting the new government. The distinction between majoritarian and consensual governments seems to be a viable one to grasp this aspect. Borrowing from Lijphart, by majoritarian governments I mean those supported by a minimum winning coalition (or single majority party), while consensual ones are those supported by oversized or minoritarian coalitions\textsuperscript{14}.

The four dimensions are not necessarily related to each other. More than telling us how much competition there is, they can describe the shape competition takes in each party system, maximizing one or the other dimension.

As we did in previous pages, we will analyze the two countries and the two time periods separately. In figure 7 data are presented for Spanish elections of 1983-1991. The dimensions of contestability and vulnerability are presented in graph 7.1, while decidability and availability are presented in graph 7.2.

[FIGURE 7 HERE]

The first graph does not suggest a clear relation between the two variables, nor a differentiation between ordinary and historical communities. Historical Communities are

\textsuperscript{13} Technically, polarization has been measured as the sum of absolute weighted distance of party position on the left-right scale from the hypothetical central point. Party position is given by the position of the median voter of that party on the left-right scale. Data, collected from Eurobarometer surveys, have been disaggregated by Region/Autonomous Community. This means that the same party can have different positions in different regions.

\textsuperscript{14} Including minority governments among the less vulnerable is only apparently a paradox. As Bartolini argues “minority governments are vulnerable by definition, as their survival rests on some sort of collusion with non-governmental parties. However, their high parliamentary vulnerability may result in their electoral invulnerability. Minority governments are relatively insensitive to electoral returns because their raison d’être is not electoral” (Bartolini 2002, 104). When reshuffles and changes in the composition of coalitions have taken place during the legislature, I have considered the composition of pre-electoral government.
instead scattered in different positions: Galicia scores high on the government variable (meaning that in the first legislatures this Community had mainly ‘consensual’ governments), and is close to national average on disproportionality; Cataluña is also close to national average on disproportionality, but much closer to the majoritarian government side, the País Vasco is somewhere in between these Communities as far as the type of government is concerned, but has higher contestability. In the second graph the other two dimensions are presented. Here a loose inverse correlation can be observed. Lower ideological polarization seems to entail higher volatility, which is not unreasonable, but the correlation is far from being a clear one. Again, this second graph does not provide any distinct pattern for Historical Communities nor, more generally, for Communities with stronger NSWP.

Figure 8 shows changes along the four dimensions. As before, disproportionality is plotted against the type of government (fig. 8.1), and ideological polarization against volatility (fig. 8.2). Starting from the situation of the previous figures, we observe here if Communities have kept the same position (in this case they would be located near the intersection of the reference lines) or have instead moved along one or more dimensions.

The most striking evidence emerging from these pictures is the generalized decline of volatility throughout the country. If we make an exception for Murcia, all other Communities are below the previous value, indicating a stabilization of the electorate in regional elections. In graph 8.1 the position of Galicia is again remarkable, as the only Community facing a double shift towards more contestability and more government vulnerability.

In figures 9 and 10 the same exercise is repeated for Italy. In figure 9.1 the most interesting aspects emerge from vulnerability axis. At the majoritarian extreme we find Veneto and Umbria, two regions dominated by the DC and by the PCI respectively, where single party governments or minimum winning coalitions were relatively frequent. But they are exceptions. At the opposite end we find in fact half of the regions (nine out of twenty) whose pre-electoral governments where always oversized or, less frequently, minoritarian coalitions. In figure 9.2 a cluster of regions emerges with higher volatility scores, among which four special statute regions can be found. It is also noteworthy that ‘red’ and ‘white’

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15 Valle d’Aosta, together with Molise, is not reported on the graph because they do not have values on the polarization index. Apparently they are too small to have people interviewed in Eurobaromenter surveys. Their scores on the volatility dimension are Valle d’Aosta: 0.070 and Molise: -0.650. This would place them at the two opposite extremes on this scale, the first one would be the most volatile, the second one would be among
regions do not cluster with each other and do not score high on the polarization index, as we could expect. Toscana appears to be strongly polarized, but Emilia-Romagna and Basilicata are located at the opposite end, and Umbria and Veneto are somewhere in the middle.

[FIGURE 9 HERE]

