Political Decentralisation, Electoral Change and Party Organisational Adaptation: A Framework for Analysis*

Jonathan Hopkin
Department of Political Science and International Studies
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT UK
J.R.Hopkin@bham.ac.uk

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Abstract

Electoral politics in the larger western democracies seems to be becoming increasingly 'denationalised': non-statewide political parties have grown in strength, and demands for decentralisation have led to major institutional changes in large unitary states in recent years. As a result, the conventional view of party politics as essentially taking place at the national level, between national parties, over national issues, appears increasingly inadequate. This article argues that party scholars need to look more closely at what we could call the 'territorial dimension' of electoral politics: the spatial and geographical aspects of party competition. This article presents a preliminary analysis of how centre-periphery tensions and institutional reforms affect the way statewide parties organise, focusing on the areas of elite recruitment, electoral programmes and campaigning, and party behaviour in public office. It hypothesises a variety of patterns of party response, and provides some tentative evidence from Western European democracies, and in particular in Britain, Italy and Spain. This analysis shows that the internal workings of statewide political parties are a key variable in understanding the relationship between institutional reform and the 'denationalisation' of electoral politics.

Introduction

The apparent 'denationalisation'[1] of electoral politics in a number of western democracies, and the decentralising reforms adopted by a number of these democracies in recent years (Jeffery 1997), necessitate a reevaluation of our understanding of the way political parties organise and compete in the electoral arena. The view of party politics and party competition as essentially taking place at the national level between national parties over national issues appears increasingly inadequate to capture the dynamics of contemporary party democracy. Instead party scholars need to look more closely at what we could call the 'territorial dimension' of electoral politics, supplementing the focus on the traditional categories of social class and religion with greater attention to the spatial and geographical aspects of party competition (as in the classic work of Lipset and Rokkan 1967; see also Karvonen and Kuhnle 2001). Whilst centre-periphery dynamics

have not been entirely neglected by comparative party scholars, much of the existing literature on the territorial aspects of contemporary democracies has adopted the perspective of ethnoregionalist movements and their territories (see for example De Winter and Tursan 1998, Keating 1998). The ways in which statewide, national-level political parties respond to territorial challenges has been relatively neglected (for rare exceptions to this see Aguilera de Prat and Martínez 2000, Roller and van Houten 2002). This article suggests how the territorial dimension might affect the way statewide parties organise, and offers a preliminary framework for orienting research into changing patterns of party organisation in a context of 'denationalised' party politics. To do so it draws on the experiences of territorial politics and the impact of decentralising institutional reforms in Western European democracies, and in particular in Britain, Italy and Spain.

Studying 'Denationalised' Party Politics: Concepts and Theories

The emergence of subnational or ethnoregionalist parties, and the challenges they pose to the existing order in centralised states, is one of the most striking trends in recent party politics in western Europe. However, it is not the only, or indeed necessarily the most important, aspect of the territorial dimension of party politics. Shifts in the territorial distribution of political power may have as much to do with politicians fighting for resources as with the politics of identity (Panebianco 1988). The denationalisation of electoral politics can be driven by the changes in the strategies and support bases of statewide, 'national' parties, as well as by the emergence of rival parties at the subnational level (for instance in the case of the UK in the 1980s; see Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp 1988). Moreover, although it is to be expected that decentralising reforms will lead to changes in the territorial nature of electoral politics, such changes can also result from institutional changes which have little to do with centre-periphery dynamics (such as some of administrative reforms carried out in 1990s Italy; see Dente 1997).

Two features of 'denationalised' politics in particular have received insufficient attention in the literature. The first is the extent to which 'denationalised' party politics may be driven by factors other than ethnoregional cleavages, such as clientelism, or

simply the presence of powerful political figures at the subnational level (Tarrow 1977). The second is the way in which statewide or national level political parties adapt to the electoral and political threat posed by ethnoregionalist parties, and the increasing importance of subnational and supranational electoral arenas (Roller and van Houten 2002). Both are important in understanding the implications of an increasingly 'denationalised' party system, and the remainder of this article will focus on understanding the causes and consequences of the shifting organisational balance of power between centre and periphery in statewide political parties. Although this issue has not so far been widely studied, we do have appropriate theoretical and conceptual tools at our disposal. The extensive literature on political parties and party systems, while it has often neglected the territorial dimensions of party politics, can be readily adapted to the needs of research into 'denationalised' politics.

