

Ethnicity, Territory, and Party Competition

Toward a Unified Approach

Workshop to be held at the
ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops 2012
University of Antwerp, Belgium

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Motivation

During the 1990s, the *re-territorialisation of politics* in Western Europe on the one hand and the break-up and *democratisation of multi-national states* in Central and Eastern Europe on the other hand both increased the importance of *ethnicity* and *territory* in *party competition*. With an additional ethnic issue dimension structuring the policy space and the fragmentation of party systems into segmental and/or regional subsystems, party competition in the multinational democracies of wider Europe takes the form of a complex multi-dimensional game played in multiple, territorially nested arenas.

We argue that fresh analytical approaches bridging the fields of *territorial*, *ethnic*, and *party politics* are needed to deal with this complexity. So far, however, research on ethnicity has remained largely disconnected from the field of party politics. Additionally, a heterogeneous use of terms has detached scholars working on 'ethnoregionalist' parties in Western Europe from scholars focussing on 'minority' parties in Central and Eastern Europe. The workshop seeks to overcome scholarly insulation and kick-start a debate that explores the possibility of a unified analytical approach to ethnicity and territory in party competition.

Outline of the topic in relation to existing research

In a recent contribution to *Party Politics*, Bardi and Mair (2008) concluded that given omnipresent horizontal (i.e. segmental), vertical (between levels of government), and/or functional (between an electoral and a parliamentary arena of competition) divisions in modern democracies, “it is almost impossible to speak of any given polity being characterised by a single, or unique, party system”(159). Even more recently, Albright (2010) concluded that the single Left/Right dimension “is steadily diminishing in its ability to summarize party behavior”(714), given the multi-dimensionality of party competition in advanced democracies.

Largely unnoticed, party competition in multinational democracies has been displaying these characteristics of multiple divisions and multidimensional competition for quite some time. *Ethnic divisions* constitute a *horizontal* division between different groups in society that gets translated into party politics as ethnic parties appeal to voters on the basis of some ethnic identity categories to the exclusion of others (cf. the definition of an ethnic party provided by Chandra 2005: 236). This adds an *ethnic dimension* of competition to other dimensions (such as e.g. the Left/Right dimension) and fragments the party system into segmental arenas of competition, where ethnic parties appealing to the same group compete with each other over the best offer catering for group specific interests.

If the ethnic groups are *territorially* concentrated, ethnic parties can appeal not only to ethnic but also to *regional* identity categories and try to gain votes by pushing for the devolution of decision-making competencies to the region. If this move is successful, the *horizontal* division of the party system into

different intra-ethnic arenas is joined by a *vertical* division of the party system as regional electoral arenas open up. Party competition under these circumstances then takes place at the very least along two dimensions (e.g. Left/Right and Ethnic Majority/Minority or Centre/Periphery) and in multiple segmental and territorial arenas. Ethnic and territorial identity categories in party competition account for a great deal of the complex divisions Bardi and Mair (2008) find to be characteristic of modern party systems more generally and imply a multidimensional nature of competition.

Empirically, two simultaneous processes increased the role of ethnicity and territory in party competition and contributed to the demise of “single, or unique” party systems in wider Europe. During the 1990s, the re-territorialisation of politics in Western Europe gave way to a wave of devolutionary reforms that denationalized party systems and increased the importance of regional politics (Keating, 1998; Jeffery 1998). The driving force behind this were devolutionist demands of ethnoregionalist parties, a fact that tended to be neglected by large parts of the literature (Tronconi 2006: 138). Demanding autonomy for a group of voters appealed to on the basis of both ethnic and regional identity categories resulted inter alia in the federalisation of Belgium and Spain and the devolution of competencies to Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom (Sorens 2008). Party systems were fragmented into regional subsystems that came to accompany or – in the extreme case of Belgium – substitute national party systems. At the same time, the transition of formerly communist countries with a large number of national minorities (i.e. ethnic groups with a traditional homeland territory) and a legacy of institutionalising ethnicity in Central and Eastern Europe implied that parties representing territorially based groups in politics entered the newly developing multi-party systems right from their inception (Bugajski 1995; Moser 2005).

At the same time, however, theoretical accounts are lagging behind empirical realities. To our judgement, a unified approach to the role of ethnicity and territory for party competition in political science is impeded by 1) divides between scholars dealing with Western and Central and Eastern European democracies respectively and 2) the disconnection of research on ethnicity (and, to some extent, federalism) from the field of party politics.

First, the re-territorialisation of politics in the West and democratisation of multinational states in the East led to divergent vocabulary. Scholars dealing with Western Europe frame their research in terms of territorial politics and mostly speak of *regionalist* or *ethno-regionalist parties*; scholars dealing with Eastern Europe, on the other hand, are mostly concerned about the protection of minority rights in democratising states and prefer the concept of *minority parties* (see e.g. Bochsler and Szöcsik 2010), often neglecting devolutionist demands. Terminological confusion also prevails within areas: in a recent review article drawing mostly from research on Western democracies, Hepburn (2009) pointed to the abundance of terms classifying parties as 'ethnoregionalist', 'autonomist', 'regionalist', 'nationalist', 'ethnic' or 'ethnonational' respectively (Hepburn 2009).