If we look at changes over time, the Italian picture is again very clear. In figure 10.1 we see that all regions move towards more disproportionality\(^\text{16}\), as an effect of the new electoral law introduced in 1995. The explicit purpose to move towards a majoritarian model has been successful, at least in this respect. The same cannot be said for the dimension of government vulnerability. If one expected the new electoral system to encourage the diffusion of minimum winning coalition governments, these findings suggest that this has not been the case. Many regions score zero (i.e. do not move on this dimension) for the simple reason that they already had the maximum score in the previous period, some others become more consensual and only three move towards the opposite direction. Figure 10.2 describe an unequivocal change also on the other two dimensions. As far as availability is concerned, all the regions show a marked increase. This is the result of the radical change of the party system. The emergence of a new party, Forza Italia, which immediately became the most voted one, the rise of the LN and AN, the sudden disappearance of all the old protagonists of Italian political life, the disintegration and successive partial re-aggregations of the centre: all this earthquake is reflected in exceptional levels of volatility at the beginning of the nineties. On the other hand, the exceptionality of the first half of the nineties is confirmed by the fact that voters’ mobility has sharply declined in more recent years, going back to reasonable levels, but remaining still higher than in the eighties (Cartocci 1997). The overall level of polarization, referring to the dimension of decidability, has also increased, slightly declining in only four regions. This might appear as a paradox, in a country that up to 1991 was characterized by the presence of the strongest communist party of western Europe. The reason for this rise of polarization is anyway to be found on the opposite side of the political spectrum. For many years Italian voters have been reluctant to declare themselves as right-wing supporters. The legacy of fascism and the lack of democratic legitimization of its successor, the MSI, made it almost impossible for respondents to locate themselves on the right when asked

\(\text{16}\) The exception of Trentino-Alto Adige is explained by the fact that it has kept the proportional electoral law in 1998, and has changed it only partially in 2003, introducing plurality elements only relatively to the electoral district of Trento.
the traditional question of political self placement in survey questionnaires. This situation has partially changed in recent years, with the transformation of the MSI into AN and its legitimization as a member of coalition governments, both at regional and at national level. The result is an optic illusion of a larger distance between left and right, which probably does not exist in reality.

[FIGURE 10 HERE]

Our last exercise will link one of the ‘traditional’ indicators of party systems format, the effective number of parties, with the four analytical dimensions of electoral competition presented in the last pages. The expectation is that the latter may have an influence on the former. Voting for minor parties (that necessarily involves a rise of the ENP) represents, at least in some cases, a ‘voice’ option against leading parties. The idea is that certain features of the structure of party competition can be an incentive for voters to choose this option. More particularly, I hypothesize that the ENP should be correlated to: 1) high electoral contestability (low levels of disproportionality), bringing down for small parties the threshold of entrance into the electoral market; 2) high electoral availability (high levels of volatility), reducing the share of voters ‘encapsulated’ in major mass party; 3) low decidability (low levels of polarization) and 4) low vulnerability (prevalence of consensual type of government), given that these reduce the saliency of elections and thus reduce the costs for voters of defecting from major parties.

The results presented in table 4 offers only a partial support to these hypotheses17.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

As usually, results are provided for the two countries and the two electoral periods. Disproportionality and volatility are the variables most consistently associated with the effective number of parties. The sign of the correlations confirms our hypothesis and the relations are significant in three out of four cases. The other two variables do not support our hypotheses. Polarization is clearly independent from the effective number of parties, while the correlation with the format of government is clear only for the last period of Spanish elections.

17 Contrary to all other tables and graphs, in this case the unit of analysis is not the region, but the election. The observations on which the table is built are the seven electoral turns in the 20 Italian regions and the six electoral turns in the 17 Spanish Autonomous Communities.
By way of (provisional) conclusion

In this paper we have analyzed a number of features of Spanish and Italian regional party systems, contrasting not only these two countries and their internal specificities, but also successive periods of time. The main results of these analyses may be summarized in the following points. First of all, the breakdown of the Italian party system at the beginning of the nineties not only brought about a replacement of old with new parties, but also a deep change in the structure of party competition itself. The only dimension apparently not affected by this revolution is the one concerning the format of government coalitions. On the other hand, it must be underlined that some of these changes have taken an unpredictable direction: the sharp rise of the effective number of parties was clearly not foreseen when the electoral system have been changed introducing majoritarian elements.

In Spain we do not have such a clear watershed. In this country the change of majority, with the end of a long Socialist leadership and the upsurge of the PP, did not bring about clear changes in the structure of party system and party competition.

The crucial position of NSWPs in Spanish politics has also found a confirmation, together with the peculiarities of Historical Communities and the other ‘non-ordinary-status’ Communities: Navarra and Canarias above all. In Italy such a differentiation is clear only for Valle d’Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige. If we make an exception for these two cases, the main source of internal differentiation comes from regions where a strong subcultural identity was present, whether communist or Christian democratic. This traditional feature of Italian politics seems anyway less relevant today.