This analysis therefore draws on the existing literature on party organisation, and in particular the conceptual framework for the study of party organisations developed by Panebianco (1988). Panebianco sees parties as organisations, rather than simply as parts of a party system, and therefore emphasises the internal dynamics which condition parties' ability to adapt in optimal ways to environmental changes. In particular, he places great emphasis on the concept of institutionalisation and the rigidities this imposes on party organisations, and stresses the effects of a party's origins on this process of institutionalisation (what current historical institutionalist work refers to as 'path dependency' [Steinmo and Thelen 1992]). This perspective is important because it moves the analysis beyond a simple assessment, from the position of an external observer, of what it would be 'rational' for a party to do given a change in its environment, such as for example the emergence of an ethnoregionalist challenger party or the upheavals caused by a decentralising institutional reform. Instead it permits us to understand why parties will often have great difficulty in adapting successfully to such challenges, and why dramatic changes in electoral behaviour may occur as the process of 'denationalisation' gets underway. Finally, Panebianco provides a conceptual roadmap which is useful in reconstructing organisational dynamics; although now somewhat dated, the concepts he introduces (such as the emphasis on diverse incentives facing party actors, or the

importance of political resources or control of 'zones of uncertainty' in the party organisation) can help map changes in parties' internal workings.

This emphasis on institutionalisation, and the increasing profile of institutionalist approaches which stress the 'stickiness' of political organisations, must be placed in the broad context of increasing electoral instability in western democracies. Extensive research in the 1980s in particular argued that the foundations of electoral stability in western democracies had been undermined by social change and that traditional parties were consequently weakened and vulnerable. This view was strongly challenged by Bartolini and Mair's analysis of long-term electoral change (1990) and by research on party organisations (Katz and Mair 1992, 1994) which emphasised the ways in which parties had been able to consolidate their organisations by leaning on the resources of state power, promoting party system stability. Events in the 1990s, however, have tended to confirm the parties' increasing vulnerability (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). The collapse and disappearance of the Italian ruling parties (Socialists and Christian Democrats) and their replacement by new and unconventional political forces, the dramatic electoral defeats (with subsequent recoveries) of the French Socialists and Canadian Conservatives, and the moribund state of the most historically successful of western European parties, the British Conservatives, reflect an increase in electoral volatility (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg 2000). Recent research on party memberships suggests that parties' organisational weakness and distance from civil society is increasing (Scarrow 2000, Mair and van Biezen 2001), and in some countries has reached critical levels (Britain, France and Italy in particular). All this points towards a potential for significant party system realignments.

In some western democracies the destabilisation of party democracy has taken the form of a strong impetus towards the denationalisation of party politics, independently of institutional reforms in a decentralising direction. In fact, often the denationalisation of party politics is chronologically prior to institutional reform, rather than being a consequence of it. In Britain, the emergence of ethnoregionalist parties in Scotland and Wales, and the parallel growth of the centrist Liberal (now Liberal Democrat) party which has strong roots in the 'Celtic fringe', have seriously eroded the traditional two party system over the last three decades, laying the foundations for the devolution

reforms set in train by the Blair government. In Italy, the emergence of a strong ethnoregionalist protest party, the Northern League, was a key factor in the implosion of the party system, and the principal reason for moves towards further decentralising reform in the present parliament (see Dente 1997). In Spain, ethnoregionalist parties, already significant in the first post-Franco elections, grew strongly during the transition to democracy and played a role in the major realignment of the party system in 1982. In short, there is an important territorial dimension to processes of electoral change in western democracies which has not received sufficient attention in the scholarly debate. This territorial dimension is key to understanding how political parties respond to emerging threats and challenges, in terms of both their electoral strategies and their internal organisation. The rest of this paper seeks to analyse changing forms of party competition, and in particular party organisation, from a territorial perspective.