Second, a detailed understanding of the logic of party competition in ethnically and territorially fragmented party systems requires bridging analytical gaps between theories of decentralisation and federal systems, theories of party competition and theories of ethnic politics. However, many scholars interested in multinational democracies come from a conflict perspective that treats ethnic groups, not parties, as the main actors, “making the routine assumption that members of ethnic groups 'naturally' mass behind ethnic organizations” (Chandra forthcoming: 2, original hyphenation). These scholars tend to neglect flexible patterns of ethnic representation through ethnic and other parties and the role of party competition within and between segments of society (see Birnir 2009 for this critique). Similarly, the role the nature of a party system plays for the stability of a federal system and the complex institutional regimes arising from the combination of different types of party systems with differently designed federal institutions has only recently been discovered (Filippov, Ordeshook, & Shvetsova 2004; Swenden & Maddens 2009).

Approaches – types of participants and papers

The workshop aims to bridge both types of gaps described above: 1) between scholars addressing ethnicity and territory in party competition under different labels and 2) between the fields of territorial, ethnic and party politics. Therefore, we do not only invite party scholars, but also scholars working in the fields of ethnic and territorial politics. However, since we aim to deal with the role of ethnicity and territory *in party competition*, we strongly encourage papers that deal with the topic from the perspective of party competition and are not interested in contributions that address the subject from the perspective of the mobilisation and grievances of ethnic groups as such. Relatedly, while we are generally open to both large and small-N approaches, papers presenting case studies should be aimed at testing, modifying or building *theories* and should not be centred on individual cases. Papers with a clear theoretical focus on party competition that try to bridge one of the two gaps will be strongly prioritised. In more detail, we seek participants delivering papers related to three main themes:

1. **Theory:** papers firmly grounded in general concepts and theories of party competition, ready to explore how well these concepts travel to explain party competition involving an ethnic dimension and several segmental and territorial arenas. How do party systems change if an ethnic cleavage is mobilised? (Coakley 2008). Which theoretical approaches can mount the analytical challenge of capturing the dynamics of fragmented party competition as a nested game where ethnic parties compete within their segments on an ethnic dimension but across segments on other dimensions? (Zuber 2011).
2. **Actors:** empirical papers seeking to analyse the parties that mobilise territorial and ethnic categories in party competition. Under what conditions are ethnic groups represented by one or many parties and by mono- or multi-ethnic parties or independent candidates? How can we

draw a conceptual distinction between ethnic, ethno-regionalist, and purely regionalist parties? What drives ethno-regionalist parties' positioning between secession and regional autonomy? (Sorens 2008) or ethnic parties' choice between radical and moderate positions on the ethnic dimension more generally? (Bochsler & Szöcsik 2010). Under what conditions do ethnic or regionalist parties enter competition on an additional dimension, e.g. by adopting a leftist agenda? (Masseti 2009)

3. **Party competition:** empirical papers seeking to analyse party competition involving either segmental or territorial divisions of the party system or both. Either small-N comparative studies that choose a case from Western and a case from Eastern Europe for qualitative analysis or present results of large-N quantitative analysis based on data-sets that include Eastern and Western European cases are particularly welcome.

Proposals containing the title of the paper, the name(s), institutional affiliation(s) and contact details of the author(s), and an extended abstract of approximately 500 words should be submitted by e-mail to both organisers. In addition, we kindly ask applicants to provide us with a short statement on their research interests in the fields of territorial, ethnic and party politics.

Funding

We plan to submit a proposal for the funding instrument *international scientific event* to the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Organisers Biographical Information

Edina Szöcsik began her doctorate studies at Prof. Frank Schimmelfennig's Chair for European Politics at the ETH in Zurich in 2008. Edina holds an M.A. in Political Science, Economics and Philosophy and studied at the University of Zurich and the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. She wrote her M.A. thesis on the ideological development of Hungarian parties since 1990. In her dissertation, she analyzes the conditions under which ethnic minority parties in Central and Eastern Europe radicalize or moderate their demands.

Christina Isabel Zuber is a Ph.D. candidate and research assistant at the Chair in Comparative Politics, University of Cologne. Her principal research interests lie in the area of comparative institutions, in particular their origins, effects and functioning mechanisms under the conditions of ethnically plural societies. Past research has dealt with asymmetrical federalism with a related article published recently in *Comparative Political Studies*. Research for her Ph.D. is focused on the logic of party competition and the strategic choices of ethnic parties in multiethnic democracies.

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