Coming to the second part of this work, results are admittedly not conclusive. The hope of my exploratory exercise was at best to find meaningful correlations between the four dimensions of political competition and at least one of the ‘traditional’ indicators of party system format, the one of effective number of parties. At worst the hope was to find that Bartolini’s analytical framework proved useful to better describe variations and regularities among the party systems of Italian regions and Spanish Autonomous Communities. As far as the first goal is concerned, the results cannot be considered entirely satisfying, as we have seen in tab. 4. Also the scatterplots of regions along the four dimensions did not always show clear clustering of regions, nor clusters were always easy to be interpreted. This suggests that the gap between theory (indeed an elegant and comprehensive theory) and empirical research is still far from being filled.
An undoubted source of problems is given by the translation of the four dimensions of party competition into valid indicators. Actually, all of those proposed here suffer from some drawbacks. The indicator of contestability – disproportionality of the electoral system – does not take into account, for instance, that some parties (namely those with territorially concentrated support, see Sartori 1987) might be not affected by low proportionality. Availability has been indicated by aggregate volatility, but Bartolini himself reminds that the *location* of volatility (weather within the government and opposition blocks or across the two) is probably more important than its amount. The most obvious indicator of decidability – polarization – suffers from being an intrinsically two-faced concept: *ideological* and *policy* polarization are not the same thing and they are often inversely correlated; nonetheless, both of them contribute to shape the space of political competition. Finally vulnerability has been operationalized here as a dummy variable (majoritarian vs. consensual type of government), which is by definition a rough representation of reality, and takes into account only pre-electoral governments, ignoring all the possible intra-legislature reshuffles, that are especially characteristic of Italian politics, at regional as well as at national level.

Many problems are still open, as we can see, and no easy solutions are at hand. Nor this first exploration had the ambition to provide conclusive answers. But the theoretical approach appears to be a definitely promising one and deserves anyway, in my opinion, to be further investigated.

**REFERENCES**


Laakso, Markku, and Rein Taagepera. 1979. "'Effective' Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe." Comparative Political Studies 12:3-27.


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3 Special Statute regions are Friuli VG, Sardegna, Sicilia, Trentino AA and Valle d’Aosta.

Source: Author’s elaboration on Baldini and Vassallo (2000).
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3Historical Communities are those regions who had voted for autonomy statutes under the Second Republic: Cataluña, Galicia and País Vasco.

Source: Author’s elaboration on Pompeu Fabra University (www.eleweb.es/elecciones.htm)
Fig. 1 Regional distinctiveness of voting (Lee index) in Spanish Communities.

Source: see tab. 1

Fig. 2 Regional distinctiveness of voting (Lee index) in Italian Regions.

Source: see tab. 2
Fig. 3 Regional distinctiveness of voting. Evolution 1970-2003

Source: see tab. 1 and 2

Fig. 4 Regional distinctiveness of voting and effective number of parties in Spanish Autonomous Communities.

Source: see tab. 1 and 2
Fig. 5 Regional distinctiveness of voting and effective number of parties in Italian Regions.

Source: see tab. 1 and 2

Fig. 6 Regional distinctiveness of voting and effective number of parties in Italian Regions (Trentino-Alto Adige and Valle d’Aosta excluded).

Source: see tab. 1 and 2
Tab. 3 The four dimensions of electoral and party competition and their indicators.

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<th>Availability</th>
<th>Decidability</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Polar Opposite</strong></td>
<td>Closure</td>
<td>Collusion; obfuscation</td>
<td>Safety of tenure/inability to sanction of reward</td>
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<td><strong>It indicates</strong></td>
<td>Openness of the market on the supply side</td>
<td>Openness of the market on the demand side</td>
<td>Party differentials</td>
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<td><strong>Conditions</strong></td>
<td>Low threshold for accession</td>
<td>Weakness of identifications</td>
<td>Visibility of the dividing line between government and opposition</td>
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<td><strong>Indicator</strong></td>
<td>Disproportionality of the electoral system</td>
<td>Net volatility</td>
<td>Ideological polarization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Type of government (0-Majoritarian, 1-Consensual)</td>
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*Source: Adapted from Bartolini (2002, 105)*
Fig. 7.1 and 7.2 The dimensions of party competition in Spanish Autonomous Communities (1983-1991).

Note: type of government: 0 = majoritarian government, 1 = consensual government
Source: disproportionality and net volatility: see tab. 1 and 2; ideological polarization: Eurobarometer surveys, various numbers; type of government: Vassallo and Baldini (2000), Urquizu Sancho dataset.

Fig. 8.1 and 8.2 The dimensions of party competition in Spanish Autonomous Communities (change over time).

Note: type of government: 0 = majoritarian government, 1 = consensual government
Sources: see fig. 7
Fig 9.1 and 9.2 The dimensions of party competition in Italian Regions (1970-1990).

Note: type of government: 0 = majoritarian government, 1 = consensual government
Sources: see fig. 7

Fig 10.1 and 10.2 The dimensions of party competition in Italian Regions (change over time).

Note: type of government: 0 = majoritarian government, 1 = consensual government
Sources: see fig. 7
Tab. 4 Pearson’s correlations between the four dimensions of electoral competition and the effective number of parties.

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<td></td>
<td>(101)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(53)</td>
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<td>(39)</td>
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<td>(68)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(86)</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.
In parentheses the number of cases.

Note: type of government: 0 = majoritarian government, 1 = consensual government
Sources: see fig. 7