Organising Parties in a Denationalising Political System

Although decentralising institutional reforms are often a consequence, as much as a cause, of changes in the territorial dimension of electoral politics, there is no doubt that a major source of party organisational change along the territorial dimension is institutional reform, such as the recent 'devolution' of powers in Britain or the creation of the 'Autonomous Communities' in post-Franco Spain. It is also the case that such reforms are not always welcomed by national-level party organisers, since 'severe functional or territorial changes dislocate the party organisation and upset channels of patronage' (Ashford 1982: 1-2). Ashford argues that 'urging structural change is most often the argument of oppositions, more often than not because they see it as a way of increasing their power' (*ibid*), and recent examples from Western Europe seem to support this interpretation. The regional reforms in Italy (1970) and France (1980s) were the result of (statewide) left parties demanding reforms while in opposition, and implementing them after finally getting access to political power; in Spain (post-1978) and Britain (in the 1980s and 1990s) statewide left oppositions linked up with ethnoregionalist parties for the same purpose. Of course, when national-level party elites carry out decentralising reforms, they do so because they expect to benefit from them,

either by offloading responsibility for difficult policy problems, or because such reforms will have redistributive consequences favourable to their support base (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill 2002). But party leaders still have to adapt their reforming ambitions in order to ensure that institutional changes do not have unwanted consequences for the balance of power inside the party organisation.

National party leaders may have little choice but to change party organisational practices if decentralising reforms take place. Lancaster argues that 'regardless of territorial, group, or combined notions of representation, federalism creates additional territorial-based citizen-agent relationships' (Lancaster 1999: 64), and the point is equally valid for unitary states where institutional or electoral change enhances the importance of the subnational level of party organisation. Where elections revolve around local-regional issues and voters consciously cast their votes for local-regional candidates (rather than voting for them as proxies of the national-level candidates), internal party dynamics will reflect this, and the balance of organisational power will shift from centre to periphery. At the same time, the party's internal rules and structures tend to be 'sticky', and do not change at the same pace as the internal distribution of organisational resources. Instead, party rules and standard operating procedures may resist change for long periods, placing considerable pressure on internal coherence. The nature of complex patterns of organisational continuity and change can best be analysed by disaggregating different functions and arenas of internal party life, and looking at changes over time in these different arenas. Here three such arenas are considered: elite recruitment, party programmes and electoral campaigning, and the activities of the party in public office.

Political Recruitment

It has been long established in party organisational studies that one of the key arenas in internal party politics is the development of individual political careers (Michels 1962, Wellhofer and Hennessey 1974, Panebianco 1988). Even if we discard the simplistic 'economistic' approach (that politicians are simply looking out for their own material interests), political careers remain important, since any politician hoping to push for the realisation of a political project must get his/her hands on the levers of power.

Therefore one of the first areas in which centre-periphery tensions can be played out is in the process of political recruitment in general, and candidate selection in particular.

Candidate selection in western parties has undergone significant changes in recent years, with the increasing direct involvement of mass memberships in the process, through membership ballots and primary elections (Hazan and Pennings 2001). However, outside the US these changes have not permitted candidate selection to escape the control of party elites, since the choice of potential candidates, and the ratification of the results of selection votes, tend to remain in the hands of party leaders (Hopkin 2001a). The centre-periphery conflict is therefore likely to revolve principally around the formal control of the selection process and the ratification of candidacies, which subnational elites will attempt to wrest from the central level. However, the selection votes and primaries themselves are likely to become arenas in which this conflict will be played out, with subnational leaders using selection votes to rally local/regional support against centralising forces. More open selection procedures hinder attempts by central elites to impose candidates against the will of the subnational organisations, since the subnational elites have the potential to mobilise opposition through the selection process. This places central elites in the uncomfortable position of either accepting a selection vote which may produce an undesired outcome, or intervening to stop such a vote taking place, thus subverting the legitimacy of the selection process.

Striking examples of these dynamics have been seen in the British Labour party since it launched its devolution reforms in the 1997-2001 parliament. Although Labour's selection procedures involve a vote by party members on a shortlist of possible candidates, the party's central leadership intervened heavily in the selection process for the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections, preventing an internal opponent, Dennis Canavan, from standing in the election as a Labour candidate. Canavan subsequently won election to the Scottish Parliament as an independent. The party leadership's role was even more heavy-handed in the case of the London mayoral election in 2000. Concerned that party members would select left-winger Ken Livingstone as Labour candidate, the national leadership attempted to block his selection by diluting the role of the membership vote in the selection procedure. This strategy rebounded, as Livingstone instead stood as an independent, winning the election (Hopkin 2001a: 352). These examples dramatically

illustrate the limitations of centralised strategies of party management in a decentralised state. With increasingly open candidate selection processes, centre-periphery conflicts over political recruitment are exacerbated and may lead to a decentralisation of control over candidate selection.

The second important arena of conflict is the recruitment and career development of non-parliamentary party elites. One of the features of the emergence of 'cartel parties' (Katz and Mair 1995) is the use of state resources to consolidate party organisations, and the strengthening of parties' central offices and territorial bureaucracies with state funding. Although very often these structures are controlled by the parliamentary elites themselves (Mair 1994: 12-3), there is a career structure in party bureaucracies which does not necessary involve election to public office. These bureaucracies have their own corporate interests and bureaucratic development has inherently centralising tendencies (Panebianco 1988: Ch.12). Blocking decentralising moves may be an important part of these bureaucrats' strategy for professional survival, and therefore the presence of a distinct bureaucratic structure may act as a force for internal organisational continuity. Recent trends in party organisation have contradictory consequences for such dynamics. On the one hand, the declining importance of traditional pyramidal party bureaucracies (in particular those characteristic of classic communist and labour parties) weakens this inertial effect. On the other, parties' increasing dependence on state funding, usually allocated in terms of national parliamentary representation and directly controlled by the national parliamentary leadership, may strengthen the centralising influence of parties' extraparliamentary organisations. The extent to which state party funding is decentralised (ie through allocations to party leaderships in subnational assemblies) is an important condition of party bureaucracies' ability to resist decentralising changes.

Programmes and Campaigning

Another important arena for internal conflict is electoral activity. The potential for centre-periphery tensions is strongly related to the extent of nationalisation or denationalisation of the electoral battle. To the extent that voters tend to see themselves as participating in a nationwide electoral event, casting votes for local candidates as

'proxies' for national party leaderships, the subnational level of party organisation will have little opportunity to push for a redistribution of internal authority. Party candidates will be expected to contest the election over national issues on the basis of a nationwide party programme. In this scenario, control over 'zones of uncertainty' (Panebianco 1988) such as campaign strategy, party discourse and programmatic proposals will be essentially in the hands of the central leadership and there will be little space for subnational party elites to develop a differentiated strategy. Party candidates will be 'delegates' of the national party leadership. This scenario is a fair reflection of the situation in the main British parties (Labour and Conservatives) before the recent devolutionary reforms.

Pressures for internal organisational changes are more likely to take place where subnational party elites gain some form of independent control of zones of uncertainty in the electoral arena. This may have nothing at all to do with ethnoregionalist pressures. One example of a strong decentralising impulse is the situation in the Italian Christian Democrat party (DC) before its electoral collapse in 1992-4. Here, ethnoregionalist claims were mostly absent (and when they emerged they had catastrophic consequences for the party), but many local elites had a great deal of (mostly informal) independence from central control. This independence had its roots in the historical weakness of the central state apparatus and its need to distribute favours to local notables in order to secure their adhesion (Tarrow 1977). This meant that in areas such as the South and islands clientelistic tradition was strong, encouraging the parties of the post-war period to simply coopt local elites in these areas, rather than building autonomous party organisations. This was described as the 'Southern system', in which 'all parties are organised in the South and Islands on the basis of personal *clientele* (the politicians are local bosses using their parties as their own exclusive electoral machines)' (Allum 1973: 66). These clienteles amounted to 'packages of votes' which local notables could control, and in theory, transfer from one party to the other in search of the best deal.

Such clientelistic networks still exist in western democracies (including the US, where it comes under the name of 'pork barrel' politics), although the modernisation process has tended to undermine its traditionally personalistic nature. In the Italian case, growing state intervention in the economy changed the nature of clientelistic practices,

and the ‘old’ clientelism was replaced by the ‘new’ clientelism based on party organisation, described by Tarrow as ‘the judicious manipulation of blocs of votes through the allocation of economic development projects from the state’ (1967: 331). This brought a greater centralisation of power inside the DC because of the heavy role of central state spending which depended on ministerial decisions. However it is easy to imagine how decentralising reforms, which provide the subnational tiers of administration with greater financial autonomy, could enhance the ability of subnational party elites to control their own ‘packages of votes’. This appears to have happened in Spain since the 1980s. During the period of Socialist dominance (1982-96), the primacy of the national government leadership was gradually challenged by the emerging leaderships in important autonomous regions such as Andalusia, New Castile and Estremadura. In such circumstances, where local and regional leaderships can claim responsibility for lavish public spending projects, it is the national party leadership which becomes dependent on the subnational party elites for its electoral needs, creating strong pressures for formal organisational recognition of this particular internal power map. In the case of the Spanish Socialists, regional leaders had become decisive by the 1990s, and with the departure of Felipe González as leader after 1996 the so-called ‘barons’ in the key regional governments had become the *de facto* power in the party structures, implying a clear shift in the Socialist Party’s organisational model. However, the clientelistic networks established in post-Franco Spain appear to be far less extensive than in the Italian case (Hopkin and Mastropaolo 2001).

Subnational elites can also apply pressure on national leaderships in other ways. One is the simple presence of popular or even charismatic subnational political figures with personal followings (independently of clientelistic types of mobilisation) who have a much greater ability to mobilise support than any simple ‘delegate’ of the central party leadership. Here the consequences are similar to those described above: national leaderships have little option but to negotiate with such subnational leaders, since the latter may be capable of winning any conflict with the central authority by appealing to the electoral base (a good example of this is the inability of Labour’s official candidate to defeat the dissident Livingstone in the London mayoral election, cited earlier). Subnational leaders may simply use their bargaining power to gain advantages for

themselves, or, more threateningly to central leaderships, they can rally support amongst other subnational elites for an internal redistribution of organisational power. In many parties, subnational leaders are so well-resourced that they take or share control over the national party leadership without relinquishing their local positions. Bids for national party leadership are built on the foundations of subnational political office in democracies as diverse as the US (where both Clinton and Bush were State Governors), Germany (where Schroeder was President of a *Land*), Mexico (where Fox was a State Governor) and Spain (where Aznar held the Presidency of Castile-Leon). In such circumstances, the distinction between national and subnational party leaderships can become somewhat artificial[2].

A further scenario is the presence of an ethnoregionalist rival to the nationwide party in particular areas. Here subnational party elites will be in a relatively weak position, probably losing votes to the ethnoregionalist contender. National party leaderships have a strong incentive to enhance the subnational elites' powers in order to contest this electoral threat. Likely ways of doing this include allowing subnational party organisations to adopt differentiated party programmes, discourses and campaigning strategies in an attempt to develop an ethnoregionalist 'face'[3], and possibly also greater autonomy in candidate selection. However, such concessions may only be made to subnational elites in at-risk regions, leading to asymmetric forms of internal party organisation and chains of authority.

This is clearly the case in the Labour party, where the Welsh party has acquired greater autonomy from the central party leadership after its successful campaign to remove a leader, Alun Michael, imposed by London. The Scottish party has not been able to demonstrate similar independence, although the tensions caused by the devolution process have been illustrated by some high-profile resignations, most notably the resignation of First Minister Henry McLeish in late November 2001. The position of the Labour party in Scotland and Wales stands in marked contrast to the high levels of leadership control over the party organisation in England.

In Spain, whose model of political decentralisation is also asymmetric (see Moreno 2001), contrasting outcomes can be observed. The current governing party, the Popular Party, has a formally centralised organisational model, and party branches in the

historic regions (where the party is weakest) have been relatively subordinate to the leadership in Madrid (van Biezen 2003). This is particularly clear in Catalonia: here, Madrid moved quickly in the mid-1990s to remove the regional party secretary (Aleix Vidal-Quadras) when he adopted an aggressive anti-Catalan nationalist discourse (which the national party leadership regarded as electorally damaging and offensive to potential coalition partners in the Spanish Parliament). However, in regions where the party is stronger, a much more balanced relationship prevails, with powerful local 'barons' exerting strong influence in Madrid. The Socialists have adopted a more formally decentralised model, whilst successfully maintaining internal cohesiveness (van Biezen 2003). The Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) is formally separate from the Spanish party (PSOE), although it has generally fallen into line with the Madrid leadership on key issues. However, this strategy has had significant political costs: whilst the Catalan Socialists have been the dominant force in Catalonia in statewide legislative elections, returning more deputies to Madrid than their Catalan nationalist rivals, they have failed miserably in their attempts to take control of the Catalan administration (Ross 1996). This is widely seen as the consequence of the PSC's perceived closeness to the PSOE, which allows the Catalan nationalist parties to represent the PSC as a party more concerned with the interests of Spain as a whole, and themselves as more concerned with the interests of Catalonia (see Caminal 1998). As a result, there have been pressures from within the PSC to adopt a more independent line, which can be seen in part in the strategy adopted by the current PSC leader Pasqual Maragall, the former mayor of Barcelona (see Roller and van Houten 2002)[4].

The evolution of all of these scenarios will be strongly conditioned by the parties' institutional inertia. Especially in 'old' parties where particular structures and rules may have been in place for a very long time, change may encounter serious obstacles. Internal reforms are likely to be path-dependent; breaking from long standing standard operating procedures may only be possible in the event of organisational 'catastrophies', such as large scale electoral losses, the discrediting of the party elite as a result of scandals, and significant policy failures (possibly all at once). Here, Panebianco's notion of the party 'genetic model' is helpful, as it allows us to map the consequences of party origins for their subsequent development. To this extent, decentralising reforms may be more likely

in cases of parties which were founded by 'diffusion' – the independent emergence of regional party organisations which subsequently unify – than in those founded by 'penetration' – the establishment of a territorial organisation from a strong central authority (Panebianco 1988). In cases of diffusion, party organisational rules are much more likely to provide for subnational elites' influence over internal decision-making, whereas in cases of penetration, parties may be 'locked in' to a highly centralised form of decision-making, which may be hopelessly obsolete when party politics becomes denationalised. The Spanish case provides abundant evidence in support of this thesis. The PP has its origins in a highly centralised and personalised party organisation (Manuel Fraga's Popular Alliance, AP), and this tradition has been exploited by Aznar in the 1990s to consolidate Madrid's dominant position. The Socialists, in contrast, adopted a quasi-federal structure during the post-Franco transition, with the autonomy of the PSC formally recognised in its statutes (Gillespie 1989). In the 1990s, the Socialists have moved in a different direction to the PP, with the regional party federations acquiring an increasingly prominent role in the management of national party affairs.

Public Office: Executive and Legislative Action

The third arena I would like to examine is that of public office. Parties' activity in the executive and legislative institutions of the state involves them in various dilemmas relating to the internal balance between national and subnational party leadership. These dilemmas will be further complicated by the existence of institutions of multilevel governance, for instance a regional level of government and administration with significant powers, or the need to establish such a level of government. In situations where voting patterns have become denationalised, a subnational institutional level is almost certain to be either already present or in the process of being created. Moreover, very often governing parties at the national level will be in the position of controlling subnational administrations in areas with strong ethnoregionalist parties; this is currently the case in Britain, where Labour governs in Westminster as well as (in coalition) Scotland and Wales, and in Spain, where the conservative Popular Party governs both in Madrid and in the autonomous region of Galicia.

Irrespective of whether a party has governing responsibilities at any institutional level, the territorial question emerges as soon as representatives are elected to the national parliament and parliamentary groups are to be constituted and governed. The first dilemma is whether the party representatives should constitute a single group; although this will be conditioned to some extent by parliamentary regulations, it is a choice which reflects the territorial balance of power within the party. The formation of territorial parliamentary 'subgroups' does not necessarily imply a threat to the cohesion of the parliamentary party as a whole; for instance in the Spanish transition period the Spanish Socialists (PSOE) and their affiliates the Catalan (PSC) and Basque (PSE) Socialists had separate parliamentary groups but maintained a solid parliamentary discipline (López Garrido 1985). Similarly, internal conflicts between subnational and national elites can damage parliamentary discipline whether or not separate groups are constituted. Here the form of governance of the parliamentary group becomes important: the clarity of chains of command, the formal autonomy of the parliamentary party vis-à-vis the extraparliamentary party (including if appropriate representatives in the government) and the openness of decision-making on parliamentary strategy will affect the cohesion between subnational and national leadership. Of course, the greater the subnational autonomy over candidate selection and campaigning strategy, the greater the risks to parliamentary cohesion at national level, if the appropriate mode of governance of the parliamentary group is not adopted.

A similar problem arises at the subnational level of government. Here of course there is not so much of an issue of parliamentary group cohesion, although where subnational elites have substantial clientelistic resources further fragmentation on territorial grounds can take place even at this regional level (an example of this is the PP in Galicia, where rival clientelistic networks are frequently in open conflict). The principal issue is one of coordinating parliamentary and executive action at regional/subnational level with parliamentary and executive action at the national level. In one sense, the question of coordination should not apply; where regional levels of government have been given independent powers, it is precisely to remove these same powers from the central government. In practice, however, it is broadly expected amongst western publics (with some exceptions, most notably the US [Donahue 1997]) that parties

should follow coherent policies at different institutional levels, or at the very least should not be on a collision course. The potential for regional-central conflict over policy divergence, and in particular over central-regional distributional issues, is ever present. Subnational elites will naturally press for the maximum share of distributive benefits for their regions, and over issues of decentralisation vs. centralisation, subnational elites will naturally be inclined to press central government to release further powers to the regions. The level of internal party conflict this provokes will depend on the extent to which subnational elites motivate regional sentiment, even ethnoregionalist sentiment, to achieve their objectives.

An area of great sensitivity in this context is the complementarity or otherwise of parliamentary strategy, in particular regarding the formation of governing coalitions. Quite frequently in western Europe parties have been faced with uncomfortable situations in which they collaborate in governing coalitions with other parties at one level, and oppose the same parties at another. Establishing consistent rules for coalition formation within the national level party may be difficult if some subnational elites are expected to forego opportunities to govern at regional level for the sake of a party line they may not fully support. The potential for internal splits over such issues is considerable, and one of the key issues in the dilemma of national versus subnational control is that of coalition strategy. In the 1993-2000 period both major statewide Spanish parties faced, in turn, such dilemmas, as they were forced to form minority governments dependent on the support of ethnoregionalist parties. In 1993-6, the Spanish Socialist Party struck a deal with the Catalan nationalists in the Spanish Parliament, leaving the Catalan Socialists in the difficult situation of having to vote with their ethnoregionalist rivals in the national parliament whilst acting as the main opposition to them at regional level. In 1996-2000 it was the PP's turn to face this dilemma, although the relatively marginal position of the PP in Catalonia meant that less was at stake. In both cases, the central party leadership's priorities were imposed on the regional parties, indicating the primacy of statewide party competition within the party organisations.

Conclusions

This article has set out to trace a theoretical framework to organise research on the consequences for internal party dynamics of the 'denationalisation' of electoral politics, providing some examples for illustrative purposes. Rather than hypothesising particular directions of change, the aim has been to identify the organisational arenas in which internal party conflict is likely to take place, and to suggest how such conflict should be analysed. It has been argued that internal party dynamics produce outcomes which can only be fully understood if the organisational dimension of party behaviour is taken into consideration. The consequences for party politics of 'denationalising' trends in electoral behaviour and/or decentralising institutional reforms are rather unpredictable and mediated by the organisational dynamics of the parties themselves. Close attention will need to be paid to the ways in which party structures respond to the challenges they face if we are to make sense of the effects of institutional and electoral change on party competition.

The territorial dimension of party politics should be studied from a comparative perspective. The last two decades have provided an extensive theoretical and empirical literature on the ways parties organise in western democracies, and although this literature has focused rather too little on the territorial dimension of party politics, it does provide the basic tools for such an analysis. We now know a good deal about the internal dynamics and decision-making processes of the principal western European parties, and can draw on this knowledge to assess how they might respond to denationalising trends. This article constitutes a tentative first step towards a comparative analysis of party responses to decentralising reforms and the denationalisation of electoral politics in western democracies.

Notes

[1] 'Denationalisation' can be defined as a process by which electoral politics becomes less and less a national arena for party competition. It is therefore the inverse of the process of 'nationalisation' of electoral politics analysed by Caramani 1996, and can be measured by assessing the degree of correlation between the distribution of the vote in different geographical areas of a given state at a given election. On the measurement of territorial homogeneity, see Rose and Irwin 1975, Hearl, Budge and Pearson 1996, Caramani 2002.

[2] I owe this point to Andrés Rodríguez-Pose.

[3] Of course, the statewide party may decide to adopt an aggressive strategy of opposition to an ethnoregionalist party, particularly in cases of ethnically divided regions where a sizeable proportion of the electorate feels strongly identified with the nation state. A recent example of this is the campaign led by the Italian post-Fascist party, the National Alliance, to protect the integrity of an Italian nationalist monument in Bolzano, the capital city of the ethnically divided Alto Adige region. This forms part of a broader strategy to mobilise the support of the Italian-speaking population in the region in frontal opposition to the *Volkspartei*, which draws its votes from German speakers.

[4] Maragall has developed a distinctive discourse stressing a 'federalistic' solution to Spanish centre-periphery tensions, in contrast to the increasingly centralistic discourse adopted by the Spanish Socialist Party leadership.

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